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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
Monday 14 January 2002—Friday 25 January 2002

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14 January 2002

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 378**

NINTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 14 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Afghanistan

1. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's role in international peacekeeping in Afghanistan. [24462]

4. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will make a statement on the number of British troops deployed in Afghanistan. [24465]

5. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): What size of force has been deployed to Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [24466]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As I told the House on 19 December and 10 January, the United Kingdom has agreed to lead the international security assistance force—ISAF—in Afghanistan. Under the terms of the Bonn agreement of 5 December 2001, ISAF will assist the Afghanistan interim Administration to provide security and stability in Kabul. ISAF will play a vital part in the international community's support to the Afghan people in the difficult task of rebuilding their country.

The United Kingdom will be lead nation of ISAF for a limited period of three months. The UK will provide up to 1,800 personnel for ISAF. In addition and in the short term, we are deploying nearly 300 Army and Royal Air Force personnel to help repair and operate Kabul international airport. As of today, we have some 600 troops in Kabul.

In total, ISAF will be around 5,000 strong. So far, some 1,000 troops have deployed to Kabul. In all, 17 countries will be deploying troops alongside UK forces as part of ISAF.

Mr. Edwards: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in addition to Britain's lead contribution to ISAF, an additional force is being sent to repair and to operate Kabul international airport and that that is absolutely vital to allow aid supplies to get through to the people of Kabul? Will he join me in commending the professionalism of the British troops who will be working in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the oppressive Taliban regime?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right. It is an important job to be able to ensure access to Afghanistan, a country that has been ravaged by many years of war. The present arrangements for Bagram are satisfactory, but I would not go any further than that. Therefore, the ability to make use of Kabul international airport will be an important element in speeding up the deployment of ISAF. In addition to the main contribution to ISAF, as I said earlier, we are temporarily deploying another 300 Army and Royal Air Force personnel to repair and operate Kabul international airport. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's observations.

Mr. Robathan: I welcome the presence of British troops under General McColl. I am sure that they will do an excellent job in Kabul.

Given the problems of overstretch and recruitment in the Army in particular and throughout the armed forces, will the Secretary of State tell the House how long exactly he expects the troops to remain there? Will he assure the House that, in a year's time, we will not still have a similar force based in Afghanistan?

Mr. Hoon: The issue of overstretch is not exacerbated by a deployment that is limited in time. As I told the House the other day in a statement about Afghanistan, it is important that we are able to limit the deployment of our forces to the three months that I have set out. I cannot absolutely guarantee to the House, nor would it be sensible to do so, that some members of Britain's armed forces will not remain after that three-month period, but there will certainly be a significant reduction in numbers once we cease being lead nation.

The forces in Afghanistan are not contributing to problems of overstretch, not least because we do not anticipate an open-ended commitment or a commitment that will require large numbers of forces to be replaced in position. We are talking about a limited responsibility as lead nation for a period of three months only.

Mr. Waterson: Can the Secretary of State confirm that, on 19 December, he talked about 1,500 troops and that that figure has now risen to 2,100 overall? Will he now set a limit on the number of British troops committed to Afghanistan and can I press him to be a bit more precise about what proportion of that number is likely to remain, on any view, after the three-month stint is over?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there was an increase from about 1,500, although if he checks the terms of my original statement, he will see that it was heavily qualified. An increase to 1,800 is certainly not at all surprising in the very difficult circumstances of Afghanistan. The figure of 2,100 that he quotes includes the additional 300 to whom I have just referred and who will be there on a very temporary basis to deal with the problems at Kabul international airport.

I will not give a specific guarantee on numbers simply because those numbers must reflect the circumstances on the ground, not least because significant elements in the force will be engaged on repair work and on ensuring the successful arrival of other elements of ISAF. The job of those elements of the force will depend on how long it takes to ensure safe access to Afghanistan. However, I certainly assure the House that, if there is any significant change in the numbers, the House will be the first to hear of it.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Does my right hon. Friend not agree that the effectiveness of the peacekeeping force is as dependent on maintaining the international coalition as it is on the undoubted excellence of the forces on the ground? Does he fear, as do I, that international cohesion will be in danger of falling apart if the United States does not alter its attitude towards, and its treatment of, Taliban prisoners? If they are not to be kept under the terms of the Geneva convention, will he ensure that they at least have the protection of basic human rights?

Mr. Hoon: I am afraid that I do not accept my hon. Friend's premise. The biggest difficulty with which the Minister of Defence has had to deal in recent weeks is the number of countries that wanted to participate in ISAF. Some 18 countries in total are participating. The practical problem that we faced in organising that force was explaining to a number of disappointed countries that we could not manage to take their forces as well. There is no danger of the international coalition falling apart in the way suggested by my hon. Friend. Certainly, it is important that whoever is responsible for holding prisoners in Afghanistan ensures that they are treated with proper respect for international law. I know of no evidence to indicate that the United States is not doing that.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If the joint patrols between Afghan units and British units were attacked, who would have operational command? Would it be the British or the Afghan units?

Mr. Hoon: In the event of the joint forces coming under attack, I have little doubt that they would co-operate together as successfully as they have done in the course of joint patrolling. I want to emphasise that British forces, as part of ISAF, have robust rules of engagement that are entirely appropriate to their mission. They allow those forces to defend themselves robustly in the face of any threat to them, so I do not anticipate that difficulty arising.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Does the Secretary of State recall that at column 669 of *Hansard* on 26 November last year, he agreed with me that British troops, as coming from one of the combatant forces, should be used in Afghanistan only for brief periods, against specific targets, and not as an occupation force? Why has he changed his mind? Or have he and the service chiefs been overruled by our increasingly gung-ho and vainglorious Prime Minister?

Mr. Hoon: I accept neither the premise nor the conclusion of the hon. Gentleman's observations. All the indications that I have given to the House of the likely duration of any operations sit entirely with what I said in those comments. We are talking about a brief period of three months as lead nation, in which we will make a significant contribution to the position in Afghanistan. I am sure that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will recognise that what is important about the deployment of ISAF is that it is there not as an occupying force, but with the consent of the interim Administration, pursuant to a United Nations resolution. It is there to ensure that Afghanistan cannot descend into the chaos that we saw in the all too recent past, so that there is no support there for the international terrorism that led directly to the events of 11 September and so that we win the peace, having very successfully won the military conflict.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I thank my right hon. Friend for the helpful response that he gave last week in his statement on reserves. Can he confirm reports in today's papers that the Government are to exercise their right of a compulsory call-up of reserves? If so, how long will that last and how many people will it involve?

Mr. Hoon: I was able to tell the House that we were actively considering the possibility of further mobilisation of reservists to assist in the continuing campaign against terrorism. Since the call-out order was signed last October to permit reservists to support the operation, 74 reservists from all three services have volunteered to be called out. Others have been supporting the operation and other forms of service, and we are immensely grateful to them all.

As a further measure to enable the current level of operations to be sustained, I have authorised the compulsory call-out of up to 140 specialist Territorial Army personnel. The majority of those specialist personnel are required to provide intelligence support to headquarters' organisations in the United Kingdom. A small number—up to 40—will provide intelligence support to the UK land force deployed in Afghanistan. That action is fully in accordance with our stated intention to have more usable, integrated and relevant reserve forces.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for informing the House about the reserves, but it would have been helpful to have answers to our written questions that were tabled last week on the same topic, instead of a planted question and a leak today.

Following the right hon. Gentleman's statement to the House of Commons on Thursday last week, may I draw his attention to the letter that I subsequently wrote to him, requesting substantial answers to the questions that he avoided then? In particular, can he confirm who will take over from the UK lead of ISAF, and what representations he has received from other countries about which country it should be?

Mr. Hoon: No decision has been taken yet about who will take over, which is why I was not in a position on Thursday to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. I am afraid that I am in no better position to answer his question today. No decision has been reached. We have received an offer from Turkey, which would be willing to take over at the end of the three-month period which I set out with regard to the United Kingdom's responsibilities. That is a matter to be discussed with Turkey and other contributors to the international force.

Mr. Jenkin: Pursuant to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), can the Secretary of State at least confirm that the 1,800 British troop commitment to ISAF will be substantially reduced after the 90 days, which is clearly the impression that he sought to give, so that he can restore their availability for training and other possible operations?

Mr. Hoon: That is precisely what I said the other day and again today.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful for that assurance. The right hon. Gentleman has given it more clearly now than we had it before. However, it represents yet another major new commitment, on top of the thousands of troops that the Government have committed to open-ended operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and elsewhere. Does the Secretary of State plan simply to ignore the warnings of former chiefs of staff such as Field Marshal Lord Bramall, who warned that that would "significantly increase overstretch", or Field Marshal Lord Inge, who warned in December that the UK was "already dangerously over-committed" and said:

> "We shall have very little left to deal with the unexpected; and at a time when they"—

that is, British troops—

> "are under-recruited and when the defence budget is already underfunded",

or General Lord Guthrie, who confirmed that

> "the defence programme was underfunded before 11 September"?

If the Prime Minister's foreign ambitions are to be like the imperial anthem—"Wider still and wider"—will the Secretary of State make it clear to him that Britain's armed forces cannot be expected to carry an ever greater burden on a budget that has been cut by £1 billion since Labour came to power? He is trying to do too much with too little.

Mr. Hoon: I certainly take account of the views of the former chiefs of staff, but I take advice from the current chiefs of staff.

War Graves

2. **Mr. Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester): If he will make a statement on his discussions with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission concerning the graves of soldiers killed at the Somme. [24463]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence nor I have had any talks with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission concerning the graves of soldiers killed at the Somme. However, I am aware that the French Government have not released any approved plans for a new international airport which might affect historic battlefields to the north of Paris. Plans for a new airport in Picardy, 15 miles to the south of the Somme battlefields, were prematurely leaked to the media late last year. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is in discussion with the French authorities, who will provide details of any proposals that might adversely affect British war graves.

Mr. Dhanda: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware that according to the Soldiers of Gloucestershire museum, more than 8,000 men from my constituency and the surrounding area gave their lives for this country in the first world war, and that under the rumoured plans for the airport in France, many of those graves would have ended up being exhumed, as well as 23,000 graves of German soldiers? Does my hon. Friend agree that if that happened, it would be a dishonour to the men who fought for our country and made the ultimate sacrifice for us all?

Dr. Moonie: Yes. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is in close contact with the French Government about the matter. The French Government have, in general, behaved with great sensitivity with regard to any war graves in the vicinity of the Flanders

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battlefield. I can assure my hon. Friend that were plans to proceed and were I to have any doubts at all about what was happening, I would make strong representations on the subject.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I thank the Minister for the assurance that he has just given. Such matters must be handled with the utmost sensitivity by Governments. In that connection, can he tell us how far plans have advanced for a national memorial for service men and women who have died on active service since 1945? Not a lot seems to have been said since the Government announced that last year.

Dr. Moonie: I can say that plans are progressing. Of course, it is not the Government who are doing that planning, but ex-service organisations and others with a great interest in the matter. The plans are proceeding satisfactorily, although I accept that the process may appear slow to the hon. Gentleman. However, progress is being made and I suspect that an announcement will be made in the not-too-distant future.

Overstretch

3. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What steps he is taking to avoid overstretch in the Army. [24464]

9. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): What moves he has made to reduce overstretch of the armed forces. [24470]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): We remain committed to achieving a balance of commitments for our armed forces that is consistent with the strategic defence review. We aim to commit personnel to operations for no longer than is necessary to achieve the military aim. The success of that policy is already evident. To date, there has been a significant improvement in the number of personnel committed to operations, in comparison with the position at the height of the Kosovo campaign in 1999. In the Army, although there are variations between units, the average unit tour interval has improved, with the latest assessment being around 28 months—the best figure for five years and one that is above the strategic defence review target of 24 months. Royal Navy harmony standards are being maintained, and in the Royal Air Force, only about 2 per cent. of trained personnel are exceeding the planned limit for separated service.

Mr. Prentice: Well, apparently there is no overstretch, but it seems to me that we have troops all around the globe, in Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan. We have just heard about the commitment of 1,800 personnel in Afghanistan. My question is this: is it our objective to become a global policeman, and if not, why not?

Mr. Ingram: I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in supporting greater commitment in terms of our armed forces from all hon. Members. The more that we recognise the very crucial role that the forces play internationally, the greater the prospect of obtaining people to join them. He is right to say that apparently there is no overstretch, although that is not a word that we would use. Clearly, there are pressure points in some of the key areas and we are taking a range of measures to tackle them.

Hugh Robertson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he confirm that all the units deploying this year to Northern Ireland, Afghanistan or the Balkans will do so at full manning strength? If so, is that at peacetime or wartime establishment?

Mr. Ingram: We will do our best to achieve those objectives. That depends on two factors, one of which is maintaining recruitment. I know that the hon. Gentleman would support us on all the measures that we are taking in that regard. Also, there must be an improvement on retention of key personnel. If we can achieve those objectives, we will be able to meet the premise that he set out.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): With this overstretch in mind, is the Minister aware that, in Afghanistan, there are more than 25,000 unexploded ordnances following the American bombing, not to mention the 10 million landmines left in that country following the Soviet era? Will he ensure that our troops are adequately covered and have sufficiently trained men in clearing these unexploded bombs, to ensure that their safety is intact?

Mr. Ingram: We take this issue very seriously indeed. My hon. Friend is right about the potential extent of the problem in Afghanistan, although it is not exclusive to that particular theatre. If time permits, all troops are given the best information that we can possibly provide in training terms and in practical terms on the ground. Of course, we deploy very significant key personnel to tackle the threat posed by unexploded ordnance.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Can the Minister deny that the Government themselves are partly responsible for overstretch, because the number of medically downgraded personnel in the armed forces has increased by more than 50 per cent. since they came to power and more than 10 per cent. of the Army is now medically downgraded? Bearing in mind that the injuries are often caused by the rigorous nature of training and duties, will the Government agree to fast-tracking of service personnel for medical purposes?

Mr. Ingram: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is trying to prove. Is he saying that our forces are incapable of carrying out the functions that we ask of them? If so, I wholly disagree with him. Being downgraded does not necessarily mean that someone is unfit for duty. The issue is clearly more complex than the hon. Gentleman's simplistic approach implies.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): What did the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Guthrie, mean when he said on 17 December at column 46 of *Hansard* that our armed forces were "dangerously over-committed"? The Secretary of State has said that he takes advice from the current Chief of the Defence Staff. However, in his Royal United Services Institute lecture, the current chief said that something would have to give. Did he mean that we are attempting to do too much with too little? If not, what could he have meant?

Mr. Ingram: That was a range of open-ended questions. The hon. Gentleman may wish to raise Lord Guthrie's comments with the noble Member, who is an independent voice in the other place and is entitled to express his opinion. A healthy debate is taking place about what we do to tackle all our commitments. A key factor is getting resources from the centre. That is what the current Chief of the Defence Staff meant. We cannot go on doing everything, and we therefore have to be specific. That was implicit and explicit in the strategic defence review.

International Terrorism

7. **James Purnell** (Stalybridge and Hyde): What recent discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts on measures to combat international terrorism. [24468]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As reaffirmed during discussions at NATO Defence Ministers' meetings in Brussels on 18 and 19 December, the Alliance is committed to countering the threat posed by international terrorism. In particular, Defence Ministers agreed that the Alliance's military concepts should evolve in keeping with the threat posed by international terrorism, and that NATO's defence capabilities should be adequate to meet the demands that it will face.

James Purnell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure that, like me, he welcomes Russia's support for the coalition against international terrorism. What implications will that have for Russia's future relationship with NATO?

Mr. Hoon: I have had several opportunities to meet Russian colleagues, including the December NATO ministerial meetings, when we discussed the impact of international terrorism. The Russian Defence Minister visited the United Kingdom on 19 to 21 December for extended talks on the fight against terrorism. He informed us that he had issued instructions that a hospital that the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations had set up north of Kabul should be available for British and other ISAF troops if required.

Russian support in the current crisis has been exceptional and has led us to believe that we have a unique opportunity to enter into a new security relationship with Russia. Consequently, the Prime Minister suggested in November new arrangements for the NATO-Russia relationship, including a new NATO-Russia council, operating with 20 members rather than the current 19 plus one. We hope that the arrangement will be in place at or around this year's spring ministerial meetings.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in expressing the House's appreciation of the tremendous work of British troops in providing security and stability in Afghanistan and many other locations? Does he agree that many of those troops are double-hatted for NATO purposes? Despite the onerous and unavoidable operations in which they are engaged, it is essential that the tempo of their training to fight at the highest intensity is maintained. Will he assure us that, whatever the demands and obligations that the troops are invited to undertake, the tempo of training will be maintained at all costs?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for British deployment to Afghanistan and his general observations about British troops. He is right to emphasise the importance of the tempo of training. Like other hon. Members, he is aware that members of Britain's armed forces recently participated in Operation Saif Sareea II, which is the largest such exercise since the Gulf war. All aspects of our requirement to deploy rapidly were thoroughly and rigorously tested. Recent events in Afghanistan have again demonstrated that ability. The hon. Gentleman is right; training must be maintained if we are to keep up those high standards.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): In his discussions with his NATO counterparts, what has the Defence Secretary had to say about the role of a NATO member, namely the United States, in removing prisoners from Afghanistan, hooded and manacled together, and flying them in that condition for 24 hours to an airbase in Cuba? Is that legal? What law is being applied? Does the Secretary of State not think that, if the international community is preaching democracy and the rule of law, it is time for it to practise it, rather than taking people out of Afghanistan illegally?

Mr. Hoon: As I indicated earlier, there is no doubting the legality of the way in which those combatants have been imprisoned, or the legality of the right of the United States or any other country to remove them for trial. There is also no doubting the United States' commitment, publicly expressed, to recognise and maintain standards of international law relating to the way in which prisoners are dealt with.

A400M

8. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): When he will sign a contract for the procurement of A400M aircraft for the Royal Air Force; how many aircraft will be ordered; and to what delivery time scale. [24469]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The A400M contract was signed on 18 December by the Organisation for Joint Armaments Co-operation, on behalf of the partner nations, and by the contractor Airbus Military. It provides for the development and manufacture of 196 aircraft in a single launch order, of which the UK's share is 25 aircraft. The contract will enter into force once final Bundestag approval has been given for the German commitment. Our in-service date is 2010 and we expect the last aircraft to be in service by 2014.

Mr. Wilkinson: Notwithstanding the fact that the Royal Air Force's transport capability is to be much enhanced by the welcome acquisition of four C17s and by the modernisation of half the Hercules fleet with C130Js, will the Minister tell the House what the likely cost of the A400M to the Royal Air Force will be? Would that cost be greatly increased, were the Bundestag not to approve the second tranche of aeroplanes on which it has as yet deferred its decision?

Dr. Moonie: I am afraid that the exact price of the contract is commercially confidential, but our commitment in the memorandum of understanding is for funding totalling approximately 3 billion euros—that is approximately £2 billion, for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman—covering development, production and initial in-service costs.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I know that my hon. Friend is aware that many jobs in the north-west and other parts of the country depend on the A400M. Will he use his good offices to get an early signature from the Bundestag to ensure that this project goes ahead?

Dr. Moonie: Confident though I am of my abilities in this field, I do not know whether I would have much influence on that decision. I can say that we fully expect the relevant committee to sign up to this at the end of this month, and that there should therefore be no delay in proceeding with the contract.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): The Minister will be aware of the importance of aircraft orders to many hon. Members' constituencies, particularly in the light of the announcement last week of 950 job losses at Westland in the south-west. I thank the Secretary of State for agreeing to see me in the near future to discuss future orders relating to Westland. Will the Minister confirm that his Department will take every possible action to ensure that aircraft orders are brought forward in a timely way, in the interests not only of our constituents but of the effectiveness of our armed forces?

Dr. Moonie: We sympathise greatly with those affected when redundancies such as these occur. However, decisions on the size of the work force must primarily be a commercial matter for the company. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the Apache helicopter contract has peaked, and the last machines are now being delivered. We therefore have no current need for any further work from the company. I cannot say at present, as any other helicopters that we may intend to buy are still at the concept planning stage, whether there is any possibility of bringing anything forward.

Vera Baird (Redcar): Further considering the question of aircraft contracts, is the Minister able to comment on Saturday's press reports that the Secretary of State for Defence is active in an intensive campaign to boost arms sales to India, in particular to promote a contract for the sale of 60 Hawk jets? In the light of the current—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's question is not relevant to the question before us. She must sit down.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure that the Minister is aware of the substantial lobby of Parliament today by the work force of BAE Systems, not least the 1,000 members of staff at Woodford in my constituency who have been made redundant because the RJX civil aircraft programme has been phased out. Does he accept that if the contract for the A400M project goes ahead, Airbus properly allocating work from other factories to Woodford, which is one of the most modern production plants in the aerospace industry, would be appropriate so that those heavy redundancies might be offset?

Dr. Moonie: The A400M contract will support thousands of jobs in this country, but I am afraid that where those jobs are is a matter for the company, not Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Minister well knows that I hope that the A400M will be based at RAF Lyneham, in my constituency, to replace the ageing C130K Hercules fleet, but will he confirm that only four of the 51 Hercules available at Lyneham are properly equipped to be used in international security and assistance force tasks in Afghanistan? Is that not worrying for the nation? How does he intend to get 2,100 troops to Afghanistan—he said that 600 have been taken so far—if he has only four operative planes? Is not that another case of doing too much with too little?

Dr. Moonie: No, it is not. We are having no difficulty at all in deploying our people to Afghanistan. The deployment is building up and will continue to do so until the end of the month when we reach the numbers forecast. We are well aware that we need to provide enhanced defensive aid suites for more of our aircraft, and we are doing just that.

Racial Equality

10. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What recent steps the armed forces have taken to promote racial equality in the services. [24471]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The armed forces have done much in recent years to promote racial equality and create an environment free from harassment and unlawful discrimination. That includes establishing confidential advice and support helplines; a network of equal opportunities advisers; equality training, focus groups and surveys; monitoring and evaluating ethnic minority recruitment, progression and retention; and a vigorous recruiting and outreach programme to encourage more people from ethnic minorities to join the armed forces.

Kevin Brennan: My right hon. Friend is aware of some pretty dreadful cases, such as that of the son of my constituent, who was racially abused and bullied in the Army. The perpetrators went unpunished while he was court-martialled for going AWOL. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that racial abuse will not be tolerated under this Government? We criticised the previous Government for not doing enough to recruit ethnic minorities to the Army, so what steps is he taking to ensure that we meet our targets to recruit ethnic minorities and, indeed, retain them in the armed forces?

Mr. Ingram: Racial harassment should not happen and we shall take every possible step to ensure that it does not happen. That is the message that should go out firmly from everyone who can bring influence to bear.

My hon. Friend asks a specific question about what we are doing. All three services have established ethnic minority recruiting teams, which have engaged in numerous initiatives to encourage more ethnic minorities to join the armed forces, and those efforts are beginning to pay off. There has been a steady year-on-year increase in the number of ethnic minority recruits and the annual percentage has more than doubled, reaching 2.9 per cent. by April 2001. In the first five months of 2001–02, 3.8 per cent. of recruits came from ethnic minorities and the Army exceeded its 5 per cent. goal for the first time. We have achieved a lot, but clearly there is much more to do.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Can the Minister tell the House what feedback the Government have had about their equal opportunities corporate approach document? Will he give me a personal commitment that he would investigate to the best of his ability if any of us brought evidence either of a racial or of a sexual discrimination case in the armed forces?

Mr. Ingram: Those issues should be properly dealt with through appropriate procedures to establish the facts of the matter, but my door would never be closed to representations from right hon. or hon. Members if they were concerned about the way in which a particular case was being dealt with. As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), we must address this issue robustly and aggressively to ensure that if there is a problem, we eliminate it as quickly as possible.

Special Forces

12. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the role of special forces in countering terrorism since 11 September. [24473]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The United Kingdom's special forces have a key role to play in countering terrorism: a responsibility they have had for many years. As a result of the events of 11 September, we are considering the capabilities, including those of Britain's special forces, that we need to deal with the challenges posed by international terrorism. That is being taken forward as part of our work on a new chapter for the strategic defence review.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, which was rather fuller than I expected, and I am grateful for just that. Does the Secretary of State have a view about the amount of information that can be given about the role of special forces? He will be aware that, in the past, special forces have felt that all their activities should be kept secret, whereas those in the United States are given, if not full, then at least some, publicity. Has the Secretary of State considered giving slightly more publicity to the role of our special forces than it has previously had?

Mr. Hoon: The view of the Secretary of State is that the disclosure that we currently allow is exactly the right amount. There are a number of reasons for that policy, which have pertained for a long time. First, further disclosure would forfeit the element of surprise, which is essential for the operational effectiveness of UK special forces. Secondly, it is vital to protect the identities of special forces personnel. They are a key element of our anti-terrorism capability, and are significant targets for terrorists. Disclosure of identities and capabilities would have severe consequences for the effectiveness of our special forces and the safety and morale of personnel.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Given the need for an international response to international terrorism, does my right hon. Friend envisage a role for NATO in developing a military anti-terrorist capability?

Mr. Hoon: NATO is examining the implications of the events of 11 September for its military responsiveness. I am sure that that will be one of the debates in NATO, but that work is far from concluded, and I anticipate that it will be informed by the work being conducted in the United Kingdom on the extra chapter to the strategic defence review.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I appreciate the reasons for the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), but does the Secretary of State accept that the most important consideration is the security of our special forces, and that the less we know about what they are doing, the better?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and that is the reason for the present disclosure policy.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): There remains concern about the killing of the Mazar-i-Sharif prisoners during their apparent uprising. Some members of the special forces were present at that event. Will the Secretary of State arrange for their reports on the matter to be published, so that we can clear up some of the fears and concerns that people have expressed?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend talks about an apparent uprising. I can confirm to him that there was an uprising, when prisoners tried to take control of the armoury and obtained various weapons, which were then used not only against coalition but against Afghan forces in the area. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will understand that, for reasons of operational security, I shall not go into specific details about the involvement of any British troops in that incident. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that British troops went to the aid of their US colleagues, and under heavy fire attempted to recover two US personnel who had apparently been captured by Taliban fighters. Their involvement was a perfectly proper response to the attack on their fellow coalition members, and they showed great bravery in their efforts to secure their release.

International Terrorism

13. **Mr. Hilton Dawson** (Lancaster and Wyre): What plans he has to adjust defence capabilities to cope with terrorist attacks. [24474]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The work being conducted in the Ministry of Defence on a new chapter to the strategic defence review is designed to ensure that we have the right concepts, forces and capabilities in place to deal with the threats that were manifest on 11 September. That work builds on the sound foundation of the strategic defence review, which left the United Kingdom well placed to meet the additional challenges that we now face.

We are considering our capabilities to counter and deter terrorism abroad, and the role of the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces in the defence of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dawson: I agree that the SDR has proved a robust tool for the purpose of defence planning. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that Members of Parliament, and indeed members of the public, will have an early opportunity to contribute to the new chapter?

Mr. Hoon: I can give that assurance. The work will be done in an open and inclusive manner. We will in February make available discussion material setting out the range of areas that we are considering. It will reflect our emerging thinking, and we will seek views. I hope that that will give interested parties an opportunity to contribute, but let me emphasise that we will welcome contributions from Members of Parliament, members of the public and others with particular interests or expertise at any time.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I welcome any opportunity to strengthen this country's anti-terrorism defences, but does the Secretary of State know of any example of its embarking on an overseas anti-terrorism peacekeeping mission over the past 50 years without that mission's being prefaced with confident remarks about it all being over in a few months, followed by finding ourselves involved for years and years?

As we take more and more units off for peacekeeping anti-terrorism operations around the world, is a single operational brigade left in the British Army, with all its troops, that could be sent at short notice to fight a war somewhere?

Mr. Hoon: I can give the hon. Gentleman the example that he seeks. The mission concerned took place in Macedonia for 30 days in August last year.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Srebrenica experienced an appalling atrocity on NATO's doorstep, in which 8,000 innocent people were killed. The perpetrators of the crime and their whereabouts are known. Why is it taking so long to bring General Mladic and Radovan Karadzic to justice?

Mr. Hoon: Obviously, given the opportunity of bringing either of those people—who are indicted war criminals—to justice, British forces would take it.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Secretary of State is doubtless familiar with the Defence Select Committee's report on the 1998 SDR, which said that

> "the government's manifesto promised a 'strategic defence and security review' . . . we are still awaiting the strategic security review. In a sense we have received a two-dimensional review of a three-dimensional world".

The three-dimensional world is now upon us, and the Government are wrestling with that. Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be rather better if the Ministry of Defence paid closer attention to the Select Committee's work?

Mr. Hoon: All Ministers always pay the closest possible attention to the work of Select Committees. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Defence Select Committee, as it was then constituted, on its recommendations, which will play an important part in the work that we are currently doing.

European Security and Defence Policy

15. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement on the role that is envisaged for the European NATO non–European Union countries in the European security and defence policy. [24476]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The European Union is committed to the fullest possible involvement of the non-EU European allies and the EU accession partners in the European security and defence policy. The Nice European Council agreed a detailed set of provisions governing consultation with those countries, and arrangements for their participation in EU-led operations.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Thirteen of the 19 flashpoints involving terrorism have a bearing on Turkey. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Turkey and the other NATO non-European Union countries feel frozen out of the European security and defence project? Will he always bear in mind the fact that, whereas NATO has been exclusively and successfully concerned with the defence and security of our continent, the ESDP is primarily concerned with giving a political identity to the European Union?

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes that view. Even if that ever was the case, it certainly is not today. Non-EU NATO allies are not being frozen out of the arrangements in any way; they are participating in a mutually supportive system that will allow a clear exchange of ideas and expertise, and will allow non-EU NATO allies to participate in EU-led operations where appropriate.

I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's description. There have been constructive, positive discussions, and great progress has been made. The precise terms of the arrangements and the relationship between EU and non-EU NATO allies have not yet been finalised, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that his description does not apply to the way in which the partnerships will develop.

Afghanistan

16. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): What assessment he has made of the use of the Navy in the Afghan war. [24477]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Royal Navy submarines fired a small number of Tomahawk land attack missiles on 7 and 13 October

2001. The UK assigned an amphibious task group led by the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious, converted for helicopter operations, to the coalition. Other Royal Navy vessels were assigned, including seven Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, which provided logistical support.

Our task group's commander, Rear Admiral Burnell-Nugent, is also deputy commander for all coalition naval forces in the theatre, responsible for co-ordinating all the coalition's extensive naval operations. Those operations have, since 21 December 2001, included coalition maritime interdiction operations to seize personnel or equipment linked to al-Qaeda or the Taliban.

John Robertson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that extensive answer. When he answered my question of similar ilk, he said:

> "At the end of the process, a statement will be required as to how we go forward in terms of a new chapter of the strategic defence review."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 626.]

Has he looked at the role of the Navy at the beginning of the conflict and at how we could mount another campaign using the Navy—perhaps, shall we say, bringing it up to date so that we could do it without the help of some of our coalition friends?

Mr. Ingram: Irrespective of the events of 11 September, I know that my hon. Friend is aware that the Government have an extensive shipbuilding programme planned. Orders have already been placed to meet some of the commitments. Clearly, we must learn lessons from every set of circumstances. I assure him that lessons will be learned if they need to be from the current deployment of our maritime force in the Arabian sea.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Will the Minister join me in congratulating all members of the Royal Navy on the excellent work that they performed at the beginning of the mission? I say that because a member of my family was part of that force. What progress is being made with the Tomahawk mission, and will all the submarines be equipped with that weapon?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the extensive role played by members of the Royal Navy. In a statement to the House dealing with the situation in Afghanistan, I said that in excess of 4,000 naval personnel were being deployed. The figure remains roughly of that magnitude. In my earlier answer, I indicated the extent to which they continued to play a role, so our thanks are due to them just as much as they are due to those who are being deployed on land in Afghanistan.

On the future of the submarine fleet, clearly, what our future posture would be must be considered in the round. What we wish of our joint forces working in an expeditionary way is set out within the SDR.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Is there any chance of Royal Navy vessels bringing to this country some of the distressed animals from Kabul zoo? Does my right hon. Friend recall the correspondence that I have had with his Department about the plight of the animals in the zoo and the need for veterinary attention? I now understand that vets have gone into the zoo. What involvement has there been on the part of Ministry of Defence personnel in helping the animals and protecting the vets in the zoo?

Mr. Ingram: I try to be as helpful as I can be in answering questions. I do not have immediate information as to the specifics of any hands-on involvement by our personnel, but I shall try to find out whether any of them have given assistance to the civil authorities and to those who take care of animals in the zoo.

My hon. Friend asks whether our naval vessels would be used for transporting animals to this country. I have no knowledge of any plans so to do, but I know that he is active in pursuing the matter and has written extensively to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who will address some of the issues that he has raised in detail with him.

Shoeburyness

17. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): If he will make a statement on the future use of the new ranges in Shoeburyness. [24479]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): QinetiQ has a contract with the Ministry of Defence to operate facilities across all the test and evaluation ranges until the end of March 2003. Day-to-day operations at the new ranges in Shoeburyness are being conducted by QinetiQ on the MOD's behalf under this contract, although the site remains MOD-owned. The company is pursuing opportunities for diversification, where appropriate, as part of its commercial strategy.

Separately, the MOD is also conducting a review of its longer-term requirements for trials, testing, training and evaluation, but it would be inappropriate for me to comment until the results of the review are known.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The Minister will be aware of the huge uncertainty of the people of Shoeburyness, and their local Member of Parliament, about the future of a large and exciting site. For example, in the past few months we have been told that QinetiQ, which runs the site, was going to be a PLC company with a private shareholding. However, that has now been abandoned. We were then told that there would be an agricultural project employing 1,000 people. That too has been abandoned. Now we are told that the future of the range as a range is under review.

In view of the importance of this site, is there not a case for the Minister coming to Shoeburyness—he will be very much welcomed there—to tell local people what is going on? The matter is of great significance to Shoeburyness; it is a wonderful site.

Dr. Moonie: I must admire the hon. Gentleman's capacity to wring a great deal out of a single question. Perhaps I could try to answer as much of it as I can in the time allowed me by the Speaker. First, all our ranges are under review because, frankly, we must decide on the most cost-effective way of using them. I am well aware of the uncertainty that this poses for the people employed on our sites. I visited Shoeburyness last year and had the opportunity to see for myself its excellent facilities. However, our overall programme is subject to some doubt. We must be sure about how much use of our facilities we can make at each of the sites that we still use. With regard to QinetiQ, I would be thought to have poor commercial judgment if I attempted to float the company on the stock exchange, given the present state of technological stocks.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I am the Member of Parliament for the constituency opposite Shoeburyness, and the bangs from the ranges cause windows to break and doors to rattle, and they scare dogs, cats and horses.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Rubbish.

Mr. Wyatt: We in north Kent would vote for the ranges to be closed. *[Interruption.]* We hear noises apart from the guns. My hon. Friend the Minister has kindly asked my constituents to visit Shoeburyness to see the site. Could we ask him instead to come and listen to the noises that cause windows to break and rattle the windows of old people's homes, scaring the hell out of them?

Dr. Moonie: That does not sound like the peaceful and idyllic part of our beautiful country that I thought north Kent was. Perhaps my hon. Friend is hearing the noise that the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) makes in defence of his ranges. We have invited people from my hon. Friend's constituency and from neighbouring constituencies to go and see for themselves what goes on there. We investigate complaints fully. I must say that I find some bemusement at the level of complaint, compared with that from people who live much closer to the area concerned.

National Missile Defence

18. **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): What recent discussions he has held with his US counterparts concerning UK involvement in the proposed national missile defence system; and if he will make a statement. [24480]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I discussed missile defence with the US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, and other NATO colleagues, most recently during the NATO Defence Ministers meetings on 18 December. I expect regular discussions on the subject to continue. I have consistently made it clear that we share US concerns about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and that we will continue to work together to tackle the threat with a comprehensive strategy. But it remains the case that the US has not yet decided how it wishes to proceed with missile defence and has made no request for the use of facilities in the UK.

Jeremy Corbyn: My right hon. Friend quite rightly drew attention to the dangers of proliferation of nuclear weapons. Does he accept that national missile defence, if introduced by the United States, would be a serious breach of the test ban treaty process and the nuclear disarmament process? Would it not be better if my right hon. Friend used his good offices to persuade the United States not to go ahead with this incredibly dangerous proliferation, and if he made it clear that no British facility whatever will be available for it?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept the way in which my hon. Friend puts his question. He will know, as other Members of Parliament do, that the United States continues to observe the terms of the anti-ballistic missile treaty, having given six months' notice of its withdrawal, as either signatory is perfectly entitled to do. I am sure that he would welcome the intention of the United States to reduce the number of operationally deployed warheads to between 1,700 and 2,200 as a valuable step forward. That of course is linked to its commitment to missile defence; that important reduction is a direct consequence of the extra security that it anticipates having once missile defence is fully deployed.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The events of 11 September showed graphically the lengths to which certain terrorist groups are prepared to go in an attempt to achieve their aims. Given the proliferation of long-range missiles, including among rogue states, does the Secretary of State agree that what happened on 11 September strengthens, not weakens, the case for ballistic missile defence?

Mr. Hoon: Yes. The events of 11 September show that there are those who would seek to threaten the United States and its friends and allies by any means available. That could certainly include ballistic missiles, and we agree with the United States that there must be a comprehensive strategy to tackle all those threats.

Gibraltar

3.31 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Spanish Government's claim to have reached an agreement with Britain to share sovereignty over Gibraltar.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): No agreement has been reached with the Spanish Government, and the Spanish Government have made no such claim. Discussions about Gibraltar's future, including the question of sovereignty, are continuing under the Brussels process established in 1984 by Lady Thatcher. *[Interruption.]*

Since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Spanish Prime Minister, José Maria Aznar, announced the resumption of the process last spring, we have kept the House informed of developments at every stage. On 20 November, I issued a detailed joint communiqué with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Josep Piqué, about the process. We said:

> "Our aim is a comprehensive agreement by summer next year. This will cover all outstanding issues, including co-operation and sovereignty".

A copy of that statement was placed in the Library. The United Kingdom's objective is a secure, stable and prosperous Gibraltar enjoying greater self-government and the full benefits of normal co-existence with the wider region.

Let me repeat that we stand by the commitments first given in 1969. Any proposals affecting the sovereignty of Gibraltar would be subject to the consent of the people of Gibraltar in a referendum and would require United Kingdom primary legislation.

Mr. Ancram: I am less than reassured by that response, and less than convinced that there is not a deal being done behind closed doors to share sovereignty over Gibraltar with Spain. Is the Foreign Secretary saying that the report in *The Daily Telegraph* on Saturday that Spanish officials had confirmed that the deal would be struck late this summer is inaccurate, or that Spanish officials had no grounds for saying that? Is he saying that reports in the same paper on the same day, attributed to the Foreign Office, that

> "Britain plans to end Gibraltar's 298 year old colonial status by signing a historic agreement with Spain to share sovereignty",

are untrue, or that the Foreign Office should not have given that impression?

The whole process in which the Foreign Secretary is engaged is beginning to smell to high heaven, and the smell is of stitch-up and of sell-out. Is it not totally unacceptable to seek to pre-empt proper discussion of this vital issue of sovereignty behind closed doors? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House clearly and unequivocally whether he is discussing shared sovereignty with his Spanish counterpart, Mr. Piqué, and whether such an arrangement would be time-limited, indefinite or with a built-in mechanism to transfer to full sovereignty in due course?

Will the Foreign Secretary explain clearly to the House why joint or shared sovereignty is not surrender of sovereignty and the thin end of the wedge leading to eventual abdication of sovereignty over the Rock? Does he not understand the suspicions of many Members of Parliament and of the whole people of Gibraltar that the British Government are being disingenuous in purporting to be holding genuine talks?

It is all very well for the Foreign Secretary to claim, as he has again today, that no change can be made without the consent of the people of Gibraltar expressed in a referendum, but does he not understand that we have all heard of offers being made that cannot be refused? A take-it-or-leave-it done deal on shared sovereignty put to the people of Gibraltar, surrounded by veiled threats of being left behind—to quote the Minister's words—or financially penalised, or harassed or left to sink, would amount to such an offer. That would run contrary to the spirit of the

> "freely and democratically expressed wishes"

referred to in the constitutional preamble of 1969. Agreement sought under duress can never be agreement freely or democratically achieved.

What did the Spanish officials mean, if they were correctly reported in the same newspaper, when they said that

> "the Hispano-British agreement would be useful even if it was rejected because it would mark a historic milestone in the dispute."?

Does that not suggest that the Government are considering surrendering sovereignty in principle, and does not that also fly in the face of the constitutional guarantee? Cannot the right hon. Gentleman learn the lesson of his Government's experience in Northern Ireland, when they realised early on that such discussions cannot fruitfully be pursued without giving interested parties a full and separate voice and by ruling out joint sovereignty from the start?

The Foreign Secretary may believe that in pursuing his course he is building bridges with his partners in Europe. He must understand that he cannot do that by selling out the interests and rights of British people. Such a path will only end in tears. Today he has a chance to come clean with the House. Does he not agree that the people of Gibraltar have shown great loyalty to the Crown and to the United Kingdom and that we at least owe them openness and loyalty in return?

If the right hon. Gentleman seeks to bounce the people of Gibraltar, we will oppose him and support them. If he seeks to intimidate the people of Gibraltar or bring duress to bear on them, we will resist him and support them. If he seeks to achieve a done deal or sell out the people of Gibraltar, we will oppose him and support them. Can he today guarantee that the wishes of the people of Gibraltar will be capable of being freely and democratically expressed in the true meaning of those words, because anything less would be despicable and dishonourable and we would support the people of Gibraltar in opposing it?

Mr. Straw: I give the guarantee that the right hon. Gentleman seeks, as I have given it throughout my stewardship of my office. The process that we are following is that established in 1984 by the Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a member. It was established by Lady Thatcher, and we are following it. As I was speaking, the right hon. Gentleman claimed from a sedentary position that the 1984 Brussels process had nothing to do with sovereignty. That is untrue. The text of the communiqué

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issued in Brussels by the Governments of Spain and the United Kingdom on 27 November 1984 stated:

> "Both sides accept that the issues of sovereignty will be discussed in that process."

That was the position under Lady Thatcher and it is the position now.

Moreover, as I have repeated, we stand by the pledge, originally given by a Labour Government in 1969, that any provisional agreement reached between us and the Government of Spain will be subject, in a free, secret ballot, to the wishes of the people of Gibraltar, without duress—as the right hon. Gentleman asks me for that undertaking—and would also be subject to a decision by this House and the other place in UK primary legislation.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am far from encouraged to hear that he is pursuing a process started by Margaret Thatcher? Will he accept that I am baffled as to why the Government have allowed themselves to be led into this morass by the appeasement tendency in the Foreign Office? Many of my hon. Friends will not accept any dilution of British sovereignty in Gibraltar against the wishes of the people in a referendum and will not tolerate them being bullied or blackmailed into voting in a referendum. Is it not hypocritical of the Spanish Government to go on and on about sovereignty in Gibraltar when they hold on to sovereignty in Ceuta and Mellila in Morocco? If there is to be a referendum, would it not be appropriate for it to take place on the same day as Spain holds a referendum in Ceuta and Mellila, to see if their people wish their sovereignty to be transferred to Morocco?

Mr. Straw: I was not expecting my right hon. Friend to be persuaded by my point about Lady Thatcher. However, I should have thought that it was a persuasive point for Conservative Members, as they started this process and it is actively supported today by many former Conservative Foreign Office Ministers and people who care both about Spain and about the people of Gibraltar, including Lord Howe and Lord Garel-Jones. *[Interruption.]* I am glad to learn that the distinguished record of people who have served this country faithfully is now dismissed.

I should be glad to hear from the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) whether the Conservative party is now discarding altogether the Brussels process established by the Thatcher Government of which he was a member. Is he or is he not? No, he is not, he says—he shakes his head from a sedentary position. In that case, let us be clear that all this is simply piffle and wind. The right hon. Gentleman is not abandoning the Brussels process, so what is this about? He is accepting that there ought to be negotiations and that these negotiations, subject to the consent of the people of Gibraltar, ought to consider the issue of sovereignty.

Let me give a direct response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The problem about Gibraltar is that it, Gibraltar, raises all sorts of difficulties that it has with Spain. Spain, in turn, raises all sorts of difficulties that it, Spain, has with Gibraltar. Short of sending a gunboat to start military action against an EU and NATO ally—[Hon. Members: "Come on!"] Well, short of doing that, the only way is by negotiation, and that is what we are doing. We have invited the people represented by the Government of Gibraltar to take part in these negotiations, and in any event the final outcome will be subject not to the Spanish Government nor to the British Government but to the wishes of the people of Gibraltar. That is the guarantee we give.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Foreign Secretary has been in politics long enough to know why suspicion and insecurity arise in such situations. We welcome his indication that there can be no transfer of sovereignty to joint or shared sovereignty without the consent of the people of Gibraltar expressed in a referendum. Must it not be clear that that referendum should not be held in an atmosphere of coercion or on the basis that the people of Gibraltar would continue to be denied the basic rights to which they are now entitled, such as representation in the European Parliament and freedom of movement without undue restriction? It is up to the power that wants to increase its involvement in Gibraltar—namely Spain—to convince the people of Gibraltar that they will gain positive benefits from the change, and not to connive in any way in a denial of rights that they should have now, with or without this agreement.

Mr. Straw: I accept what the right hon. Gentleman says. There are all sorts of rights to which the people of Gibraltar are entitled which they are currently denied. The only way that I can see of even potentially securing those rights is by a process of negotiation, and that negotiation has to be with Spain. I also accept the right hon. Gentleman's point that there is an important responsibility on the Government of Spain to ensure that any proposals that we and they provisionally and jointly agree are beneficial to the people of Gibraltar and that a new atmosphere is created. That would be assisted considerably by a new approach from the Government of Spain.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): As chair of the all-party group on Gibraltar, I would like to put a different spin on this from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), and ask why, if we are to have discussions with Spain, we do not discuss further independence for the people of Gibraltar or, using the Spanish template, further integration for the people of Gibraltar, as is the case, say, with France and Corsica? Surely that is a way forward that the EU would welcome. Furthermore, sovereignty should not be discussed without Gibraltar being at the table and given an equal voice. No option ought to be considered without that.

Mr. Straw: As regards independence, my hon. Friend is well aware that we are bound by the treaty of Utrecht. Under that treaty, if any issue of the United Kingdom giving up sovereignty arises, the Government of the Kingdom of Spain have to be given first refusal. That is the international legal position.

As regards my hon. Friend's second point, again—because of the treaty of Utrecht—that cannot be an issue, but we certainly accept the case for a greater degree of

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self-government for the people of Gibraltar and we want to see that taken forward in the context of these negotiations.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): It is truly incredible to hear the right hon. Gentleman praying in aid the opinions of Lord Garel-Jones on this matter. The entire House considers them totally irrelevant, because we are looking forwards, not backwards—*[Interruption.]* They are totally irrelevant. If the Foreign Secretary is trying to persuade us that he truly wants to listen to the opinions of the people of Gibraltar, will he give the House an assurance that a referendum of the people of Gibraltar will be held forthwith, and before any further negotiation takes place between his Government and that of Spain?

Mr. Straw: The answer to the hon. Lady's second question is no. A referendum cannot be held until there are clear proposals to put before the people of Gibraltar, following agreement. The hon. Lady may not like that; I understand her anger at Lord Garel-Jones for simply telling truths about the position of the Conservative party on these negotiations. I understand that, but her abuse also covers Lord Howe, the former Conservative Foreign Secretary, who has spoken out—

Mrs. Laing: That is irrelevant.

Mr. Straw: With great respect, it is not irrelevant: Lord Howe had stewardship and custody of the issue for six years. The speech that he made in the other place at the end of December is well worth study because he said that the moment one raises the issue of Gibraltar—especially on the Conservative Benches—one is accused of disloyalty. However, it cannot be disloyal—above all to the people of Gibraltar—to recognise that they have problems, as they themselves keep telling us, and that those problems need resolution. The only way to resolve them is by a negotiation which, if it is successful, will lead to provisional conclusions being put to the people in a referendum.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Without in any way wanting to draw a direct parallel between Gibraltar and Northern Ireland, may I make the following point to the House? In age-old disagreements of this kind, we cannot just stand still and allow things to fester without at least trying to find the basis of an enduring settlement. The Gibraltarians and the Spanish will have to show some significant movement. However difficult it is to find an accommodation in this situation, the Foreign Secretary is showing guts and skill in his approach and I urge him to keep going.

Mr. Straw: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks. He makes them against the background of great experience in the Northern Ireland process. That process has not been perfect but, thanks to his skill and professionalism and that of many of his colleagues, we now have greater relative peace in Northern Ireland than ever before; yet we understand from the position now being taken by Conservative Front-Bench Members that they would not have gone down that road—whatever position they held previously—and that they seek to break the process of peace in Northern Ireland and put things back rather than forward.

Of course, as my right hon. Friend said, the positions are not exactly comparable, but the truth is that the position in Gibraltar is least acceptable to the people of Gibraltar. The Brussels process—which the right hon. Member for Devizes apparently still supports—provides a means of trying to secure a better future for those people.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Many Conservative Members believe that it is the duty of Her Majesty's Government to work for and with the British people in Gibraltar, and not to sell them out to Spain. In his answer to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), the Foreign Secretary claimed that it was necessary to hold negotiations in order to move the matter forward, but one of the right hon. Gentleman's Treasury Bench colleagues—a member of the Home Office team—gave me an undertaking in Committee that the present Government would ensure, by the time of the next European elections, that the people of Gibraltar would have a vote in those elections. That undertaking is not dependent in any way on negotiations with Spain. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore confirm that his previous answer to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was incorrect in that regard? Will he further confirm that the British Government's duty is to support British people first, not Spanish people?

Mr. Straw: I gave a similar undertaking in the House on 27 November, so I simply do not understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. We accepted the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, and we are implementing it. We believe that the people of Gibraltar should have a right to vote in the European elections, and we are making arrangements for that to happen. As on so many things, those on the Opposition Front Bench are tilting at windmills and raising fears that simply have no substance. I have already made it clear that any provisional agreed proposal between ourselves and the Government of Spain will be subject to a referendum in Gibraltar. In addition, I repeat what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe told the Foreign Affairs Committee, again at the end of November: there is absolutely no prospect of the British Government agreeing to full Spanish sovereignty over Gibraltar.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is not one of the differences between Northern Ireland and Gibraltar the fact that, apart from anything else, there is unanimous support in Gibraltar for retaining the links with Britain, so a comparison with Northern Ireland is not really appropriate? Is not one of the problems simply that, over the years—whether under the Franco dictatorship or, unfortunately, since Spain has become a democracy, which, of course, we all welcome—that country has had a policy of outright hostility towards Gibraltar? Understandably, instead of seeing Spain as some kind of friend, the people of Gibraltar recognise that it has adopted such a policy, so they are very suspicious indeed of any moves along the lines about which my right hon. Friend has told us today.

Mr. Straw: I certainly accept that, as my hon. Friend says, there has been a climate of suspicion and hostility in Gibraltar about Spain, and therefore suspicions about any move by the British Government to try to change

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the status. Of course I understand that, but the people of Gibraltar also face big problems. They have put those problems before us, and the only way that I can think of that those problems could be resolved is by a process of negotiation, which is what we are embarked on. We would like the Government of Gibraltar to be actively involved in that process of negotiation. That remains the position, and in any event the final outcome of any negotiation will be subject to the free and full consent of the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Why is the Foreign Secretary so uncharacteristically tetchy this afternoon? Could it be because virtually all hon. Members who have spoken from both sides of the House oppose his policy? Could it be that a Foreign Office stitch-up has been discovered? While I am asking questions, let me ask another specific question. Is it not blackmail of the people of Gibraltar for them to have to vote on any referendum under duress? Is it not a pity that the Foreign Secretary has not yet said from the Dispatch Box this afternoon how he is trying in his negotiations and discussions with his Spanish counterparts to lessen that duress—apart from selling out Gibraltar?

Mr. Straw: There is no question of duress, but if there is an agreement, there must be a discussion, and a discussion is currently taking place with the Government of Spain. We would like the Government of Gibraltar to participate fully in those negotiations. We have made it clear, and I repeat the point, that any outcome will be subject to a referendum—free and fair, in a secret ballot—of the people of Gibraltar. For all their bluster, that is also the position of those on the Opposition Front Bench. The shadow Foreign Secretary has made it clear from a sedentary position that he continues to support the Brussels process. That is the one new thing that has emerged from today's discussion. The right hon. Gentleman continues to support the Brussels process, so he continues to support exactly the process in which we are involved—including a discussion, subject to the consent of the people of Gibraltar, of the issue of sovereignty.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is it not simply the case that, whatever the results of the negotiations, there is no way that the people of Gibraltar will accept in a referendum anything that sells out their interests or their views? In those circumstances, what are the negotiations about? They clearly cannot be about sovereignty, even if there is scope for consideration of other relationships between Gibraltar and Spain.

Mr. Straw: I am quite sure that the people of Gibraltar will not vote for any proposed agreement if they think that it sells out their views. That is palpably the case.

My hon. Friend asked about the other issues for discussion. The Government of Gibraltar and the people of Gibraltar feel profoundly disadvantaged by controls that the Government of Spain have imposed on the borders, by the Spanish approach to a number of EU instruments and by controls over the airport and so on. Those are the subject of discussion, which is why the Brussels process was established by Lady Thatcher in 1984 and why we are continuing it today.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Cannot the Foreign Secretary see that, by entering into the negotiations, the Government are implicitly accepting that there is a valid dispute about the status of Gibraltar, when in fact there is no such question and no such dispute? Can he not see that while the status of Gibraltar may be an irritant to the European Union and, indeed, to his relations with Spain, it is the oft-expressed desire of the people of Gibraltar to keep their present status? If he is confident that the outcome of the negotiations may be acceptable in a referendum, why does he not admit the Gibraltarian Government as a full participating member of those negotiations? In the absence of that, will he publish the minutes and the agenda of the negotiations so that all may see what is being decided in their name?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman asks me why we have entered into the negotiations—we have not. The negotiations were entered into in 1984 by the Government whom he supported, and it is a process that we are continuing. I realise that this historic truth is one that the Conservative party wishes to deny, but it is the fact of the matter. The template for our negotiations, in which we are now taking part, comprises exactly the terms of reference laid down by Mrs. Thatcher and the Prime Minister of Spain in 1984.

As for the Government of Gibraltar participating fully in the talks, I wish them to participate fully in the talks. An invitation for them to do so remains open.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that—at a time when millions of British people go to Spain each year and hundreds of thousands live there and when many Spaniards come to this country and many live and work here—relations between democratic Spain and its 40 million people and the democratic United Kingdom are the best they have ever been, and that this is probably the best possible time for negotiations about an intractable and difficult issue, towards a resolution that is in the interests of the people of Gibraltar and the two countries as well?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is entirely right: relations are good. That does not mean that the negotiations will not be tough, because we are there not primarily to represent the interests of the United Kingdom, but to represent the interests of the people of Gibraltar. That is another reason why we wish the Government of Gibraltar were included in the talks.

Contrary to the view expressed by Conservative Members, it is not the case that the Government of Gibraltar or the people of Gibraltar wish to keep the present situation. They may wish to keep their present status, but one of the reasons why we have entered into these negotiations is that they wish the status quo to be changed so that they can lead better and freer lives.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Why does not the Foreign Secretary break off the negotiations until all the vindictive and petty restrictions placed on the people of Gibraltar by the Government of Spain are ended? Why does he not go to Gibraltar himself and try to persuade its people that they have nothing to fear from the British Government? Why does he not go and win their trust and confidence before he starts to barter their future?

Mr. Straw: What the hon. Gentleman's question raises is the fact that there are many difficulties in the relationship between Spain and Gibraltar. Spain has many complaints about Gibraltar which we would be wise at least to acknowledge exist, even if we disagree with their substance. The way to resolve those difficulties is by constructive negotiation. Although it remains to be seen whether it will be constructive, that is the way forward and it is why I am involved in negotiations. And, yes, if it is appropriate, I will go to Gibraltar.

Rail Strategic Plan

4 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the strategic plan for our railways, which was published this morning by the Strategic Rail Authority.

The plan's publication comes at a time when industrial action is being taken against a number of train operating companies. It is not for the Government to intervene directly in disputes between private companies and their employees. However, we do believe that in this day and age disputes of this nature should be settled by negotiation and not by strike action, which harms the travelling public and in the longer term has the potential to damage the railway industry itself. In those circumstances, the interests of the rail passenger must come first and, as the Prime Minister said last Wednesday, arbitration and the end to strike action should be, and would be, the best way forward.

Despite the efforts and commitment of many dedicated and motivated individuals who work in the industry, we do not have a railway system fit for the 21st century. That is due to two principal reasons. First, our railways have been subject to consistent underinvestment for almost three decades. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was an environment of political disinterest as far as the railways were concerned. That led to limited funding and investment, a situation that continued throughout privatisation during the 1990s.

The second reason for underperformance is the failed privatisation that was Railtrack. Five years after privatisation, Railtrack still does not have a register of its basic assets—track and signals. Costs of the west coast main line have escalated from £2 billion to perhaps some £7 billion, and it is only now, with a new management at the top, that the total mismanagement and failure to deliver on that project are becoming clear. The lack of investment in track maintenance was cruelly exposed at Hatfield, while at the same time £700 million was paid in dividends to Railtrack shareholders.

Both those problems—the lack of investment and the failed privatisation—have now been addressed by the Government. As the director general of the Confederation of British Industry, Digby Jones, said this morning,

"nettles are at last being grasped".

Total investment each year over the next 10 years will average £4.3 billion in today's money. That contrasts with £1.4 billion in the final five years of the last Tory Government. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should let the Secretary of State make his statement. He is allowed to do so.

Mr. Byers: The reality, of course, is that the Conservative party does not like to hear the truth. As a result of chronic underinvestment under the Conservatives, the total subsidy from the Government to the industry will increase to an average of £2.94 billion a year at current prices, directly and indirectly supporting the increased investment that it needs.

[Mr. Byers]

We have said that we will provide £33.5 billion of public money to invest in our railways. The original provision in the 10-year plan for transport was £29 billion. The placing of Railtrack into administration on 7 October by the High Court means that we now have the opportunity of seeing a new licence operator for the network who will have one overriding priority—to put the interests of rail passengers first.

Against this background, the strategic plan is being published. It is just a start, but it is important because it is the first long-term plan for the expansion of the railway for nearly 50 years. It sets basic objectives, allocates funds, identifies priorities and sets a clear timetable for delivery. The plan forms part of the Government's agenda for modernisation of those essential services on which the public depend. Our approach is clear across all key public services. Whether in health, education, the fight against crime or transport, we invest in reform and insist on results. The results are clear from the strategic plan.

For the period between now and 2005, the priorities outlined in the plan reflect the need to tackle the current problems of poor performance and lack of reliability, to develop a new structure for the industry and to implement much-needed improvements across the country. Let us examine the detail of the improvements to take place between now and 2005. Specifically, 1,700 new carriages will be delivered by the end of 2004 to replace the 30-year-old slam-door rolling stock on the South Central, Connex South Eastern and South West Trains routes. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask again that there be no shouting. The Minister is making a statement—a statement which the House asked for.

Mr. Byers: The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the facts of what will be delivered are uncomfortable for the Conservatives. Let us go through the detail. As I said, 1,700 new rolling stock will be introduced by the end of 2004. By the end of 2003, the train protection warning system will be completed, preventing trains going through danger signals. Four hundred million pounds will be provided for a rail performance fund to help secure short-term improvements, and £430 million will be available for local schemes under the rail passenger partnership programme.

There will be major infrastructure and rolling stock investments in the west coast main line and cross-country routes. That will lead to significant journey time reductions on the west coast, and frequencies on cross-country services will be doubled, which will be of real benefit to major regional centres such as Birmingham, Liverpool, Derby, Bristol and Plymouth. There will be improvements at 1,000 stations. A new approach to franchising will be adopted which reflects the priorities of passengers and achieves a balance between getting the basics right in the short term and the need to invest for the long term.

The strategic plan contains a delivery commitment for each of the franchise areas, showing in detail the improvements to be made and the time scale for their implementation. In the medium term, the plan shows how to achieve the three core targets for the industry: increasing passenger growth by 50 per cent; increasing freight by 80 per cent; and reducing overcrowding in the London area. It also sets out a broader range of objectives, including improvements in safety, performance and quality.

Although the plan rightly focuses on the short and medium term, it is vital to plan for the long term. Major projects require detailed planning and analysis, robust contracting, and strong and competent project management and delivery. The plan makes provision for development work now towards longer-term potential projects. Those include major infrastructure improvements to the Great Western main line, new airport links, London crossrail and a new north-south high speed line.

Major investment must be directed to where it is most needed. Passenger demand is highly concentrated by market and route. About 70 per cent. of all passenger journeys made nationally use the network in the south-east. That means that we must focus investment on the main routes, both inter-city and commuter, which serve London. With the scale of investment provided in the 10-year plan, we can meet the needs of London and the south-east without diverting funds from the regional network. In addition, the refranchising of the regional franchises, almost all of which come to an end shortly, will provide the opportunity to improve services. The regional networks will also benefit significantly from the doubling of frequencies on cross-country services.

A particularly key role in the forward planning of the railways is being played by the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and London. My colleagues in Scotland welcome the document and the vision that it contains of a safer, better and bigger railway system for Scotland in the future. The SRA's plan is designed to meet the needs of Scottish passengers and freight customers and contributes to the delivery of the Scottish Executive's document "Strategic Priorities for Scotland's Railways". Many of Scotland's priorities are addressed in partnership with the Scottish Executive and with the Strathclyde passenger transport executive. In particular, the plan refers to the development of Waverley station in Edinburgh to provide more capacity and better passenger facilities, and to work on rail capacity in the central belt and on rail access to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports.

The Welsh Assembly is making a significant contribution alongside that which is planned by the Strategic Rail Authority over the next five years, with enhanced rail infrastructure especially on valley lines and the Cambrian line. The Wales and borders franchise is being taken forward as a priority in the strategic plan. This provides a real opportunity to increase the quality and frequency of service, and I expect the new franchise to be operational early next year. A good start is being made with the opening of the Vale of Glamorgan line from Barry to Bridgend for passengers. Wales will also benefit from the commitments made on strategic services into London, including new rolling stock and track improvements. That is vital in improving communications for people in Wales as well as attracting business and leisure travellers to Wales. The Mayor of London is about to issue directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority that will place a priority on better integration of railways with tube and bus services and on increased frequencies.

We also need to do more to encourage freight on to our railways and off the roads. I recognise that a key element will be intra-European Union freight passing through the channel tunnel. The House will be aware of attempts to enter our country illegally through the tunnel. We must ensure that that does not happen and we will continue to press the French authorities strongly to provide the necessary security, both physically and through police presence at the freight yards on the French side. We have made good progress on Eurostar and that needs to be matched on freight as well. Under the plan, the freight facilities grant will be relaunched and there will also be a £300 million fund aimed at small-scale freight schemes.

Britain's railway is essential to the country's economic success and social development, and to environmental sustainability. Every day, the network carries 2.5 million passengers and 400,000 tonnes of freight. Each day, Liverpool Street station alone handles as many passengers as all the airlines carry through Heathrow. The railway industry is a key industrial sector employing 130,000 people. An efficient rail system would relieve road congestion and improve the competitive position of British industry.

It is six times safer to travel by rail than by car for each mile travelled. Rail is Britain's most extensive and co-ordinated national public transport system. We therefore need a railway that can deliver for our people and our country, and no more vague aspirations or grand visions that are strong on rhetoric but weak on delivery. The plan is an agenda for action. It shows what will be achieved for the large-scale investment that we intend to make in the next 10 years.

The strategic plan for railways draws a line in the sand and represents the point at which we say enough is enough. Let us take the necessary action and get on with providing a railway that is fit for the 21st century and the country with the fourth largest economy in the world. The plan will make an important contribution towards achieving that objective and I commend it to hon. Members.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Before I respond to the statement, I should like to inform hon. Members that my husband is employed by a bank that has been appointed to advise the Railtrack administrators.

I thank the Secretary of State for just about prior sight of his statement; it was tight going. I also thank him for coming to the Chamber to respond to the Strategic Rail Authority plan. However, I appreciate that we may have to await the words of Lord Birt in another place before we hear the Government's genuine response to it.

Since the Secretary of State pulled the plug on Railtrack and put the company into administration, train delays have increased overall by 45 per cent. and by more than 70 per cent. on some lines. Strikes are crippling some lines and every day brings more news of commuters' misery. As the Secretary of State admitted this morning, responsibility rests firmly with the Labour Government.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): What about privatisation? You privatised the railway.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not shout across the Chamber.

Mrs. May: I am sure that the Secretary of State was thinking about the railways on his walking tour of south India. I assure him that rail passengers were thinking about him as they shivered on platforms, waiting for trains that never came. He has promised us new direction and focus for the railways, yet the plan delivers only more repeated announcements and pretty waiting rooms. People want trains that run on time, not Government gimmicks. They do not get to work any faster because a station has been painted.

As the *Evening Standard* tells us, there is no new money. That is significant. The Secretary of State would have told us that if he had not left out the paragraph in his statement that said "Most of the additional £4.5 billion has been the subject of previous Government announcements." In fact, it is difficult to find what is new in the statement, which is a triumph of cut and paste from Railtrack's network management statement.

The Government have provided some value added: a 25 per cent. increase in delay for most of the projects. Perhaps the Secretary of State could name one project for which the timetable has not slipped. Again, the Government have raised expectations that the plan will be the answer to passengers' needs.

Much is made of new carriages, and the Secretary of State referred to them. Will he confirm that they are not additional, as the statement suggests, but merely replacements? By how much will capacity increase as a result? Furthermore, what confidence can the beleaguered travellers on Connex South Eastern have that the power supply will be sufficient to run the new trains?

The SRA has set out three milestones that need to be reached to achieve the strategic plan. The first is resolution of the Railtrack administration. While the company stays in administration, the rail system is in limbo, with staff, contractors and train operating companies uncertain about the future, and the private sector unwilling to invest. Some say that Railtrack will remain in administration until next year. Will the Secretary of State tell the House his working estimate, for budgetary purposes, of the date on which Railtrack will come out of administration?

The second obstacle to achieving the SRA's plan is instability and lack of confidence in the railway—the plan says that placing Railtrack into administration has damaged confidence in the railways. The Government are expecting the private sector to invest more than £30 billion in the railways over the next 10 years. Exactly what steps is the Secretary of State taking to restore the confidence of private sector investors?

What about passengers' confidence in safety? In December, at the Paddington survivors group summit, the Secretary of State signed up to implementing improved safety measures. The network management statement made a commitment to the installation of automatic train protection systems. In this plan, that has disappeared. Are the Government still committed to it?

The third obstacle mentioned by the SRA is skill shortages. Passengers' misery is being increased by the cancellation of trains due to strikes caused by the irresponsible behaviour of the RMT and ASLEF. We hear that last year the Minister for Transport was ordered to hold monthly meetings with the unions. Well, we can see how much help that has been. Will the Secretary of State join me in condemning the trade unions for calling these strikes, and will he clearly state to the House that the Government back the management of the train operating companies in dealing with the strikes?

[Mrs. May]

There is a fourth milestone: capacity. Without increased capacity the Government will not deliver the improvements that they promise. The plan holds out little hope that that can be achieved and therefore fails in relation to the most important milestone of all.

The Minister for Europe tells us that we have the worst railways in Europe. The chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority says that

"customer satisfaction is at an all-time low".

Meanwhile, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), is being groomed to take over as Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The Secretary of State has been humiliated by his colleagues, undermined by the Prime Minister, and stripped of his powers; the only thing that he has not got around to doing is handing in his ministerial limo. This plan offers no new money, no new schemes and no hope for passengers in the future. Passengers want trains that run on time, not cosmetic gimmicks from a failed Secretary of State.

Mr. Byers: Since I became Transport Secretary, I have made it very clear that the level of service provided on our railways is unacceptably low. That decline has not happened since the general election last year, or since the one in 1997. The problem has been caused by a number of reasons, and, as the travelling public know, the two main ones are underinvestment going back decades and the failed privatisation involving Railtrack. The Conservatives cannot come to terms with the fact that one of their creations, Railtrack, has been taken into administration by the High Court. They oppose that.

The shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer said on "Question Time" last week that privatisation of Railtrack was not given a chance. I see him nodding in agreement now. That is the Tories' solution: give Railtrack one more chance. That is the shadow Chancellor's policy, but the travelling public know better.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) spoke of the problems with drivers. There is a terrible shortage of drivers, which is why the trade union has been able to push up the rate of pay, for two reasons. First, the industry is run according to the short term at the moment; we do not have real investment in skills. The SRA plan proposes a National Rail Academy to address that problem. What are the facts behind the crux of the problem? On privatisation, what did the train operating companies do? They got rid of 1,000 drivers. That is the heart of the problem faced by the industry.

The hon. Lady raised issues about improved safety measures. Our commitments will be delivered, and that is a guarantee from the Government. On carriages, of course there will be replacements for the old slam-door stock, but if she reads the document and the detail on individual franchises she will see that capacity will increase as well. Each franchise is gone through in the strategic plan, and I ask her and the travelling public to read what improvements are planned and timetabled for their particular franchise area. That is there in detail and people can see, for the first time and with a timetable, the planned improvements in their area. The plan also takes into account the cost of Railtrack being in administration.

The hon. Lady makes a big point about no new cash being available to the industry, but we are very clear about investment: the figure was £29 billion when the 10-year plan was announced and it is now £33.5 billion, the sum which is being allocated today. We have made no secret of the fact that announcements have been made over the past 12 months or so about the additional money coming into the railway network. We have been very clear about that, but for the first time—this is the crucial point—we are seeing big investment in our railway network, as £33.5 billion of public money is coming in. That stands in stark contrast to the penny-pinching of the Conservatives in government.

It is rich for the hon. Lady to question our investment commitment when we know from the shadow Chancellor—I am pleased to see him here—

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I am too.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman may say that, and I look forward to the next election campaign, when he stands on a commitment to reduce the percentage of gross domestic product spent on services to 35 per cent. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) knows that an allocation of 35 per cent. of GDP for public services means a £60 billion cut in public services. It means that the whole investment need for railways will be lost totally. The shadow Chancellor may not like it, but he is on record as saying that very clearly.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Five years ago.

Mr. Byers: It was not. The right hon. and learned Gentleman really should know better. He has said that the Conservatives' aim should be to reduce the proportion of national output taken for the state to 35 per cent. The leader of the Conservative party said in the Budget debate in autumn last year that their target should be a reduction towards 35 per cent. of GDP. *[Interruption.]* I can understand why the Conservatives do not like it, because they challenge our commitment to investment—£33.5 billion—even though they know that they are committed to cut spending on public services.

On private sector involvement, the chairman of the SRA made himself very clear this morning when he said that he had discovered since he took office that many of the institutional and lending investors had been ringing him to say they want to be involved. He believes that that is clear indication of the investment that those involved want to see made.

We have made our position on the disputes absolutely clear, as did the Prime Minister last Wednesday. We are not prepared to get to a situation in which things that might be said work against a solution being found. Discussions are going on between the private employers and the trade unions, and the hope is that they will resolve the dispute. The Government's position is clear: arbitration is a far better route than strike action, which will affect the travelling public.

I said at the beginning of my statement that the Government accept that the current level of service is not good enough. The travelling public know that the responsibility does not lie with this Secretary of State or with this Government; they know that years of underinvestment and the failed privatisation that was Railtrack are the real reasons for that. The strategic plan draws a line in the sand. It states that enough is enough, and provides an agenda for delivery in the future. That agenda will be implemented in full.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The Secretary of State will know that the Strategic Rail Authority plan has been a long time coming, and will be warmly welcomed. One of the hazards of the rail industry is that, since the disastrous privatisation, it has suffered for too long from poor management, squabbling companies and the total inability of those responsible for the railways to invest in modern equipment or to deal with the day-to-day administration of a failing system.

Will my right hon. Friend give me one or two undertakings? Will he assure me that no long-term franchise will be given to a company that cannot show that it has fulfilled all the terms of its existing franchise? Failed companies should not merely be fined, but should be put at risk of losing their franchises if they do not deliver services at the standards that passengers demand. Will he also assure me that, in doing his very best to improve facilities for commuters in large urban areas, he will not forget that those who destroy the feeder branches of a railway system destroy its real strength? It would be stupid in fact, if not in theory, to forget that, because we have been round that track and got lost before.

Mr. Byers: As Chairman of the Transport Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend makes some important points. On the attitude within the industry, she is right that there has been a tendency for people to blame each other and never to take responsibility themselves for delivering the rail system that we need. The positive thing about the strategic plan published today is that it has been widely welcomed by all sections and all sectors of the rail industry. That is a good indication of the fact that the industry has recognised that it needs to move forward, and that companies will be in a stronger position to deliver if they work together instead of blaming each other, as they have all too often done in the past.

My hon. Friend raises the important issue of using the franchising system as a key lever to improve the quality of service. In the past, the franchise regime has not been used in a tough and disciplined way to ratchet up levels of performance. My hon. Friend hinted at the fact that, in the past, previous performance has not been used as one of the key tests in awarding franchises for the future, and I accept that. That must change, as is evident in the new franchising regime produced by the Strategic Rail Authority and reinforced in the strategic plan.

There is competition for these major franchises. In that competitive atmosphere, we must ensure that the passenger gets the benefit from the new franchising regime, which will take account of the quality of delivery by the previous franchise holder.

On the role of feeder branches, it is important that we acknowledge that 70 per cent. of all passenger travel is in London and the south-east. However, that is not a reason for underinvestment in other parts of the railway network. It is a railway network, and that includes London commuters, inner-city commuters, the regional network and the feeder lines.

I ask hon. Members to look at the detail of the proposals for each of the franchising areas, which show clearly the need to ensure that the feeder lines are retained and developed for the future. The announcement about the Vale of Glamorgan line between Barry and Bridgend is a good example of the improvements that we can expect over the coming years as a result of the new approach that is now being adopted and the funding that is now being made available.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Today's plans will undoubtedly provide a dim light at the end of the tunnel for rail users. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge, however, that more could and should have been done sooner by his Government? Will he also acknowledge that, despite what the Prime Minister told the House last Wednesday, figures from the Library demonstrate clearly that his Government will have spent less on the railways in their first five years than the Conservative Government spent in their last five? Given that 40 per cent. of trains are overcrowded, is it not bizarre that a Labour Government have introduced legislation to prevent overcrowding of chickens, but have introduced no such legislation to prevent overcrowding of humans?

Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that many of the proposals are simply reannouncements, for instance that about replacing slam-door carriages? Is it not the case that delivery is already behind schedule, and that when those carriages are delivered they will not actually work because of a failure to improve the power systems?

As for the repeat announcement about stations having to be safer, is it not the case that after four years of the Government's secure-station initiative, only 120 of 2,500 stations have yet received accreditation? How is that number to be boosted?

Given that we have the highest fares in Europe, and possibly in the world, is the very best that the Secretary of State can offer as a means to give us an affordable railway a "possible review"? Given that so much of the plan depends on investment from the private sector, will he acknowledge that continual uncertainty about the future of Railtrack, and about plans to reduce fragmentation in the railway, will make that private sector investment very much more difficult?

Is it not perhaps symbolic that the photograph illustrating the conclusion of the strategic plan is not of a train, but of a bus?

On 2 April last year, the Deputy Prime Minister announced a fresh start for the railways. Is today's statement a new fresh start, or just a reannouncement?

Mr. Byers: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I always treat figures from the Library with a certain amount of scepticism. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I do so for the simple reason that we need to know the question that was asked. It is as simple as that. I have been in opposition, and I know how to do it as well—do not worry. It depends on the question, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

What I know is what really counts to the industry. I do not think that those travelling on the railways are too worried about where the investment comes from—whether it comes from public sector borrowing or from the private sector. What they want is investment in the railways. Total investment is the key. The figures are clear. Over the period of the 10-year plan, the average per year is £4.3 billion.

[Mr. Byers]

Under the last five years of the Conservative Government, the average per year was £1.4 billion. That is the big change that has been made. It is total investment in the railways that concerns people, and the figure I have quoted is the amount that is being invested.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that the private sector is not interested in being involved in the projects listed in the strategic plan. The chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, who daily speaks to investors, confirmed that in a radio interview this morning.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the replacement of the slam-door carriages. As the report makes clear, there is a problem with the power system, which was not addressed by Railtrack but will be addressed as a matter of urgency by the new regime in Railtrack and by the new Strategic Rail Authority. That will ensure that the commitment in the strategic plan will be met, and that mark 1 slam-door trains will not run after the end of 2004.

There can be talks about new beginnings and so on, but I was realistic in my statement. The strategic plan will make an important contribution, but it is not a start and an end; this is the beginning of a process. There will need to be further announcements in the period ahead so that people can see the improvements that are being made. Most important—I give this commitment to the House—it is not a one-off exercise. Next year, I want to see a statement from the Strategic Rail Authority about progress that is being made on delivery of the guarantees and commitments in the plan. The travelling public have been shown today the detail of what it intends to deliver. We need to see that there will be effective delivery and implementation. The travelling public expect nothing less. We expect the Strategic Rail Authority to deliver. We expect the Government to play their part as well, and we will.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he was absolutely right to take decisive action against Railtrack and that that is one of the reasons why the Tories squeal like busted pigs every day he comes to the House? [HON. MEMBERS: "Busted pigs?"] Yes. Will he bear in mind that in the next 10 years, there is half a chance that one of the railway operating companies may suffer the same fate as Railtrack? My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that a company may fail to meet its commitments, but it may fail all together. Will my right hon. Friend have the resolve to do the same with that company as he did with Railtrack? Is there enough money in the 10-year plan for him to carry that out?

Mr. Byers: It would be inappropriate to try to speculate about the position of individual train operating companies. They have had some difficulty because of the nature of the franchises that were awarded under the Conservatives when they were in office. I do not know if my hon. Friend had certain Opposition Members in mind when he talked about busted pigs; there are probably several to choose from. The important thing is that the decision to place Railtrack into administration was taken by the High Court because of that company's inability to pay its debts, or potentially to pay its debts when they became due.

Since then, it is interesting that there has been a political outcry because, for the first time under this Government, the Thatcher-Major legacy of privatisation has been rolled back. That is what the Conservatives find so offensive. They are offended by the fact that one of their creations, Railtrack, has been taken into administration by the High Court. That is the problem for the Conservatives.

In reply to my hon. Friend, the strategic plan shows a real way forward. It is a pragmatic approach, not based on political dogma, but on a way of achieving real improvements for the travelling public.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Secretary of State has again whinged on and on about Railtrack. If it was such a disaster, why did his Government include Railtrack in the windfall tax when they came to office? Why after nearly 18 months did they take yet more money out of the company in September 1998? If it was such a disaster, why did they not insist that the money that the Treasury robbed from it was invested in the company?

Mr. Byers: This is a new line from the Conservative party. We are now being told that in 1998 the Treasury robbed Railtrack. Remember that Railtrack paid £700 million in dividends to shareholders during its period of privatisation. During the summer, it came to the Government asking for more money; indeed, we paid money under legal procedures to bring forward £1.5 billion at the beginning of October. Three days later, it paid £88 million in dividends to shareholders yet again. That showed Railtrack's priorities.

The problem with Railtrack—it was the fundamental flaw—was that it tried to serve two masters: its shareholders and the travelling public. However, in the end, its legal duty—its legal priority—had to be to the shareholders; the directors in a quoted company had no option. They had to put the interests of shareholders first. As a result, the travelling public suffered.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I will resist asking a question about the west coast main line, as my right hon. Friend has agreed to come to a meeting of the all-party group tomorrow. I wish to refer to the mention in the plan of the National Rail Academy, a proposal on which I have been working for two years with partners in north Cumbria. Is it not a fact that we have a skills shortage involving up to 60,000 people on the railways? If that academy is not set up quickly, all of the proposals in the document will fail because there will not be the skilled workers to do the job.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out the importance of investing in skills and training for the railway industry. There is a chronic shortage of drivers; that is at the heart of some of the industrial disputes that we are seeing in parts of the country. There is a lack of skilled signallers, engineers and general support staff. We need investment across the board in the railway network, and the lack of skills is a direct consequence of the industry's short-term approach in the past. When people have had an opportunity to look at the strategic plan, they will see that our proposals are for the short and medium term, but they are also about long-term planning for the future. Part of that is investing in people and developing the skills base of the industry. The establishment of a National Rail Academy will play an important role in ensuring that we have the people with the right skills—drivers, signallers and engineers—to deliver the high-quality railway system that we want for the future.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Is the Secretary of State aware that overcrowding on some commuter lines into London—including Kent commuter lines, such as my local line from Orpington—is now so grotesque that Connex South Eastern is contemplating removing the toilets from trains to squash in more people? Is he aware that, in the plan, there is nothing about new coaches that we did not already know and next to no detail about specific measures to deal with overcrowding? On the contrary, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) said, the plan contains delays to these schemes about which we did not know. For the commuter into London—who is, as the Secretary of State has said, the backbone of the economy—is this not hope postponed?

Mr. Byers: The plan states clearly the time at which delivery will take place and at which there will be implementation. The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the frankly unacceptable overcrowding on many services on London commuter routes in particular, as well as in certain other parts of the country. There is a plan to extend platforms so we can run longer trains. Waterloo will be covered by that, as will other main line stations in London and more than 60 in the south-east. That will make a real difference, but those improvements should have taken place years ago.

Mr. Don Foster: Five years ago.

Mr. Byers: No, not just five years ago, but 20 or 30 years ago. They are now at last beginning to take place. The crucial thing about the strategic plan is that, in clear language and with a specific timetable, people will be able to see the dates at which they can expect the improvements to take place. There will be no more hiding. I said earlier—Opposition Members did not like it—that we can have grand visions and great aspirations but, in the end, we must have specific commitments. These are the specific commitments on which we will be judged. We are not running away from them; this is what will be delivered.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): My right hon. Friend is right to identify lack of investment and privatisation as the main underlying causes of our difficulties. Is he aware that everyone who has the future of the railways at heart will welcome his statement today, including the reference to planned investment in Edinburgh Waverley? Does he accept that part of the problem with the structure is the degree of fragmentation introduced by privatisation, and the large number of private operators? Is it his intention to use the franchise process to reduce that fragmentation?

Mr. Byers: My right hon. Friend, who studies the industry and transport closely, is right to say that the two problems faced by the industry have been the lack of investment and the failed structure as a result of privatisation.

Richard Bowker, the new chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, makes a clear commitment in his introduction to the report. He says that he wants to use the franchising programme to achieve simplification and move away from fragmentation. He says:

> "in the interim, we will be looking to create much closer cooperation between train and track operations and will be focusing our efforts on achieving this as part of our Franchise Management activity."

He is clear about the fact that fragmentation is working against the interests of the travelling public.

London's main line stations provide a good example of that. Where there are competing franchises, individual platforms are often allocated to a particular operator, so a train may have to wait five or 10 minutes to pull into a platform even though a platform allocated to a rival operator is free the whole time. That happens a lot in Liverpool Street, as the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) may know, and as I know from personal experience when I come back from visiting my mother.

That is one problem that could be solved by reducing fragmentation, and I know that the chairman of the SRA has such initiatives very much in mind.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Secretary of State finally put aside his criticisms of privatisation? If he is truly presenting the report, let me refer him to pages 48 and 52, where there is a ringing endorsement for both passenger and freight volume increases since privatisation in the 1990s. Will he take this opportunity to agree with that endorsement?

I declare again my interest in Railtrack and First Group and the fact that I am in possession of a Great North Eastern Railway car park pass.

I have a simple question for the Secretary of State. When is a train not a train? When it is a bus service offered by Arriva between Thirsk and Newcastle. Will he take this opportunity to deplore the six-month removal of train services on that route by Arriva Northern?

The Secretary of State says that the investment planning programme for British railways is at the top of his agenda. Does he accept that the single most damaging action that he took was to remove, through his power of direction, the Rail Regulator that the Government introduced when they first came to power? Will he assure us, in an effort to encourage private investment in the railways, that he will guarantee never to remove the Rail Regulator's powers in the future?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Let me make a plea. Clearly, many right hon. and hon. Members want to ask a question. If both questions and answers can be kept briefer, more may catch my eye.

Mr. Byers: I will do my best, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The role of the regulator can be changed only by this House and the House of Lords, not by any unilateral action taken by the Secretary of State.

I have made it clear that Railtrack was the failed privatisation. Some aspects of privatisation have brought improvements, and those are referred to in the strategic plan. We must be very robust in ensuring that we are as

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tough with the private sector if it fails as we would be with anyone in the public sector, where we rightly take action.

The Thirsk-Newcastle situation is a good example of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) about people not delivering on their franchise. It is a clear illustration of a company with a railway franchise not delivering on its obligations. I hope that when the Strategic Rail Authority considers that franchise replacement it will examine very carefully the extent to which Arriva has delivered on its obligations.

The problem with train drivers has come about because of the short-term approach to the industry, with more than 1,000 drivers lost at the time of privatisation and the failure to invest in drivers over the past few years. Arriva has left it very late in the day to realise that a train needs a driver. It is not rocket science. It is pretty simple and straightforward, and all the franchise operators need to recognise their obligation to deliver on their obligations.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Secretary of State will agree that the SRA started weakly. Is he satisfied that the new management will make it a success? Can he give a guarantee to all the people who live in the conurbations of Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Greater Leeds and Greater Newcastle that one of the next key objectives will be to get the new franchise issued for that area, so that services can be upgraded?

Mr. Byers: I believe that the SRA with Richard Bowker as the new chairman will be a different body from the previous one. At last, we will have an SRA that has a strategic plan, which we did not have before today. On the specifics of the trans-pennine franchise, I hope that speedy progress can be made. People not only in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, York and Newcastle, but those in Sheffield, Bradford and what one might call the outlying areas, including Hull, Blackpool and the Lancashire towns, will benefit from that franchise. It will make a huge difference. It is important that we use the franchising process as an opportunity to raise the standards and improve the quality of rail provision in all parts of the country.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The private sector company Virgin is making a massive investment in new trains on the west coast main line. However, to deliver any extra capacity on that line, it must be able to run 11 trains an hour. The current capacity is nine trains an hour. When will we be able to have 11 trains an hour on the west coast main line?

Mr. Byers: As the right hon. Gentleman may be aware, discussions are taking place between Railtrack, the SRA and Virgin about the details of the west coast main line update. As I said in my statement, the new management of Railtrack is revealing a depth of mismanagement of the project that is breathtaking in its failure to deliver. Details of that will no doubt be made available in the near future. I spoke to Sir Richard Branson on Friday about the west coast main line and his commitment is clear. As the right hon. Gentleman said, Virgin has made a huge investment in new rolling stock.

Michael Fabricant: That's a private sector company.

Mr. Byers: Absolutely. That is the private sector doing well and investing. The private sector in the form of Railtrack failed to deliver, and that is why the distinction needs to be made. The privatisation that was Railtrack failed on the west coast main line upgrade. The private sector company Virgin, which is investing its own money, deserves a licence operator that delivers. That is why I make the distinction between some private sector companies that do well and some that do not. I share the right hon. Gentleman's view that we want a west coast main line that is working well, that can shorten journey times and increase capacity. I know from my experience of using that route that it is a well used one. More people want to use it and they will do so, when the new rolling stock goes in and after the upgrade that is so badly needed.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is my right hon. Friend aware that when the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) was asked on this morning's "Today" programme what her party would have done, she said that in 1997 it would have begun to re-examine the structures of Railtrack. As Railtrack came into being only in 1996, is not it clear that the Opposition's commitment to and belief in Railtrack is as specious and shallow as their commitment to a properly integrated public transport system?

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his actions with regard to Railtrack and on highlighting the need for proper training structures in the railway industry. I welcome the establishment of the National Rail Academy, but will my right hon. Friend make part of every franchise the requirement that train operating companies make a proper commitment financially, and in their beliefs, to the funding of such an academy, so that we can begin to tackle the serious shortage of drivers and skilled platform staff?

Mr. Byers: I missed hearing the hon. Member for Maidenhead on "Today" this morning.

Glenda Jackson: It was a treat.

Mr. Byers: That is why I am sorry I missed it. I hope that the BBC can provide me with a recording so that we can think about the pearls of wisdom that often come from the hon. Lady.

On training, I am pleased that my hon. Friend welcomes the idea of a National Rail Academy. She is right to point out that there is an opportunity to use the franchising process to ensure that the train operating companies make their contribution. The franchise for the midland main line does precisely that; it is the first time that a commitment to training has been a requirement in a franchise agreement. The SRA needs to consider making that a part of every franchise that it will let in the coming period.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): As the Secretary of State said, 70 per cent. of the investment in the plan is directed at London and the south-east of England. Out of 17 major identified projects, 11 are in London and the south-east. Indeed, London and the south-east get twice as much space in the document as the rest of the country put together. Is the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Transport for the whole country or Secretary of State for Transport for the south of England with regional appendages?

Just before that ringing bit in the statement about vague aspirations, long on rhetoric and short on delivery, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the lack of a rail link to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports; yet page 101 of the document does not give a specific commitment, but merely refers to an options appraisal study. So lest he be accused of vague aspirations, can the Secretary of State say whether there will be a rail link to Scotland's two major airports by 2010—yes or no?

Mr. Byers: I am responsible for all passengers. As 70 per cent. of passenger travel takes place in London and the south-east, it is no surprise that more than half the document addresses issues to do with those areas. However, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to page 99, which deals specifically with the ScotRail proposals and gives details of what will be achieved. As I said in my statement, many of these proposals are priorities that are being addressed by the Scottish Executive and the Strathclyde passenger transport executive. That is the crucial point—these bodies will be working together.

I believe that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive will address the issues to do with Edinburgh and Glasgow airports. They are working on developing capacity—*[Interruption.]* My colleagues in Scotland will answer the specifics. They are also working on developing opportunities for rail links with Edinburgh and Glasgow airports.

I know that the hon. Gentleman had some doubts about whether to go to the Scottish Parliament or stay here, or whether he was going to retire. As a great advocate of devolution, he should realise that the point of it is that the Scottish Executive have the opportunity of being involved. I was pleased today to have the opportunity in my statement to address the real issues affecting rail travellers in Scotland. I ask people to look at page 99 of the document by way of example to see the real improvements that will come to rail passengers in Scotland.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As one who cannot claim to be a great advocate of devolution, may I ask my right hon. Friend what is the time scale regarding the urgent problems of training, not only in Scotland but throughout the rest of the United Kingdom? The academy to which he referred in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) is fine as far as it goes, but what hope for training can he hold out for the here and now?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The National Rail Academy will, in the medium and long term, make a real difference. However, there is a pressing problem now, which is why the strategic plan makes it clear that the SRA will be closely involved in the training organisation for the railways which is already established. The authority may not have played as big enough part as was necessary but that will change. Through that training organisation, which has the involvement of all sectors of the railway industry, we will see great improvements in training and the development of skills.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I draw the Secretary of State's attention to page 70 of the document, which says:

> "East Midlands Parkway station to open by May 2003".

That will not happen unless he and the SRA enter into a section 54 undertaking. Will he give that commitment today?

Mr. Byers: What I will do is look carefully at the matter, write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of the letter in the Library. I think that would be the best way forward.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I am absolutely delighted with the statement in the plan that the vale of Glamorgan railway line will go ahead, and that it will do so on time. However, given the timetable and the fact that new franchises are to be drawn up for Wales and the borders, it is unlikely that the new franchisee will be in place before the line is up and running. Will my right hon. Friend ask the SRA to ensure that, in any new franchise bids, new rolling stock is specified by the successful company for the provision of that minimum service on the new vale of Glamorgan line?

Mr. Byers: I am pleased to receive the welcome for the vale of Glamorgan line—linking, as it does, Barry and Bridgend. That will make a real difference and open up passenger services.

My hon. Friend also points out the importance of the Wales and the borders franchise. He will be aware that the chairman of the SRA visited Cardiff—I think it was last week—to talk with the First Minister, the right hon. Rhodri Morgan, and Members of the Welsh Assembly about the franchising. The chairman reassured them about the timing of the letting of that franchise, which will be in the early part of next year in line with commitments that the Labour party has made in Wales. That is to be welcomed. I shall draw to the attention of the SRA the specific point raised by my hon. Friend as to the need for appropriate rolling stock to be in place.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The Secretary of State will probably be aware that the summary document refers to the completion of the project to extend South West Trains suburban platforms by 2004. However, the company told me that it is extremely unlikely that that project can be completed before 2007. Can the right hon. Gentleman explain that discrepancy? What reassurance can he give commuters in my area that the project will be completed sooner than the company believes?

Mr. Byers: The point to remember is that, at present, there are heads of agreement between the SRA and South West Trains about the details of its franchise agreement. Negotiations between them are continuing, so we should take what is being said with a little pinch of salt. The point is well made, however, that if we are serious about reducing overcrowding on those London and south-east commuter routes—especially in areas such as the one covered by South West Trains—the extension of railway

[Mr. Byers]

platforms needs to go ahead quickly and as soon as possible. That is how we can increase capacity—adding more cars to each service. I give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that I shall raise the issue with the SRA and South West Trains to try to obtain a firmer commitment. That commitment will come about as part of the franchise negotiations between South West Trains and the SRA.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): There is much detail in the document that I welcome—as I welcome Richard Bowker's commitment to be a railways champion. However, will my right hon. Friend address my concern that the priorities in the programme do not do a great deal to tackle the north-south divide in the economy? One of the important ways to deal with that is by establishing a northern economy whereby people in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Northumbria, Cumbria and the whole of the north can travel quickly, cleanly, reliably and easily between all their cities, just as people can do in Greater London. Will my right hon. Friend address my concerns as we work through the strategic rail document?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out that there would be a danger if the strategic plan was only about addressing our—real—concerns about commuter routes in London and the south-east. However, the plan does much more than that. When Members have been able to go through the details and to consider, franchise by franchise, the improvements that can be expected—how we expect to use the rail performance fund and the rail passenger partnership fund—they will see that there are a range of opportunities that will lead to improvements for the regional network. I personally believe that the trans-Pennine franchise, which affects my hon. Friend's constituents in Sheffield and links Lancashire with the north-east of England, will make a very real difference, not just to the benefit of the travelling public but to regenerating the economy in those areas.

The important message that underlies the strategic plan is that railways are not just about the convenience of the travelling public; they are also very important to economic regeneration and improving the competitive position of British business. That is not just an issue for London and the south-east, where the economy is doing well; we must ensure that the benefits of a growing economy are experienced by every region, as well as by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I believe that the measures contained in the strategic plan will contribute to achieving those objectives.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Does the Secretary of State agree that the proposals to abolish Anglia Railways will lead to fewer trains serving Ipswich, Colchester and London? Following his observation about strengthening the regions, will he support the proposal to re-instate the direct rail link between Colchester and Cambridge, via the existing Sudbury branch line?

Mr. Byers: Again, on the Colchester to Cambridge link, I shall consider the details and perhaps reply in writing to the hon. Gentleman. I am aware of the concern in the eastern region about the proposal to move to one franchise holder. The editor of the *Eastern Daily Press* last week raised with me the effect that that might have.

It is important that we use the franchising process to deliver specific commitments, so that, for example, Colchester, Ipswich, Stowmarket, Diss and Norwich will not be adversely affected by any change that might take place. That is particularly important given the discussion about improvements to commuter links. Of course, many people commute from those towns and cities. Although that service has improved in recent years, it can still be improved significantly beyond what has been achieved so far. We need to build on those improvements in the future, which will involve making specific commitments in the franchising process to ensure that those towns and cities benefit from any change that might take place.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, at the end of the day, the people whom we represent do not really care very much whether the rail system is controlled privately or publicly? They care whether it is efficiently controlled. I very much welcome the strategic plan, but does he agree that the real challenge and problem that we face is ensuring that the quality of the management that runs the private sector franchise companies and whatever replaces Railtrack is highly effective and includes the best calibre of manager that we can find? There has been a history of poor managers in the railway industry—whether public or private—and this country and the people who work in the rail industry deserve the very best managers to lead them.

Mr. Byers: The dedication and motivation of people working in the railway industry needs to be seen to be believed. What has struck me is that, in a difficult period for people in the railway industry, they have been motivated and committed to trying to improve and provide the best possible service to railway passengers. They have been let down by the structure in which they have had to work, and one of my commitments is to ensure that they have a structure in which they can work that reflects their own commitments as individuals, and we can produce that situation.

Management has not been good enough in the past. That point has been made today by the chairman of the SRA, Richard Bowker, and it is made very strongly in the strategic plan itself. An effective management must be in control of an industry that is key to the future of the United Kingdom's economy and to the comfort and convenience of travelling passengers and that employs 130,000 people. So changes will be necessary, and we must give the relevant people and organisations the support that they will need to carry out those changes, which will be difficult, but will provide the management that the industry needs for the future.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the plans for new capacity platform extensions to reduce overcrowding at stations in south-east England will include Reading station in my constituency? It is the second busiest station in the country outside London.

Can my right hon. Friend offer any hope at all about an upgrade for the Great Western line which, according to the document, is likely to occur at some time in the far mists of the future? Like me, the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who speaks for the Opposition on transport matters, represents a Berkshire constituency and she knows that electrification in Berkshire has been denied on the ground that it is too windy in Cornwall. What hope can my right hon. Friend offer my constituents about an upgrade for the Great Western line?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out the significant increase in capacity and use that has taken place at Reading station. As a local Member of Parliament, she has been a fierce advocate for improvements in the quality of service from Reading.

The upgrade of the Great Western main line is addressed in the strategic plan, but it is one of those long-term projects that will take time. However, the good news in the plan is that the work is beginning to ensure that we will be in a position—if the plan is deemed to be value for money and feasible—to give it the go-ahead and to be implemented towards the end of, if not slightly beyond, the 10-year plan.

A number of improvements for platform extensions have been proposed. About 60 stations will be covered by that provision, and I will write to my hon. Friend specifically about the position in Reading.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): The Secretary of State will know that the proposed Central Railway project will have a significant impact on the ability of the Chiltern line to deliver the improvements promised in the strategy. Can I take it that the absence of any mention of Central Railway in the document means that that project will not figure in his or the SRA's future strategy?

Mr. Byers: Detailed consideration is still being given to the Central Railway proposal, so it was too early to be able to say anything specific about it in the strategic plan.

Negotiations are almost concluded on the renewal of the Chiltern franchise. I agree and hope that they will be concluded in the very near future. I know that it is one of the routes that has offered a good service to the travelling public, so we must ensure that we can build on that service. At the moment, it is one of the most reliable in terms of punctuality and lack of cancellations. We must ensure that it retains that position as one of the premier franchises in the country.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is a great shame that the Prime Minister declared in 1997 that the railways were not a priority for this Government? Those of us who campaigned for a separate rail authority for Wales and Scotland feel very badly let down by the content of the statement. According to the Wales Transport Research Centre, the proposed investment is one fifteenth of what would be required to upgrade and improve services in Wales.

This is a bad day for Wales and Scotland. I do not know anything about busted pigs, or whatever the phrase was, but this statement is unlikely to save the Secretary of State's bacon.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman has had an hour and 18 minutes to think of that one, although I do not know whether it was worth the effort.

I understand from personal experience the need for good rail travel in Wales and I am the first to accept that it is not good enough at present. However, when people have had an opportunity to consider the details in the plan, they will see that, through the new franchise and through the vale of Glamorgan proposals, there are initiatives that will make a real difference. As I said in my statement, this is not both a start and an end; it is a beginning and we will need to build on it for the future. That is very important. If there are issues in Wales and more investment is needed, they can be addressed in the Welsh Assembly, as I am sure they will be.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday, in 1997—let us be clear about this—the priorities were to get our public finances on to a sound footing to ensure that we could subsequently have long-term investment. That is needed more in transport than in any other area. It is no good having a one-off splurge of investment in transport that lasts a year or two. It needs year-on-year investment and that will be delivered through the strategic plan.

The people's priorities in 1997 were education and health, which were delivered.

Bob Russell: And getting rid of the Tories.

Mr. Byers: As well as getting rid of the Tories. It was recognised that, to improve education and health, we had to get rid of the Tories. The people did that, but their priorities were education and health. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) is right to point out that the priorities now are not just education, health and fighting crime, but transport and the railways in particular.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): I welcome the statement, but does my right hon. Friend accept that although Virgin's new trains may come some day—it has been promising them for a long time—it is not reasonable for passengers to continue to travel in carriages that are dirty, badly maintained and falling apart and with decrepit buffet bar equipment? Does he agree that Virgin should not fail to maintain equipment while waiting for new rolling stock?

Mr. Byers: Obviously, operating companies need to deliver on their obligations under their franchise. I understand my hon. Friend's concerns as a representative of a north Wales constituency. However, there will be improvements as a result of the strategic plan and the new franchise proposals for Wales and the borders, which will cover north Wales. She is right to point out that old rolling stock is being used on too many routes, but there are plans to replace it. There is also an obligation under existing franchise agreements to keep it in a fit and suitable condition.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): With the midland main line running down one side of my constituency and the east coast main line running down the other, the Secretary of State is more than welcome to bring his fighting talk to my constituents at the next general election, in whatever capacity he serves. Indeed, my constituents would count it as a double whammy if he were Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

On returning to work the other week, my constituents who commute from Bedford faced a rise of more than 25 per cent. in car parking charges. I do not think that they are alone in that. Such an increase is hardly

[Alistair Burt]

encouraging for commuters, and it does not encourage people to leave their cars and get back on the train. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that car parking at stations, and the problems attendant on car parking around stations, which is a problem on the other side of my constituency, will be a serious priority for consideration in his strategic blue-sky vision for the railways of the future?

Mr. Byers: Blue-sky thinking is not something in which I indulge; I would much rather get on with the nitty-gritty of delivering. I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the state of car parks, which he voiced on behalf of his constituents. The hon. Member for Maidenhead dismissed the improvements that we will see in 1,000 stations. One of those improvements will be to car parks. We will not just improve toilets, which seem to obsess the hon. Lady, but provide better lighting and CCTV, and ensure that proper information is given to the travelling public, which is badly needed.

All those improvements, and car parking is among them, will be made to 1,000 railway stations. Although they are particular improvements, they form only a small part of the overall plan. I know that much has been made of it, but well over £60 billion is being spent on railway investment. The fact that a few hundred million is being spent on improvements to 1,000 stations gets the balance about right.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Given the Secretary of State's acceptance that transport is essential to regional economic regeneration, what role does he see for the North West Development Agency and the north-west regional assembly in securing improvements for transport in the north-west? Is he aware that the Central Railway project will be very much welcomed in the north-west?

Mr. Byers: I am aware of support for the Central Railway project in the north-west and other parts of the country. As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), a good deal of detailed work is going on in respect of the Central Railway proposal. I agree with my hon. Friend that a good, effective and efficient railway system is crucial for regional economic regeneration. It is significant that in relation to the consultation on the new franchising for the trans-Pennine franchise, the SRA said that it will speak to and consult not just the passenger transport authorities in the areas affected but the regional development agencies and regional assemblies as well.

It is important that we ensure that all those with a relevant interest feel that franchises are being developed in a way that reflects their own priorities. In the discussions that we had last year about changing the franchise process, I was struck by the fact that the franchises had not been used to drive up standards and deliver for passengers, and that that had taken place in a sort of secret garden world, where there had been no consultation about what might be achieved. I hope that we can move away from that and ensure that organisations such as those mentioned by my hon. Friend will be involved in the future.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Does the Secretary of State accept [illegible] under the plan, overcrowding will get worse rather than better over the next 10 years? Can he explain why section 2 of the plan does not identify overcrowding as a key issue, and why, on page 61, there is a prediction that even with the specific commitments, some of which the right hon. Gentleman referred to in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam),

> "most franchises will, in 2010, fail to meet the SRA's overcrowding standard"?

Mr. Byers: I would ask the hon. Gentleman to read again the details of the strategic plan. Perhaps he will realise that that was not a totally accurate statement of what is contained in it. There is no doubt that overcrowding in London and the south-east has worsened over recent years. The strategic plan identifies ways in which it can be alleviated. Steps will need to be taken; there will be no quick fix. The strategic plan begins the process of reducing overcrowding on the important commuter links into London and elsewhere in the south-east.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Railtrack was dragging its feet on station improvements long before an administration order was made. At Stafford, for example, we are waiting for an improved car park and improved access to platforms for disabled and elderly passengers. How will the plan's promise of 1,000 station upgrades soon take place?

Mr. Byers: It will be necessary to identify areas of priority. I have just had my first bid in the case of Stafford. We will have to identify where the investment needs to take place. My hon. Friend touched on the important point concerning access to the railways for people with a disability. The strategic plan contains some positive proposals. At long last we have a timetable to end the practice whereby people in a wheelchair are carried in the goods van. That is totally unacceptable. There is a commitment to ensure that that no longer happens by the end of 2004, which is still two years away. I hope that that is one aspect of the strategic plan that will not just be delivered on time, but which might be brought forward. It must be unacceptable to treat people with a disability in that way.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Did the Secretary of State see at the weekend the comments of Bob Crow, the assistant general secretary of the RMT, who said:

> "I don't understand the fuss over one little strike on South West Trains. . . That's nothing compared to what will happen if the train companies continue to ignore our genuine grievances over pay."

What is the Government response to such threats, particularly given the close relationship of many Ministers with the RMT—the Deputy Chief Whip, the Leader of the House of Commons, and, particularly, the Deputy Prime Minister who receives a substantial pecuniary interest from the RMT and who failed to deliver any policy in the past four years, as pointed out by the Minister for Europe?

Mr. Byers: It is clear that the industrial action being taken on South West Trains is creating huge inconvenience for the travelling public. The members of the RMT need to be very careful about the impact that they are having on rail passengers. Their future and their jobs depend on people travelling on the railways.

If passengers find an alternative means of travel, that is bad news not just for railways, but for the jobs of RMT members. That is an important message for them to hear.

Martin Linton (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the strategic plan for its clear national vision of the future of the railway industry, and the high priority that it gives to many schemes in the London area, particularly the East London line extension and Thameslink? Despite the comments of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), many new priorities are spelled out in the document for the first time—in my constituency, for example, the redevelopment of Clapham Junction station, and the eventual implementation of Orbirail. I urge my right hon. Friend to accept that there must be a stronger commitment to the speedy development of a high frequency inner-suburban London orbital network, which would revolutionise rail travel in the inner-London area.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to say that a national vision is contained in the document, but it is very important that we have the specifics to underpin it. As I said, it is important that we do not have merely vague aspirations as part of a grand vision. The specifics of the East London line extension, Thameslink, Orbirail, crossrail and improvements to Clapham Junction will all make a significant difference. Most important, they provide the opportunity for an orbital link in London, which will make a huge difference for people in London. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) will be called next. In London, areas of employment are no longer located only in the centre, but in outlying areas, and we need a public transport and rail system that reflects those changes.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that I must now bring questions on the statement to a close.

BILL PRESENTED

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND REMEDIES

John Austin, supported by Mr. Terry Rooney, Fiona Mactaggart, Mr. David Chidgey, Mr. Khalid Mahmood, Mr. David Atkinson and Clive Efford, presented a Bill to render unlawful religious discrimination in employment and in the provision of certain types of goods, facilities and services and to make provision for appropriate enforcement; to create new offences relating to incitement to religious hatred; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 April, and to be printed [Bill 80].

Orders of the Day

Office of Communications Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

5.31 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to be able to open the debate on this Bill.

In December 2000, the Government published the White Paper "A New Future for Communications", which set out their vision for the future of telecommunications and broadcasting in the United Kingdom. The White Paper recognised that the world of communications is changing rapidly. People now have access to ever more sophisticated technological devices providing an increasing range of high-quality services.

The huge popularity of mobile phones and text messaging, the high penetration of digital television in the United Kingdom, combined with the new interactive services now being offered, and the increasing number of people accessing and using the internet have brought enormous changes in a very short period to the way in which we all communicate and obtain information. Those rapid technological advances, together with growing convergence between the broadcasting and telecommunications industries, are creating further choice for consumers and new openings for British business. We must therefore ensure that the United Kingdom continues to be able to take full advantage of the opportunities that such developments bring.

The White Paper affirmed the Government's aim of making the United Kingdom home to the most dynamic and competitive communications and media market in the world; of ensuring universal access to a choice of diverse, high-quality services; and of ensuring proper safeguards to protect the interests of citizens and consumers. Central to the achievement of that vision was the creation of a unified regulator—the Office of Communications, shortened to Ofcom—that would take over the responsibilities of five existing regulators operating in the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors: the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the Independent Television Commission, the Office of Telecommunications or Oftel, the Radio Authority and the Radio Communications Agency.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I congratulate the Government on finally introducing the Bill, which was recommended as long ago as May 1998 by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. Why does not the Minister's long list of the organisations that will be encompassed by Ofcom include the BBC board of governors?

Mr. Alexander: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt be glad to hear that I shall deal with that issue later in my speech.

The current system of regulation, in which a number of separate bodies have responsibility for different aspects of different sectors, grew over a number of years and, indeed, over the last century, when such a separation of

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responsibilities made much more sense. Today, with increasing convergence between broadcasting and telecommunications, the Government believe that it is time to create a completely new unified regulatory body to meet the challenges of this new century. The regulator should be able to make strategic decisions across the sectors, based on expert knowledge of complex, cross-cutting technical, economic and cultural issues. It should also promote competition and high standards, and safeguard the interests of citizens and consumers.

The publication of the White Paper led to a further round of consultation with key stakeholders and other interested parties. The majority of respondents welcomed the Government's overall aims and there was almost universal support for the establishment of Ofcom. Many believed that it would help to simplify the current regulatory regime. The general consensus has been reflected in cross-party support from the main political parties for a unified regulator.

The pace of technological change and convergence has not been as rapid as some people may have predicted only a year or two ago, but it remains vital to ensure that the conditions are right to allow United Kingdom businesses to compete in global markets and provide high-quality infrastructure and content. We must therefore ensure that we have the right regulatory framework to allow business to develop and grow.

The Queen's Speech announced the Government's intention to publish a draft communications Bill later in the Session. It will set out in detail the proposals for the new regulatory regime that Ofcom will oversee in time. Such regulation is by definition complex and it is vital to get the detail of the draft Bill right. When it is ready in the spring, we will undertake full consultation with industry and other stakeholders on its contents to enable them to consider and comment fully on the proposals.

The draft Bill's publication should provide ample opportunity for Parliament to debate the proposed regulatory regime. In discussion in another place, the Government said that time will be found for a Joint Committee of both Houses to undertake the task, should Parliament wish it. We shall therefore invite Parliament to establish such a Committee nearer the time.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Will the Minister clarify his proposals for a Joint Committee, especially whether he is considering Select Committee or Standing Committee procedure? There is a crucial difference: in the House of Commons, members of Select Committees do not normally serve on Standing Committees. If membership of a Joint Committee is confined to those who serve on the Select Committee, Standing Committee members, who need expertise, do not have it when they scrutinise measures in detail.

Mr. Alexander: Procedures for the Joint Committee will be a matter for Parliament. We have offered pre-legislative scrutiny if both Houses want it.

The Office of Communications Bill is a paving measure, which will enable us to make progress on the essential practical work that is necessary to create Ofcom. The work needed for the new statutory body to evolve out of five existing regulators is complex. We must bring together three statutory organisations, one non-ministerial Department and an agency. They are based in 20 or more offices around the country, with differing pay systems, pension schemes and organisational cultures. That must be done with the minimum disruption to those who are regulated and the staff, while ensuring that the interests of consumers and citizens are safeguarded.

The Ofcom Bill will allow the essential preparatory work to begin so that the new regulator will be in a position to take on regulatory functions quickly once the regime that is set out in the main communications Bill has been fully discussed and come into force. The Ofcom Bill is straightforward. It establishes Ofcom as a statutory corporation. The new regulator will be a corporate board comprising executive and non-executive members, who will bring a range of knowledge and expertise to the organisation.

Appointment of the chairman and other non-executive members will be made jointly by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The Bill proposes that initially there should be a small board of between three and six members, including the chairman and the chief executive.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): My hon. Friend has set out the procedure for appointing Ofcom. The Select Committee report to which the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) referred proposed a body that is similar to the organisation that the Government are establishing. It stated that all appointments would be subject to "the Nolan procedures". Will my hon. Friend confirm that that will apply to appointments to Ofcom?

Mr. Alexander: I am happy to give my right hon. Friend the assurance that the appointments will conform to public appointments procedures, as he indicated.

The Bill proposes that Ofcom will initially have between three and six members, including the chairman and the chief executive. However, the Bill also provides the Secretary of State with the power to change the size of that board. It is envisaged that that power might be used at a later stage to widen the range of expertise available to the board, once Ofcom takes on its regulatory functions.

The Bill will provide Ofcom with just one function—that of preparing to assume its regulatory functions at a later stage. These preparations will include schemes for the transfer of staff, property and other assets and liabilities from the existing regulators to Ofcom. The schemes themselves, however, will not be made until the main communications Bill has been passed. Regulatory functions will be conferred on Ofcom only when the communications Bill is brought into force after receiving Royal Assent.

This necessary preparatory work can be undertaken successfully only with the full co-operation of the existing regulators. The Bill therefore contains provisions to ensure that Ofcom has a duty to co-operate effectively with the existing regulators during the transitional period. Similarly, the Bill places an additional duty on the existing regulators to do everything necessary for Ofcom to make its preparations.

To avoid regulatory uncertainty during the transitional period, provision is made in the Bill to prevent Ofcom from interfering with the carrying out by any of the existing regulators of their current regulatory functions. It will therefore remain clear during the transition period that the current regulators will continue to carry on with their day-to-day duties until Ofcom assumes its regulatory responsibilities.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): On that point, if one of the existing regulators were to take action that would compromise Ofcom, how would the Government deal with that?

Mr. Alexander: As I have said, there is an expectation that the present regulators will work effectively with the body being constituted by the Bill. We were keen to avoid any regulatory uncertainty, and the present regulators will retain their full regulatory powers to perform their functions until the point, following the passage of the main communications Bill, at which those powers are transferred.

The Bill contains provisions to give Ofcom the power to establish committees, and to govern how they operate. Ofcom will have the flexibility to determine its own internal working arrangements and to establish committees that are advisory in nature, as well as ones that will have decision-making functions delegated to them. Ofcom will be able to appoint members to the committees from outside, to benefit from their particular expertise or from the representation of particular interests.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I draw the Minister's attention to chapter 8, section 6, paragraph 2 of the White Paper, "A New Future for Communications", which states:

> "We will also particularly wish to ensure that OFCOM's work on content issues is organised so that it takes into account a wide variety of interests, including the interests of different parts of the UK, and reaches consensual judgements. Effective mechanisms will be required to satisfy these points."

Will the Minister explain what specific mechanisms are to be created, given that there are no provisions in the Bill to secure direct Scottish or Welsh representation on Ofcom?

Mr. Alexander: I hear the hon. Gentleman's point. The single purpose of the Bill is to equip Ofcom with the means of assuming the powers provided by the communications Bill. The issue of the appropriate relationships between Ofcom and the nations and regions of the United Kingdom would be better dealt with during pre-legislative and legislative scrutiny of the communications Bill, when there will be provision for exactly that kind of discussion to take place.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful for the Minister's generosity in giving way a second time. My question follows on from the point raised by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). It is not so much about regional or national interests as about the interests of the different aspects within Ofcom. I recall from my previous career how radio was very much the poor sector of the old Independent Broadcasting Authority. In my opinion, it was only when the Radio Authority came out of the IBA that commercial radio thrived in this country. How does the Minister envisage the separate committees working in Ofcom to ensure that radio is not sidelined once again by bigger industries such as television and information technology?

Mr. Alexander: The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point, and the Towers Perrin report suggests a cross-cutting structure to address specifically the needs of radio. There is interest in that proposal, although it is merely one based on the work of the existing regulators and consultants to date. I affirm the view that radio should not and will not be regarded by Ofcom as a Friday afternoon job. There is a determination to ensure that all the current regulator's interests are appropriately reflected in the work of the organisation and interesting proposals in the Towers Perrin report speak specifically to the hon. Gentleman's point.

Clause 5 allows the Secretary of State to wind up Ofcom. That, on the face of it, may appear to be a surprising commitment—indeed, the Government do not anticipate the measure being required—but it has been included purely as a safeguard to provide assurance that should any unforeseen circumstances prevent progress in introducing the policies in the main communications Bill, the Government may take the necessary steps to dissolve Ofcom should the need arise. After 2003, the Secretary of State would have a duty to act if no progress were in prospect.

The Bill will give Ofcom the power to establish committees and to govern how they operate. It will have the flexibility to determine its internal working arrangements and to establish committees that are both advisory and have decision-making functions. We expect Ofcom to operate according to the highest standards. Therefore, following debate in another place, we have included a new provision in clause 3 to ensure that Ofcom has regard to the principles of good governance in managing its affairs. We have also included provisions to introduce transparency to Ofcom's proceedings by requiring it to publish the regulations and procedures under which it and its committees will operate.

In summarising the main purpose of the Ofcom Bill, it is important to stress to the House that it will provide Ofcom with a single function—that of preparing itself. Ofcom will have no regulatory functions until Parliament considers precisely what those functions should be when the draft communications Bill is available. Nothing in the Ofcom Bill prejudges Parliament's consideration of those substantive issues.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am sorry to interrupt, but the Minister said that he would refer to the BBC and it seems to me that the time has come. He says that the Bill does not prejudge the communications Bill, but does not its structure prejudge whether the responsibilities of BBC governors will fall under the remit of Ofcom? If they were to do so, the Bill would pave the way for such a possibility, but it clearly does not.

Mr. Alexander: I fear that the hon. Gentleman does not fully comprehend the Bill's purpose in that the

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structure envisaged does not prejudge the relationship between the BBC and Ofcom. Indeed, it is of no structural importance to Ofcom whether it does or does not regulate.

Michael Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It may help you and the Minister if I refer the House to clause 6(1), which specifically states which areas—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. That is a matter for debate, not a point of order.

Mr. Alexander: It is of no structural interest to Ofcom whether it does or does not regulate the BBC, and the Bill deals with the structure of Ofcom in its preparatory stages. On the basis of the White Paper, however, I point out that the BBC will be subject to greater external regulation and its position brought much closer to that of other broadcasters.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I should declare an interest as I am a consultant to Carlton Communications, where I worked for seven years before being elected to this place. Is not the Minister offering us an empty shell of a Bill? He is saying, "I shall not tell you whether Ofcom will regulate the BBC," but people want to know that those who produce content, whether commercial companies or the BBC, will be treated fairly and be regulated and fined by Ofcom if they do wrong. Is not that the point?

Mr. Alexander: We are certainly confident that there will be fairness. The paving Bill strikes the appropriate balance between maintaining momentum behind proposals that have wide—indeed, all-party—support and recognising that serious issues need to be debated. There will be pre-legislative scrutiny and a draft Bill is to be published, so the House will have the opportunity to consider all the proposals in the main communications Bill. That should give the hon. Gentleman comfort.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Minister give way a third time?

Mr. Alexander: I give way one last time.

Michael Fabricant: The Minister is more than generous in giving way for a third time. I had hoped that he would pick up on my point of order, but he chose not to do so. In an attempt to be helpful, may I refer him to clause 6, which interprets the term "existing regulator" under the Bill? [illegible] lists four regulators, and does not include the BBC board of governors. Was not the Minister inadvertently wrong when he said that the issue is not covered by this paving Bill? It is.

Mr. Alexander: I merely make the point that clause 6 reflects the fact that the BBC is not only a regulator, but a broadcaster. The regulators listed in that clause have exclusive regulatory functions. It is common sense to acknowledge the fact that, although the board of governors has responsibilities, the BBC is also a principal public service broadcaster for the whole of the United Kingdom.

There is great scope for the House to discuss these matters.

Mr. Kaufman: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, but I am something of an authority on interpretation clauses. As the kind of Back Bencher such as the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), I have spent hours disrupting parliamentary business on interpretation clauses. My hon. Friend is right to say that the British Broadcasting Corporation is a broadcaster, but its board of governors is, among other things, a regulator.

Mr. Alexander: I recognise the point that my right hon. Friend makes, and I respect his expertise in this area. I merely point out that, as presently drafted, the White Paper recognises the fact that the BBC will fall within the scope of the functions undertaken by Ofcom. Some of the changes to the work of the BBC governors, not least the increase in transparency, is entirely consistent with the work that the Bill has set out for the BBC and other broadcasters.

I shall try to make some progress, because I have been generous in giving way.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Alexander: As I say, I must make some progress.

The Government remain committed to having Ofcom operational by the end of 2003. In order to achieve that, work has already started on the initial planning stages for establishing this new regulator. A steering group has been set up, comprising representatives of the existing regulators and the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

The results of an initial scoping study have recently been published in the Towers Perrin report, which was undertaken by independent consultants. It considers the type of organisation Ofcom could be and how the complex task of transition could be managed. Further work will be necessary to begin to create that new organisation. Once the chairman and other board members are in place, they will need to be able to take speedy decisions on the new structure of staff appointments, human resource policies, the vision, the organisational culture and many other important issues.

The existing regulators, the DCMS and the DTI will continue to work closely together to provide a sound basis for the Ofcom board to consider these issues and to take the key decisions necessary.

The Bill will enable us to start work on establishing Ofcom. That will include beginning the process of making appointments to the Ofcom board. It will be important to ensure that the chairman and other board members are in place, and are able to contribute fully to that process. In making the appointments of the chairman and other non-executive members, we will of course follow the full public appointments procedure. The appointment of the chairman of Ofcom will take place in the spring. Subsequently, we hope to have the full Ofcom board in place by the autumn of this year.

We hope to publish the draft communications Bill in the spring. That will be followed by a full period of consultation on the draft Bill, and pre-legislative scrutiny should Parliament so wish. Thereafter, we will aim to introduce the Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The Office of Communications Bill will allow Ofcom to begin to prepare itself so that it will be in a good position to assume its regulatory functions once Parliament has determined, through consideration of the main communications Bill, precisely what those functions should be.

Mr. Lansley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Alexander: I will not give way this time, as I have already been generous to the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill will allow us to begin the essential work needed to create a modern, forward-looking regulator who is able to operate a flexible, effective and proportionate regime, which is crucial to creating the conditions in which a vigorous communications sector can flourish.

Mr. Lansley: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Alexander: I have already said that I will not give way.

The Bill lets us make a start on this important work, and I commend it to the House.

5.54 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Those of us who came to the House this afternoon with some background residual concerns about the Bill will have had them profoundly deepened by the Minister's speech. I say that not just because of the hon. Gentleman's failure, for whatever reason, to deal with most of the points raised by my hon. Friends, but because the whole debate has emphasised the Alice in Wonderland nature of the proposal.

The Bill takes the preparatory steps to establishing Ofcom. We are told that the chairman of Ofcom will be appointed quite soon, and its members not long thereafter. The functions of Ofcom remain to be debated by the House. The Minister declined to answer points raised by my hon. Friends on the basis that Parliament will have its say. That presumably leaves open the possibility, in theory at least, that, as a result of what Parliament says, the functions will change from what is currently in the Government's mind—although we do not know what that is—to something else. However, it is proposed that members of Ofcom will be appointed before we even know what that body will do. That is an extraordinary sequence of events.

The Bill is jointly sponsored by two Departments. The Government claim that it fulfils a promise made in their election manifesto in 1997 and in the White Paper. However, neither of the Cabinet Ministers responsible for these proposals will be taking part in this debate. Ministers are not usually so coy, and there will be astonishment inside and outside Parliament at their reluctance to speak. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was not present at the start of the debate. Are Ministers' hearts not in the Bill, or are the proposals so complex that they have not been able to master them? *[Interruption.]* Yes, possibly. I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for saying that I have put my finger on it. No doubt that is why the hon. Gentleman has been entrusted with the task of winding up the debate. This is the only substantial Bill in which the DCMS is involved this Session, so it can scarcely be a heavy work load that prevents the Secretary of State from taking part in this debate.

I believe that if a Bill is important a Cabinet Minister should come to the House to explain it. If it is not important, the Government have no business asking Parliament to spend time considering it. Perhaps the silence of Cabinet Ministers is not so hard to fathom given that, on examination, the Bill turns out to be an extraordinarily timid measure. It is a mouse of a Bill. It fails to recognise the scale of changes to the regulatory framework that are required, or the urgency of the need for those changes.

The industries that are affected by the proposals are immensely important to the British economy. The changes that are taking place in those industries are equally great, but the Government are sitting on their hands, unable or unwilling to move with the speed that is required.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I hope that he will not be timid in his answer. Does he support the privatisation of Channel 4 or the BBC?

Mr. Yeo: I shall certainly reflect on the position of Channel 4 and the BBC. I have a completely open mind at this stage: it is early in the Parliament, and we are considering every aspect of policy as part of our policy review. If the hon. Gentleman has views about those matters and would like to write to me setting them out, I would consider them.

It is almost five years since these words appeared in the Labour manifesto:

> "The regulatory framework for media and broadcasting should reflect the realities of a far more open and competitive economy, and enormous technological advance, for example with digital television. Labour will balance sensible rules, fair regulation and national and international competition, so maintaining quality and diversity for the benefit of viewers."

I agree with that.

It is more than a year since we read in the foreword to the White Paper "A New Future for Communications", signed by the two previous Secretaries of State, the right hon. Members for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith):

> "We are committed to reforming the rules which protect media plurality, in the light of the new converging market conditions. . . . We will create a new regulator . . . OFCOM . . . with the expertise and the vision to understand the converging communications landscape and to act according to a clear set of principles."

I agree with most of that as well.

Despite those statements about what the Government intend to do, we are no nearer to the promised land than we were when either of the passages that I have quoted first saw the light of day. Time is passing, the industry is changing, and the Government are doing nothing. The Bill will have no practical effect whatever on regulation.

Until we see the substantive Bill later this year—I was concerned when the Minister said that it would be published "later in the spring", since it means we still have no clear commitment or timetable, and there is a suspicion that the timetable is already slipping—no one who is making decisions about future investment, and no one who is seeking guidance about the Government's intentions on such crucial issues as cross-media ownership or digital switchover, will be any the wiser.

[Mr. Yeo]

We are told that the substantive Bill will be published in draft form, and Ministers in another place conceded through gritted teeth that the draft Bill would be available for scrutiny by a Committee of both Houses—a commitment that the Minister just about repeated today, although there seemed to be a degree of qualification. Following an Opposition intervention, it became plain that the Minister was not at all clear about the form that the scrutiny should take. In the meantime, we must make do with the thin gruel of a paving Bill that does nothing that the substantive Bill could not have done had it been introduced in a timely and efficient way.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend realise that the position is worse than that? While we debate the matter here, advertising revenues are falling—perhaps heralding a bust, as in "boom and bust". Is my hon. Friend aware that City analysts now say that revenues received by ITV—my figures are from Carlton Television—are likely to be 15 per cent. lower this year than they were last year? Last year's, in turn, were down 12 per cent. on the previous year. At the end of the day, what will that make of public service broadcasting?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. I shall say something about ITV in a moment.

The Government have given no sign that they recognise the urgent need to give a clear lead on the issue of digital switchover, an issue in regard to which many in the industry are currently hanging fire. Of the millions of new television sets sold last year, more than 19 out of 20 were analogue. We have no indication of the criteria that the Government expect Ofcom to employ to determine the success of applications to provide radio and television broadcast services. Given the high level of public interest in the issues, it would have been helpful to have some clue about the Minister's thinking—if, indeed, Ministers are thinking about these subjects at all.

The Government's snail-like progress does little to serve the needs of a rapidly evolving industry. The distinctions between television, computers and telephones are quickly disappearing, and the array of information, entertainment and services available to people at home, at work and on the move is increasing at a bewildering rate. Every aspect of the industry, including newspapers and radio as well as television, is affected by the helter-skelter of new technology. The Government give the impression of lumbering breathlessly behind an express train that is disappearing into the distance. They are dithering—which is becoming the defining characteristic of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the switchover from analogue to digital. The Government have already set a time frame. When would the hon. Gentleman like the switchover to take place?

Mr. Yeo: I must correct the hon. Gentleman: the Government have not set a timetable. There is no firm date for the switch-off of analogue television. Not only have the Government not named the date on which analogue will be switched off; they have not even named the date on which they will name the date. The Government are in a state of complete indecision.

I will give my support if the Government give a clear lead for a realistic timetable. What the industry needs is a firm framework in which it can make its own investment decisions, and it can do that only when we have a firm timetable from the Government.

When he winds up the debate for the Opposition, my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) will focus on the DTI aspects of the Bill. I apologise for the fact that I shall have to leave just before the end of the debate, although I hope to hear the bulk of the exchanges before I do so.

The economic importance of the media has increased enormously, and continues to do so. Very few people have accurately forecast either the direction or the pace of change. The speed of technological innovation and the changes in public taste and consumer preferences have left even the best-informed and most sensitive experts sometimes looking very flat-footed. What is beyond doubt, however, is that in this industry Britain has many natural advantages: a proud tradition of high-quality public-service and other broadcasting, a good record of innovation, a large pool of creative and entrepreneurial talent, the English language, and a country in which people from all over the world like to live and work.

I believe that it is the Government's duty to create a legislative framework in which people and businesses can exploit those advantages for the benefit of the British people, in their roles both as consumers and as producers, to enhance their leisure hours and their work opportunities. As it happens, doing that will also benefit people abroad who can enjoy the product that originates here in Britain.

Amid all the confusion and change, another certainty stands out—that this is an industry that will go on being increasingly global in nature. We want it to include players in whose case Britain's influence is prominent. It should do so, but it will not unless the Government get their act together.

Brian White: Is the hon. Gentleman arguing that we should have the equivalent of what is happening in Germany, where Deutsche Telekom has become a national champion? Is that the route down which we should go?

Mr. Yeo: I am arguing that the Government should set out what they are proposing a great deal more clearly than they have, and in a more timely and efficient way. It is very difficult for businesses in this industry to make long-term investment decisions when there is still so much uncertainty about the Government's plans.

Let us consider the other global industry in which Britain has a leading role: the financial services industry. We have done well in that highly competitive market. London has remained one of the world's great financial centres, in large part because of the light regulatory touch and the way in which that has allowed intense competition within the sector. Financial services is now having to live under a super-regulator—the Financial Services Authority is a year or two ahead of Ofcom—but some of the anxieties in that industry about the bureaucracy and the costs of regulation may well apply when we have Ofcom.

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend will know, as should other Members, that light regulation is an essential part of maintaining internationally competitive industries. Does he share a concern of mine about which I had no opportunity to ask the Minister?

In one of its annexes, the Towers Perrin report—considering the scope of Ofcom—said that

"this analysis shows that far more work is likely to start than stop",

meaning that, even in its preparatory stages, Ofcom will be setting up a large number of additional processes, many entailing extra regulatory burdens on industry. Very few will be lost as a consequence of bringing five regulators together.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Exactly the sort of phrase that he has quoted reinforces the anxieties of many in the industry.

I believe that we have reached something of a threshold. We have an opportunity to see Britain and our media industry continue to flourish, but that will occur only if we do not fall into the trap to which my hon. Friend has rightly referred. We must not allow too heavy a hand to be used, and too bureaucratic a burden to be placed on businesses that must be extremely flexible and entrepreneurial.

Opposition Members do not object to Ofcom in principle, but we do want to know a great deal more about how it will work—certainly more than can be learned from even the most minute study of the Bill, whose seven clauses seem to be mostly concerned with matters of administration such as arrangements for the appointment of members.

Given the amount of discretion that the Bill gives the Secretary of State, I wonder why the Government are bothering with a Bill at all. As the Minister himself pointed out, the Bill contains provisions giving the Secretary of State power to overturn those very same provisions. It sets a minimum and a maximum number of members for Ofcom, and then specifically empowers the Secretary of State to increase the number at will.

The Bill does not address quite a number of urgent issues: for example, the rules relating to media and cross-media ownership. Since Parliament last considered primary legislation dealing with broadcasting, huge changes have taken place. Millions of households have access to hundreds of television channels, compared with only three 20 years ago. A similar expansion has taken place in radio.

One consequence of that wider consumer choice is that the special regime imposing onerous restrictions on who can own what in the media industry is no longer needed or justified. The Government's consultation paper published last November was another timid document. It set out the options but gave little lead. The industry should be governed by the same competition rules that apply to other industries. Existing competition laws are a sufficient safeguard against excessive concentration of ownership.

Mr. Kaufman: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the current legislative framework for restricting media ownership is out of date. When the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) introduced the Broadcasting Bill in 1996, I told her that it was out of date even before it was enacted. Is the hon. Gentleman disowning the parts of the 1996 Act that contain the restrictions that he now denounces?

Mr. Yeo: The right hon. Gentleman will be delighted to know that I am certainly not going to defend that legislation. We are here to debate the Office of Communications Bill, which saw the light of day in 2001. With his great expertise on this subject, the right hon. Gentleman would at least acknowledge that the situation today, five and a half years later, is very different. As I say, the proliferation of radio and television channels now available to consumers means that some of the concerns that were properly felt at the time of the 1996 Act no longer apply.

I stress that sweeping away the regime that imposes special ownership restrictions on the industry does not mean that the content of radio and television programmes should suddenly become completely unregulated. Licensing procedures should remain. The authorities should continue to scrutinise content through their codes and duty to promote diversity and choice, but it is disappointing that the Government are moving so slowly on the issue of ownership; the earliest date on which the substantive Bill can receive Royal Assent is the middle of 2003. Given the history of the five years since the commitments to introduce legislation were first made by Labour, there must be a risk that that timetable will slip still further.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): My hon. Friend lists some of the important features that the Bill needs to clarify. I hope that he will look at the role of the BBC and the lack of a level playing field that we uniquely have in Great Britain because of the BBC's role and the fact that it provides services for free that free-marketeer companies have to provide out of their own pockets.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right. I will come to the BBC in a moment, because it is an important omission from the Bill. Before doing so, I shall say a word about ITV. I will shortly publish a very brief Bill to allow at least one relaxation of the present ownership rules so that they would no longer prevent ITV from being owned by a single company. I do not pretend that that change is a magic wand that would solve all the difficulties to which my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) referred, but it would be a common-sense move to give the companies a little more freedom of manoeuvre as they decide how to respond to current market trends.

I invite the Government to support my Bill. If they do not do so, I trust that they will explain why they oppose it. After that Bill, I intend to bring forward further deregulatory proposals to ensure that other parts of the industry enjoy the same freedoms.

The BBC, which quite a number of my hon. Friends have mentioned, is excluded from Ofcom's remit. Nothing that we have heard today and nothing that I found in studying the debates on the Bill in another place, explained why that anomalous position has been proposed. The chance for primary legislation does not arise often. The statutory framework that this Bill and the substantive Bill will create will remain in place long after the current BBC charter expires in 2006. In an increasingly competitive marketplace, it is essential that the BBC, which is a powerful player and which enjoys a uniquely privileged funding base and controls a widely recognised and respected brand name, is treated in the same way as the rest of the industry.

Michael Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that the BBC is arguing that Ofcom will not be a suitable organisation to control the BBC? I quote from a BBC briefing:

> "Ofcom could not be relied upon not to bring outside interests to bear on decisions about the BBC remit which have nothing to do with the public interest in the BBC".

Does he not think that that is the ultimate in sanctimony and is being patronising?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend makes his point powerfully, but there is a further confusion in the Government's mind. They talk about the three tiers of regulation. It appears that, when it comes to the BBC, Ofcom is entrusted with the first two tiers but not the third. It seems that the arguments are completely contradictory. Either Ofcom is suitable to regulate all three tiers or it is not suitable to regulate at all, perhaps for the reasons alleged in the briefing from which my hon. Friend has quoted.

I hope that the omission of the BBC will be rectified during the Bill's passage. If it is not, I hope that Ministers will give a more convincing explanation of why they think that that unlevel playing field should be enshrined in primary legislation for the foreseeable future.

Another serious concern is the power that the Secretary of State will exercise. The Secretary of State has the power to increase at will the size of Ofcom's membership. Given the Prime Minister's fondness for filling every public body in sight with his cronies, there are obvious worries about the scope for abuse that that power entails. A regulator must be independent and seen to be independent of Government. There seems no reason why the maximum size of Ofcom's membership should not realistically be fixed in advance in the Bill. That is one of the amendments that we shall seek to introduce in Committee.

A number of questions arise from the Bill. The seriousness of the Government's intentions is already called into doubt by the extraordinary inclusion of clause 5, which provides for the possibility of a U-turn on the policy. Will the Government confirm that, if the proposal is abandoned, no cost will be borne by the industry? I understand that it is intended that the taxpayer should not bear Ofcom's running costs but that there will be setting-up costs. I should be grateful if the Minister would give us an assurance that if for any reason the proposal did not go ahead, those costs would not fall on the industry.

Can the Secretary of State say a little about the way in which the chairman will be appointed? What criteria will be used to select that person, particularly since the appointment will be made before we have even seen the substantive Bill in draft form? It would be reassuring to know what qualifications the Government will seek for that important post, beyond perhaps the inclusion of someone who is known to be a supporter of the Labour party.

I would like to ask many other detailed questions, but time does not permit. I hope that the Minister will find an opportunity to explain what role Ofcom may have in such matters as deciding the future of the radio points system, in relation to which the Government said in the White Paper they were considering changes.

This is a disappointing Bill but the Opposition do not wish to do anything to delay progress towards a substantive measure. For that reason, we will not vote against it this evening.

6.19 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness on the crisp and clear way in which he introduced what is a necessary paving Bill towards the major communications Bill that we are looking forward to later this year. He introduced the Bill in the best possible way; that was somewhat of a contrast with the mini-tirade in which the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), indulged. He reminded me very much of my own performances on that Front Bench when we were in opposition.

The hon. Gentleman's situation was summed up by Abba Eban, the former Israeli Foreign Minister, when his party was thrown out after many years in office. He was asked what was the difference between being in government and not being in government any more. Mr. Eban said that when someone is in government, they get up in the morning saying, "What shall I do today?" In opposition, they get up and say, "What shall I say today?" Unfortunately, that is the quandary in which the shadow spokesman is placed today. Since I went through it for 18 years, I sympathise with him. He will have rather more than 18 years to get used to it.

Mr. Yeo: The right hon. Gentleman may have heard me say that I will be introducing a Bill to relax the ownership restrictions. That is something that we are doing that the Government are not doing. Will the right hon. Gentleman support that Bill?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall read it with great care. If it contains provisions with which I agree, I shall certainly support it. As the hon. Gentleman said to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell), if he cares to write to me about it, I will write back to him.

As the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) pointed out, the Bill comes forward as a consequence of a recommendation made in a report by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport just under four years ago. That is quite fast in terms of a Government considering a Committee's recommendations. The Bill is important because it creates a framework for one of the most important industries that this country has.

The Department is a sponsor of the most important private sector industry in this country; namely tourism. It is a co-sponsor of the most important technological and manufacturing industry in this country; namely the converged industry of telephones, television and computers that we are looking at today. The more we consider those matters, the more we see that the convergence that the Select Committee looked forward to is, day by day, becoming a more discernible fact.

I regret that, so far, the Prime Minister has not followed up another recommendation that the Select Committee has twice made; namely that an industry of such great importance should have a single Government Department sponsoring it. We have two extremely able and efficient Ministers on the Front Bench tonight, but they come from two different Departments. It is difficult to co-ordinate adequately how the Government should approach such a major industry as this when two Departments themselves must co-ordinate.

The Select Committee report of 1998 recommended a separate Department of Communications—with its own Secretary of State—to assume the broadcasting and media responsibilities of the DCMS, the telecommunications and internet responsibilities of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Cabinet Office's responsibilities for electronic delivery of Government services. I believe that that is the best way forward. Both of my hon. Friends on the Front Bench would make admirable Secretaries of State in such a Department; therefore, I have a feeling that neither will dissent from my proposal.

This is a small Bill, but it has huge implications. I welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister said about the method by which the appointments will take place. I very much hope that as the Government consider who should be appointed to take charge of Ofcom, they will dispense with their list of the usual suspects; the great and the good whom both parties have consistently had on their lists year after year. With the Bill, we are beginning to turn over a new page in one of the most important developments that this country will see in the 21st century.

I very much hope that we get somebody who is not only knowledgeable about the industry, but has a dynamic and forward-looking view about where the industry should go. I very much hope that this office will not be added to the multifarious responsibilities of Lord Birt, who has so much to do now that he could not possibly fit in that particular responsibility.

In looking at those who will serve on Ofcom, and at its much wider remit, which the Government may propose in the major and substantive Bill, I hope that the Government will, as has been said earlier, look carefully at the regional dimension. The Independent Television Commission disappointed a great many people—

Mr. Allan *indicated assent.*

Mr. Kaufman: I see that the hon. Gentleman agrees. A great expert from Sheffield was in correspondence with us about the way in which the ITC was closing down regional representation and regional libraries. I very much hope that when Ofcom is set up, the Government will make clear that there is a requirement to have a regional dimension—if necessary, they should include that requirement in the major legislation.

We are in a curious position at the moment. The hon. Member for Lichfield referred to the decline of ITV. There has been a massive burgeoning of communications, but the main way of watching television—certainly until analogue is switched off—is through terrestrial stations. Whatever the ownership regulations for ITV may be—whether it continues as it is, or whether a single owner of ITV is allowed—I very much hope that the requirement on ITV to maintain regional companies will remain.

Even if the regulations removing the right to have a single owner of ITV are brought forward—I believe that there is a strong argument for that—that should not mean that there is one ITV company. There should be holding companies for those regional companies. As long as we have the present structure, it is important that the regional aspect be maintained.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): My right hon. Friend made an important point about regional broadcasting. Is he disappointed that ITV2 is not ITV regional? Through digital, we could have had 11 separate regional television stations and created huge hubs and digital centres for the whole of Britain.

Mr. Kaufman: One of my disappointments with ITV is that it has thought so little about its own future. Give or take one tenth of a percentage point, ITV is still the most-watched channel. The latest figures, over which there was argument a couple of weeks ago, show that it is pretty much neck and neck with BBC1.

It is disappointing that a company that has the ability to be dynamic and has a public service remit mixed with a commercial incentive should have been so unimaginative. There is a dullness and complacency about ITV that will limit its future as a viable company.

Michael Fabricant: I note that the May 1998 report stated:

> "We note with a certain degree of scepticism that commercial terrestrial broadcasters remain optimistic about their prospects."

That concern has sadly proved to be well founded.

Despite his remarks about ITV's public service remit, will the right hon. Gentleman pay at least some tribute to regional ITV news? Does he agree that both Yorkshire Television in his region and Carlton in mine have been able to present news on a more local basis than ever before thanks to electronic news gathering, and that they are fulfilling their remit in that respect?

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman has got it mildly wrong, as the regional news in my constituency is provided by Granada, although Granada used to own what is now Yorkshire Television. In those days, Granada provided a very good service, but I now find its general service somewhat disappointing. I was discussing with someone only today the really great days of Sidney Bernstein and David Plowright, which produced "The Jewel in the Crown" and "Coronation Street" and made Granada one of the most exciting and innovative television companies. Those days are gone. I strongly believe that we need regional news, but with digital television we can localise even further.

The Select Committee is to begin an inquiry into the major Bill later this month. I am interested in the nature of what is or is not to be regulated. As long as we can regulate terrestrial TV, we should do so, but we should understand the limitations of regulating converged visual communications. Once the internet takes over even more than it has done so far, the ability to regulate visual communications will be severely limited, and it would be foolish to foist on Ofcom functions and duties that it is physically incapable of fulfilling. I hope that the new Bill will be sensible in that respect.

I was surprised that the hon. Member for South Suffolk did not say more about the future of the BBC and Ofcom's role in regulating it. The Government need to think extremely carefully about that and take a much wider perspective. It is interesting that, a few weeks ago, in a letter to *The Times* in reply to an article about the need for Ofcom to regulate the BBC, Gavyn Davies said:

> "the BBC will be 'under Ofcom' where it is appropriate that it should be so. Clearly, a level playing field should exist on economic regulation and on content regulation for basic standards and quotas. In these areas, the BBC will and should be subject to Ofcom control."

[Mr. Kaufman]

That is news to me, and it may be news to Ministers, too. Perhaps they should urge Mr. Davies to read the legislation a little more carefully. I hope that it is not a signal of the approach that he intends to take.

Gavyn Davies went on to say:

> "No other broadcaster pursues public service as its sole objective, so a level playing field would be inappropriate."

He is wrong on that, too. Whatever one thinks of the quality of programmes on ITV, it has a specific public service remit on which the award of the licences is conditional, and Channel 4 has a statutory public service remit of a kind that no other broadcaster has, including the BBC. Quality on Channel 4 fluctuates, as quality on almost anything will, but I believe that it fulfils its remit admirably and is in many ways the best of the terrestrial channels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde asked the hon. Member for South Suffolk about his views on the privatisation of Channel 4 and of the BBC. I believe that it would be outrageous to privatise Channel 4, because I cannot conceive of any private owner being willing to go along with its statutory remit, which I think is very precious.

My views on the privatisation of the BBC may be known to some hon. Members, but I will not state them here, as I do not want to offend my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde even in his absence. I hope, however, that when the Government produce the major Bill, they will accept that it is an utter anomaly for the BBC not to be regulated by Ofcom. The governance of the BBC is wildly out of date. The BBC was formed 80 years ago as the sole broadcaster of what was then only sound broadcasting. It was a company, then a corporation, of a unique nature, doing a unique thing. That is no longer the situation.

The BBC is now one of the most important broadcasting organisations in the world, and it is no longer appropriate for it to be run by a group of amateurs with very few qualifications in the world of broadcasting who give the chairman and the director-general their head because they have inadequate knowledge to control them.

I know that Sir Christopher Bland was enraged when I raised this in the Chamber before, but one need only look at what happened when the BBC launched its programme to publicise and promote Camelot's scratch cards. That the board of governors was willing to go ahead with turning the BBC into a branch of commercial advertising was deplorable. After I had been subject to the usual abuse, the governors then did exactly what I told them they should do. Ministers, too, may abuse me as much as they like, if they only go on to do what I recommend.

The BBC board of governors is a total anomaly. It is utterly out of date and should be got rid of and replaced with a board of directors with an executive chairman and a chief executive. My beloved friend Mr. Dyke should be the chief executive and no longer the director-general. Part of the rethink when the major Bill is introduced should be that the BBC should be subject to Ofcom in every particular that every other broadcaster is. It is about time the BBC stopped repeating the exordium that it is special, great and noble. It gets £2.5 billion of public money that many members of the public would not want to pay if they were not forced to do so. It is about time it was accountable in exactly the same way as every other broadcaster in the country.

Mr. Lansley: In an earlier intervention on the Minister, the right hon. Gentleman correctly said that the BBC governors have a regulatory responsibility. The answer that the Minister should have given him is that there is no need for additional statutory change for the board of governors of the BBC to assist Ofcom in the transfer of responsibilities to that body, if the Government and Parliament should provide for that. The issue is whether the BBC will be prepared to co-operate with Ofcom under the Bill to prepare for such a transfer. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that discussions should have taken place to ensure that the BBC is compliant in talking to Ofcom and preparing for the transfer of responsibilities?

Mr. Kaufman: That is why I should like to see in Committee an amendment to clause 6, which the hon. Member for Lichfield mentioned, to include the BBC board of governors. It is irritating that the BBC is always ready to take the money but is not always willing then to conform to public policy. That was demonstrated when Sir Christopher Bland was asked about something that my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)—then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—had said. Sir Christopher said that the Secretary of State was just another licence payer. I hesitate to say so because I had a lovely Christmas card from Sir Christopher, but that is the sort of arrogance to which BBC chairmen are only too prone.

When I ask for the BBC to be included within the remit of Ofcom, I am not simply pursuing what people seem to regard—most inexplicably—as a vendetta that I conduct against the BBC. The National Consumer Council submitted evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee last year in which it said:

> "We are disappointed that the White Paper does not present an over-arching framework . . . including the BBC . . . It is illogical."

I received today a document from the Consumers Association that says that the BBC should be included in the remit of the Bill and of Ofcom. I am sure that my hon. Friends have seen a copy of that document, but if they have not I will gladly send them one.

It is time that the Government tackled the problem, because they will have to do so soon anyway. Before the end of this Parliament, the Government and the Committee will have to consider whether there should be another BBC charter, because it expires on 30 June 2006. The period of the present charter has more than half gone. In my view, the days for a charter are gone, whether the BBC continues in its present form or not, and it should be governed by statute. Whatever view the Government reach, they will have to consider the BBC's future definitively before the end of this Parliament. I hope that the Government will take into account the views of the Select Committee.

The members of the Committee and I feel a certain amount of exuberance that the Bill has been introduced as a consequence of a recommendation that we made. We look forward to the major Bill and we hope that the Government will be able to provide us with legislation that will move forward this country's technology, employment, profitability and exports during the 21st century.

6.44 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I broadly welcome the Bill, which is uncontroversial in many respects. It is a paving Bill and we support it with many of the same qualifications outlined by the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). For instance, I question the speed with which the Government are approaching the issue. We had a slight advantage over the Minister in that we were reading his speech in advance. I do not know whether he knew—or whether his officials had told him—that he was reading verbatim large extracts from Baroness Blackstone's speech in the House of Lords, even including at one point a split infinitive. However, there was one revealing absence in the Minister's speech compared with Baroness Blackstone's version. The sentence omitted said:

> "The Government remain committed to the target of having Ofcom operational by the end of 2003."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 1849, c. 353.]

Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us as to whether that omission represents a policy statement.

We have apprehensions about the pace of reform and the Government's commitment to the legislation. It has been said several times already that we are not dealing with the substance of the main Bill; we are considering the harness rather than the horse. However, in order to talk sensibly about the harness one needs to talk a little about the horse.

Since I entered the House in 1997 I have been involved in the establishment of two major regulators—the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England and the Financial Services Authority. In both cases, but especially that of the MPC—which I regard as a great success story—the shape, structure, governance and accountability of the bodies were heavily influenced by the clarity of the objectives. Those objectives must be discussed alongside the structure, otherwise the structure will make no sense. That is why we attached some importance to Baroness Blackstone's remarks in the other place that the Government would this spring establish a Joint Committee to review the main Bill. I hope that we shall hear more from the Government about how that Joint Committee will work.

I participated in the Joint Committee on the FSA Bill, which was a great success and a big step forward for parliamentary accountability. The Joint Committee undertook a deep examination of the Bill and managed to avoid many of the pitfalls that the Government might otherwise have encountered. We would welcome some explanation of how the process will work and an assurance that it will cover the wide range of expertise that the two Houses contain.

An obvious point, but one that is often overlooked, is the fact that although we may talk enthusiastically about regulation, it is only a small part of what happens in the industry. For example, we had a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions earlier about the state of the railways. However, the establishment of a Rail Regulator has done nothing for long-term strategic investment in the railway system. The same is true in telecommunications and the media. We have a splendid example in this country, because Britain pioneered independent regulation of telecommunications through Oftel. However, a decade and a half later, we have largely failed in that area. The European Commissioner, Mr. Liikanen, who is responsible for implementing the Lisbon summit recommendations on telecommunications, reckons that Britain has relegated itself from the premier league of European telecoms regulations to the relegation zone of the second division, and I am sure that many people in the industry here would agree.

Oftel singularly failed to grasp sufficiently early the problems associated with the need for unmetered access, local loop deregulation and so on. The whole process of the evolution of broadband access was severely retarded because Oftel did not perform its functions satisfactorily. Changing Oftel's nature and placing it within the new regulator will not solve such problems. Regulation creates a structure, but it does not solve the technical problems associated with the industry.

The essential argument is whether we should have an integrated regulator. The two arguments that have been put forward are basically sound. The first is that the nature of the technology is changing rapidly in the direction of convergence. That is apparent through the mergers that have taken place. The AOL-Time Warner merger was a classic example of how the industry is developing. We should not get too carried away, because the share price of Time Warner has fallen by 33 per cent. since the original decision, which is more than the rest of the media industry, so that merger might have taken place ahead of the game. BT has announced its intention of moving into the media business, and Bill Gates has expressed his wish to use his technology and proprietary ideas in the media business. Clearly, we have an integrated business and an integrated technology, and the regulator must reflect that.

The other reason for bringing the two things together is that although it is neat in theory to put economic regulation on one side and content regulation on the other, they have major implications for each other. The classic example is that changes in sporting rights or sporting programming have major implications for the advertising revenue of the channel concerned and its competitors. Content has major implications for the economics of regulation.

Conversely, an issue of particular concern to Liberal Democrats is regional programming, particularly regional news. That issue, which is looming up, arises from the switch from analogue to digital. It was hinted at in the contribution of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The phase-out of analogue television will mean that the price of analogue will rise, making it uneconomic for independent television companies to provide regional television news. We see that happening in the decline of regional programming. That is the kind of issue with which the new regulator is designed to grapple. However, it cannot do so if each of the regulators continues to live under the same roof but they do not co-operate. Working together is an essential challenge, but there is nothing in the structure to predetermine that.

As our job is to be critical, we must spell out some of the dangers of a mega-regulator. By being aware of the dangers, we can perhaps head them off. The regulator could become overly preoccupied with the concerns of the big interests, while some of the smaller, specialised concerns get overlooked. A classic example is radio, which is enormously popular. It has changed a great deal since I was a kid; as we did not have television in the home, the family used to gather round to listen to

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

"Journey into Space", "Family Favourites" and the like. Many of us who spend a lot of time on the road spend more time listening to radio channels—Classic FM, in my case—than looking at television output.

Radio is important; it has special problems, but as the smallest and most specialised of the regulators in Ofcom, there is a danger that it will not be represented on the board and its special concerns will not be taken into account. Indeed, the submission on the Bill shows that the radio industry in particular felt that it had not been properly consulted. That is one danger.

Another danger is that in practice the Government will not respect the regulator's independence. That may not matter with a small regulator, but if one bonds together all the different regulators and the body's political independence is compromised, the consequences will be serious. That is why the Bill should contain an independent mechanism for the appointment of the chairman and the board members.

I commend to Ministers the experience of the Bank of England. I sat on the Select Committee on the Treasury when the Monetary Policy Committee was being set up. There is an excellent mechanism whereby the chairman and the Chancellor's individual nominees are grilled, and painfully so. If they fail the test they either stand down or are reprimanded. There is real parliamentary accountability and independence in the choice of the members of the board. I hope that when designing the structure, some of those lessons will be learned and applied to this aspect of the Bill.

Mr. Wyatt: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that each member of the board of directors should hold a specific remit—one for radio, one for broadband and one for the internet, for example? If so, I think that that is quite a good idea.

Dr. Cable: I was not recommending that specifically. The structure does not have to be so formalised and compartmentalised. One is looking for expertise on the board and for people who represent different interests. I would not want to prescribe a specialist for each area. I was simply trying to establish that Parliament can give critical reviews to major appointments—in other words, board members—to safeguard the organisation's independence.

On the related issue of parliamentary accountability, I hope that the Minister will indicate how he intends Ofcom to be accountable to Parliament. Perhaps it might be useful to specify in the Bill exactly how that would occur. At present, there is the occasional requirement to report to the Public Accounts Committee—often a rather narrow and technical form of accountability—and occasionally to the relevant Select Committee. However, perhaps this should be spelled out and we should specify annual debates. The whole area of parliamentary accountability is vague, and this needs to be made clear.

We get into difficulties once we separate discussions on structure and discussions on the Bill's principles and purposes. What is the purpose of regulation? What are we trying to achieve by it? The answer is not self-evident. The Government's objectives, as set out in their preparatory paper, were to strike a balance between the interests of the industry, which are effectively unfettered commercial activity, and the protection of the consumers. However, consumer protection is very complex, as opposed to the protection in the financial services area. We are talking about quality, regional balance and access for old and disabled people. Defining those factors will be difficult.

The liberal and economic view would be to argue that the nature of the technology makes regulation less necessary, because one is creating choice through digital technology and in other ways. There is a vast cornucopia of choice; people can pick and choose. That suggests the advantage of light regulation, but it needs to be backed up by regulation of a different kind. I want to make the case for that, because the real need for proper and effective regulation is often overlooked.

There is no reason to assume that the industries that will emerge in this new business will be competitive. The nature of many multi-media and telecommunications activities is to generate monopoly. They generate economies of scale. A major concern about the growth of new media communications is what people in the industry call the secret garden problem. Major providers in the satellite communications business and elsewhere create directories which will, in turn, direct viewers to content. The providers will effectively have monopoly control over who sees what through their ownership of the media system. That is a hypothetical concern at present; none the less, it underlines the problem that in this industry there may be a natural tendency to monopolise. That is already the case with software systems and standards. Therefore, we need clarification about how monopoly and breaches of competition will be dealt with. The Bill does not make clear the link between Ofcom and the Office of Fair Trading. Which organisation will take the lead in investigating a serious breach of competition?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): That is not in the Bill because this is a paving Bill to set up Ofcom. However, I understand and share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about competition. I give him an undertaking that the issue of concurrency, which is at the heart of this matter as far as the Office of Fair Trading and Ofcom are concerned, will be addressed in the main communications Bill, which will be published in the spring.

Dr. Cable: I thank the Minister for his helpful intervention, which demonstrates his awareness of and concern about the problem. I hope that he will bear in mind the complex problem in the media and telecommunications business of ensuring that monopolies and mergers are regulated appropriately at both a European and national level.

The second issue relates to content. As I have said, there is a wide variety of concerns about quality, regional balance, unacceptable material and so on. I should have thought that one of the board's purposes was to capture some of these various public concerns about broadcasting. That is why I do not fully understand why the number of three to six has been chosen. What was the Government's rationale for that? Why is it so restrictive? Does it encompass the range of representations that will have to be made, particularly on content? It seems unnecessarily rigid, and it would be useful to have an explanation of the reasoning behind it.

Finally, and linked to that point, there is the debate that has been going on during our proceedings about the role of the BBC. There is certainly a debate to be had. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton made several particularly valid points. The BBC's normal programming—quite apart from its specialist commercial activities—has major knock-on effects on the commercial competitors. The BBC is part of the industry; it cannot be considered separately. At the same time, it has a separate remit with a host of social obligations.

The Liberal Democrats certainly believe in public service broadcasting, but getting the balance right will not be easy. We are debating not whether the BBC should be in or out of Ofcom, but how far in or out it should be. At this stage, however, we do not want to prejudge that issue. That is why we argue against including it in the Bill at present—it should be part of subsequent debates.

To summarise, we broadly support the Bill. We regard it as a step forward. It is a useful paving measure. We shall table amendments to strengthen accountability and to ensure the independence of the regulators from day-to-day political interference. With those qualifications, the Government can count on our support.

7.1 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I draw the attention of the House to the declaration of interests in the register in relation to both Disney and Classic FM.

It is sensible to change, simplify and modernise the regulatory structure in the light of changing and fast moving circumstances. We live in a world in which the fields of communications as a whole—encompassing both broadcasting in the traditional sense and the development of internet communication, telephony and telecommunications—are merging, converging, changing, developing and improving at a very fast rate. It makes complete sense that Parliament and the Government should examine the regulatory structures that apply to those various fields and try to bring the structures up to date.

It makes sense to rationalise them by creating one regulatory body. Given that there is such a fast-converging set of fields, it no longer makes sense to regulate something called telecommunications separately from something called broadcasting. Bringing the existing five regulators together in one body—Ofcom—as the Bill presages is the sensible thing to do.

It is also sensible to make preparations early, so a paving Bill that will enable some of the changes to be introduced as rapidly as possible is also a wise approach. I certainly hope that we shall soon see the detail of the main communications Bill so that we have a clearer idea of exactly what Ofcom is going to do and precisely what its powers will be.

The existing five regulators have been working together extremely well since the publication of the White Paper a year ago—as they had been doing even before that. Their willingness to participate readily in the development of Ofcom is a real tribute to their experience and expertise.

At the heart of what we are doing lies the acknowledgement that some special regulation is required for this range of industries. Broadcasting in particular is not like a material good for sale on a supermarket shelf. The media industries are special in that they rely on a limited range of means of communication with the public. They are part of the very fabric of our democracy. They form part of the means whereby the citizen gains information as well as entertainment.

As a result, it is important that there are some special rules for the media. Simply to rely on competition policy—however strong and fierce it may now be—~~is not~~ sufficient. However, it is right for the Government to want to employ that special regulation with a lighter touch than may have been the case in the past. When spectrum was scarce and there was a limited number of means of communication with the public, there was a clear role for very strict regulation. Nowadays, with the development of satellite and cable, the opening up—we hope—of broad band and the development of a more efficient use of even analogue spectrum, there is a much broader range of opportunities to reach the public and communicate with them, so it follows that it is right to go for a lighter touch as regards regulation. I very much hope that that is the way in which Ofcom will develop.

When we are enacting that new legislation we need to ensure that the structures will be flexible. In the past, there has always been a tendency for broadcasting legislation in particular to be catching up with the past rather than preparing for the possibilities of the future. I trust that the full communications Bill will be a mechanism that can itself adapt as technology and the marketplace change and as competition delivers new ways of serving the public. I hope that the mechanisms to be set up can be adapted with relative ease and with speed as the world around us changes.

I hope that Ofcom will be a small and tightly focused body. In many ways, the Government are right to consider that a board of six people will be about the right size. It is important that Ofcom is not an unwieldy bureaucracy; it should also be fleet of foot. I hope that the Government will resist calls, which will be made eloquently in all quarters, for different interests to be represented on the Ofcom board. The board must be focused specifically on its remit from Parliament; it should not be a gathering together of a multitude of interests representing different parts of the country or particular types of communication.

The board must be small and focused, but it must also be given the specific duty of ensuring that it consults deeply with every part of the country and of the industries that it regulates. The organisation should be flexible and nothing like as rigid in its operation as some of the present structures.

I offer the House a small example. At present, there are strict rules—in many ways they are sensible—to deal with the dangers of the promotion of products and the undue prominence that particular commercial products can be given in television programmes. However, a broadcaster cannot go to the Independent Television Commission and say, "We are thinking of making a programme in which there will be a particular product placement. What are the rules about whether we can do that?"

The ITC cannot give prior advice to the broadcaster. All it can say is, "There are the rules; you put the programme out; and we will then decide whether to fine you." That inability to have a prior discussion seems to be daft. Surely it would be sensible to ensure that Ofcom can act flexibly and rationally, so that broadcasters can discuss with it exactly how a certain set of rules will apply to any programme or set of programmes. That would give broadcasters greater certainty and ensure that they could

[Mr. Chris Smith]

take more creative risks because they would not be frightened of offending the ITC without knowing whether they would actually do so.

Much has been made in the debate so far about Ofcom's role in relation to the BBC. That is a crucial issue. The BBC is our largest broadcaster and, in many ways, the most important cultural institution in this country. It is therefore important that the BBC fulfils the remit that Parliament has placed on it not only effectively, but fairly. It is worth reminding ourselves that a very substantial role is envisaged in the White Paper for Ofcom in relation to many of the BBC's functions.

In the first and second tiers of regulation envisaged in the White Paper, Ofcom's role is very clear and, with one exception, there is more or less a level playing field between the BBC and the other public service broadcasters. The important difference in the White Paper relates to tier 3—the tier where the broad public service responsibilities of the public service broadcasters are carried forward.

It is envisaged in the White Paper that all the broadcasters will effectively operate on a self-regulatory basis; that at the start of a year, they will issue of set of commitments and a promise of performance about how they intend to fulfil their obligations. That will be monitored towards the end of the year, and Ofcom will have a backstop power to intervene if it believes that the broadcaster is failing to fulfil the obligations placed on it. That self-regulation, coupled with Ofcom's backstop power, seems to be a sensible approach; it will lighten the burden on the broadcasters, but it will keep the public interest firmly in place, if necessary. In the White Paper, Ofcom's backstop power does not apply to the BBC.

The backstop power envisaged in the White Paper lies in the hands of the Secretary of State. As the White Paper states, the Secretary of State is responsible for approving new services and for approving, or withholding approval, changes in services provided by the BBC. That is why my right hon. and hon. Friends have rightly identified, for example, the need to review News 24 in the near future to determine whether it is fulfilling the obligations that were placed on it when initial approval was given for it to go ahead. At the moment, that role lies with the Secretary of State.

I put it to my right hon. and hon. Friends that it is worth considering whether it might be better for that backstop power to rest with Ofcom, rather than with the Secretary of State, to achieve a more level playing field between the different broadcasters. I say that not only because it could create a more even-handed approach between the different broadcasters, but because it might be beneficial for the BBC; it would remove the possibility a political judgment being made in relation to the BBC's services and put it in the independent regulator's hands. I say that in the knowledge that I was largely responsible for writing the White Paper, but I have had the opportunity to reflect further on those matters since then, and I believe that that would make a substantial difference to the BBC's interests.

[illegible] Harvey (North Devon): Is the right hon. Gentleman arguing that Ofcom should therefore have the sole right of approval for new BBC services and that the Secretary of State should not have that right; or is he talking only about that general backstop power?

Mr. Smith: I'm talking about the general backstop power, but I accept that the point that the hon. Gentleman makes represents a logical extension of my argument and that it may well be sensible to consider putting the power to approve or disapprove new services in Ofcom's hands as well. There should be clear parliamentary accountability, and Ofcom should be answerable, through the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport and the reports that Ofcom makes to Parliament, for the decisions that it takes, but there is an argument for saying that that route should be considered.

None of this removes from the BBC's board of governors the responsibility for the day-to-day control over how the BBC fulfils its public service remit. Of course, as with Channel 4's board and the independent boards of the ITV companies, the board of governors will have a role to carry on the basic functions of ensuring that the BBC is run effectively and in accordance with its remit.

Dr. Howells: I obviously place great store by what my right hon. Friend says, but, on a point of clarity, he is not agreeing with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that the present regulatory structure, which allows the BBC's board some independence that no one else enjoys, should continue. He is saying that that should continue, but that small changes should take place.

Mr. Smith: In fact, I am saying that the independence that the White Paper seeks to create for the ITV companies and Channel 4 would enable them to be largely self-regulatory, which the BBC is at the moment, and that Ofcom's reserve backstop power should apply to the BBC, as it will to the other broadcasters. While the other broadcasters are moving towards greater freedom under these proposals, the BBC should swap the Secretary of State's ultimate responsibility for that of Ofcom. That could provide a sensible way forward in the interests of the BBC itself, as well as in those of the whole broadcasting landscape. I say that because I believe passionately in the importance of public service broadcasting.

Michael Fabricant: In addition to believing in public service broadcasting, does the right hon. Gentleman believe in public perception? Does he agree that the current public perception in some quarters is that the BBC is its own judge and jury and that, if Ofcom were to be the backstop, it would be seen as an impartial, third party judge and jury for the BBC?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is partly right in that the board of governors acts jointly as a regulator and, ultimately, as a manager. However, the ultimate judge in relation to the BBC is, at present, the Secretary of State. I suggest that that judge should be Ofcom rather than the Secretary of State.

The importance of public service broadcasting should not be underestimated. I was deeply concerned by the answer that the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and

Hyde (James Purnell) who asked about the future of the BBC and Channel 4. Both the BBC and Channel 4 are public assets, must remain public assets and must remain publicly owned. Even to be considering, as the hon. Gentleman appears to be, the prospect of privatisation of not just one but both fills me with deep dismay.

The role of public service broadcasting is to do the things that the commercial sector either cannot or will not do. It is also to ensure that there is regional strength to what the major broadcasters do in terms of the origin of their programmes, the focus of news and the way in which the regions are brought to the attention of the country as a whole. However, perhaps most important, public service broadcasters are there to act as a benchmark of quality against which the whole of the broadcasting environment must be judged. The role of ensuring that the rest of broadcasting is kept honest and of high quality is one to which the BBC, Channel 4 and ITV, in their public service responsibilities, must hold fast.

I hope that Ofcom, as it takes shapes under the proposals in the main Bill, will, first, have a duty to promote commercial competition coupled with the duty to preserve and enhance public service broadcasting. Secondly, I hope that it will have a duty of fairness between and to the broadcasters. Thirdly, I hope that it will have a duty to promote a broad band future for this country. I stress that point strongly because I am extremely worried that Britain, which was apparently set fair three or four years ago to be in the lead of the broad band environment in the future, is in danger of slipping behind. A sound and exciting future for broad band will happen only if the infrastructure providers and the owners of the infrastructure systems talk with, work with, share with and enter into ventures with the content providers.

In broad band, as in broadcasting generally, the synergy between economic infrastructure and rich and varied content is the secret of success. One has to make sure that the two go hand in hand. Having the ability to deliver new ways of absorbing information and entertainment across telephone wires or any other means of communication into the household is no good unless one simultaneously thinks about how one ensures that rich and varied material can be conveyed.

Ofcom's aim is fundamentally to provide a framework in which both infrastructure and content are brought together and are considered in the same environment and with the same set of aims and objectives. That is partly why it will be such an essential feature of the new regulatory environment that we must seek to create. The bringing together of infrastructure and content is part and parcel of what Ofcom is all about. That is important for the world of broadcasting and telecommunications and for the broad band future that we all want to occur.

Because of that and because the Bill takes us the first tiny step along the road towards bringing infrastructure and content firmly together in the same environment, I wish the Bill well. I also wish the Government well in taking it forward.

7.25 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) saw a blinding flash on the road to Damascus or merely on the road from Trafalgar square or to Disneyworld, but—whatever the reason—I agree with much of what he said. In particular, I agree with him about the BBC, about the need for broad band, and on many other aspects of the issue.

It is unattractive to say, "I told you so," but, as I said in interventions previously, the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport told the House so in May 1998 when it recommended that a single body should be responsible for regulation. It said:

> "We recommend the absorption of all current regulatory bodies into one Communications Regulation Commission".

We now know that that will be Ofcom. Interestingly enough, the report went on to say that there should be oversight of all broadcasters, including the BBC. That is what the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and the chairman of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), have called for too.

I disagree with the remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton about the possible privatisation of the BBC. Apart from anything else, that would be wholly impractical at a time when net advertising receipts to ITV, Channel 4 and the independent sector in general are falling. God only knows where one would find an extra £2.5 billion—the BBC's current receipts from the licence fee—from advertising.

There is no question but that an organisation such as Ofcom must come into being. We have recently heard much about convergence—about the need for broad band and about convergence between the television set and the computer. Let me give two simple examples of how that exists at present. I often listen in my office in the House to KING, a classical music radio station in Seattle that is broadcast on the internet. Similarly, I sometimes go to York in Maine and I am able to watch the BBC 10 o'clock news on my computer there. The news is sent on the web via Real Networks, and, as a friend of mine, who is the vice-president of Real Networks, would say, the picture is rather "herky-jerky"—that is the expression he uses—at the moment. With the introduction of broad band, however, we shall undoubtedly be able to watch programming from anywhere in the world with quality as good as we can watch from the United Kingdom already.

I welcome the creation of Ofcom, as do my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench. However, I pointed out in an intervention on the Minister that I am a little concerned that radio will be overshadowed. The hon. Gentleman gave me some assurance that it will not be, and I have no interest to declare other than my interest in the subject. I used to work in radio broadcasting and, as I told the hon. Gentleman, I am only too aware of how it was overshadowed by television in the old Independent Broadcasting Authority. That is why radio was separated from television and the Radio Authority and the Independent Television Commission were founded. Some might say that it is a retrograde step to combine them again. I do not think that it is. Provided that the structures are in place to ensure that radio and other organisations which will be controlled by the new Ofcom are not overshadowed, there needs to be one regulatory organisation. There are clear interests that need to be maintained.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Fabricant: I have great pleasure in giving way to the hon. Gentleman, who also serves on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

Mr. Bryant: Is the hon. Gentleman convinced by the Towers Perrin report, which recommends—I am not precisely sure what it means by this—a horizontal radio group within the new Ofcom? Will that be sufficient to meet the needs that he mentions?

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman does not understand exactly what is meant in the report. I suspect that it is referring to the structure that was foreshadowed in the Select Committee report, which said that sub-committees within Ofcom should have definite and different responsibilities for the various areas that it covers. If that is what it means, it is a step in the right direction and one that is necessary to ensure that those interests are well looked after by Ofcom.

The Bill is, of course, a paving Bill only, as the Minister explained. It has been introduced so that people are appointed for when the communications Bill itself goes through Parliament, if indeed it does. Presumably, the communications Bill will be announced in the next Queen's Speech.

I have one or two concerns about the Bill. Clause 1(3)(a) says, innocently enough, that the Secretary of State will appoint the chairman. The current Secretary of State appointed the chairman of the BBC. I said to the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that fairness has to be seen to be observed, and it does not help when a well-known subscriber to the party in power is made chairman of an independent broadcasting organisation. Although I do not doubt the independence and integrity of Gavyn Davies, such an appointment does not look good, so the Secretary of State should not be tempted to do it.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Fabricant: With my customary generosity, I give way for a second time to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bryant: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his customary generosity, but I am not going to be generous in return. He witters on about the supposed impartiality of the present board of governors, which has a member of the Conservative party as a vice-chair, but he does not mention Marmaduke Hussey or Christopher Bland.

Michael Fabricant: Apart from the fact that I never witter, the hon. Gentleman has a short memory. He cannot tell me of a precedent where people subscribing to the political party in power have been appointed both as chairman and as director general. That is the imbalance.

Mr. Bryant *rose—*

Michael Fabricant: Much as it is part of my customary nature, I am not going to be generous for a third time.

For that reason, I am worried about the proposal that the Secretary of State should appoint the chairman of Ofcom. As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton said, it is imperative that someone is appointed who can do the job and who is perceived to be politically neutral. The same goes for the chief executive. It would be a sad state of affairs if two of Tony's cronies were appointed to Ofcom. *[Interruption.]* It is no good Labour Members groaning, because it is precisely that which happened recently with the BBC.

The issue of the BBC was addressed admirably by the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. The Bill does not give equal control of the BBC. The Minister admitted as much. As I said in an intervention, the BBC's briefing notes give all sorts of spurious reasons why it should not be governed by the Ofcom board.

It is true that ultimately the Secretary of State can intervene, but that is the nuclear option. No Secretary of State anxiously intervenes on the BBC for a number of reasons. To be most charitable, the Government would not be seen to be supporting the independence of the corporation if they constantly intervened in the operations of the BBC. It is in the interests of this and future Governments that there should be vicarious control through Ofcom. There is no reason why Ofcom cannot have the same controls over the BBC as it will have over other public service broadcasters.

The BBC often claims, and it is frequently repeated in the House, that it is the only public service broadcaster in the United Kingdom. That is not the case. Many excellent programmes are produced by Channel 4 and ITV. They are occasionally produced even by Channel 5 and, perhaps, by Sky, which has spent a lot of money on the film industry. It is perfectly acceptable to say that those broadcasters are also public service broadcasters, the only difference being that one group is funded by advertising and subscription while the other is funded by the licence fee payer. The fact that they are funded differently does not of itself mean that the BBC can enjoy a monopoly on the "public service broadcaster" epithet.

The BBC should be controlled by Ofcom. Not only would that give it independence from the Government, who would not be seen to be in control, but, far more important, it would give the impression that the BBC was not being its own judge and jury. That has been the greatest criticism of the BBC. Even when the board of governors makes judgments about programming, which it is right to do, people still doubt whether its decisions are independent because it is an integral part of the BBC and appoints the board of management.

Dr. Howells: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that it is a problem of perception rather than of fact, and that previous Conservative Governments—no more than this Government—never sought to control the BBC?

Michael Fabricant: To a large extent I am talking about perception. Let me be clear about this. On the whole, the BBC does govern itself well. I am not attacking it, and I do not share all the views of the Chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee on the BBC. As I said, I do not believe that it should be privatised; nor do I believe that its board of governors are especially arrogant or especially neglectful of their duties. What I do believe is that justice has to be seen to be done, and that is not the case when the BBC is its own judge and jury. That is why I am calling on the Government to ensure that Ofcom has the same rights of control over the BBC as it does over independent broadcasters. For the reasons that I have given, which I shall not rehearse again, it would be to the Government's advantage if they did just that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) said, those on the Conservative Front Bench are considering whether Channel 4 should be privatised.

I have the luxury of not being on the Front Bench. When Channel 4 was established, it was set up and owned by the Independent Broadcasting Authority because it was thought that it could not make a profit. People underestimated the great power, strength and ability of Michael Grade. To me, it is a great pity that Michael Grade is not currently involved in broadcasting. Now, there is an idea for the great and the good—an idea for someone to be chairman of Ofcom.

Michael Grade changed Channel 4 so that, far from Channel 4 having to be subsidised by ITV through ITV revenues paid to the Independent Broadcasting Authority and later the Independent Television Commission, it is now Channel 4, through its advertising revenues, which to some degree subsidises independent television, by virtue of the fact that ITV fees are reduced because of the contribution made by Channel 4. *[Interruption.]* It is indeed a subsidy: ITV pays less because Channel 4 is making a contribution to the ITC.

Mr. Cameron: There used to be a subsidy under the Channel 4 funding formula, which has been abolished. It was set up so that ITV could support Channel 4 or Channel 4 could support ITV, but that has now gone. The ITV companies all pay contributions to the Exchequer; Channel 4 does not.

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend is missing the point. ITV companies do, however, pay a fee to the funding of the Independent Television Commission, and Channel 4's profits go to the ITC because it is owned by the ITC. I am merely observing that the contributions that need to be made by ITV companies to support the ITC are less because of the profits made by Channel 4. That is straightforward and simple enough. I see that my hon. Friend disagrees with me, but if he checks in the Library, he will see that I am right.

Channel 4 meets its programming requirements as set down by Parliament, yet it makes a profit. There is no reason why Channel 4, which is now, in effect, a nationalised industry through the Independent Television Commission, cannot be privatised. The money resulting from that privatisation could be put into the Exchequer or better still, could be ring-fenced, possibly to support still more public service broadcasting by ITV or other organisations. Parliament could still maintain strict controls over the programming remit of Channel 4, as it does at present, to ensure that Channel 4's programming does not suffer as a result.

Mr. Wyatt: The hon. Gentleman is generous in giving way. He mentioned in an intervention that £3 billion could not be found to privatise the BBC, so how would he find £1 billion to privatise Channel 4? He cannot have it both ways.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman completely misunderstands what I am saying. He has plucked a figure of £1 billion out of the air. I am speaking of £2.5 billion in revenue costs—the income derived by the BBC. The income derived by Channel 4 comes from advertising, not from the licence fee. That is an entirely different matter. The hon. Gentleman is confusing revenue income with capital charge that would have to be made if the shares were sold. The two do not relate at all.

I spoke earlier about the parlous state of ITV. I contacted Carlton Television for some figures. In my experience in broadcasting, it is often advertising revenues that suffer first when the economy gets weaker. People perceive—falsely, in my opinion—that that is the first thing that they can save on their operating budget. The current position gives cause for concern.

In the 12 months to September 2001, which is the year-end for Carlton Television, net receipts were down by 12.7 per cent. For the 12 months to September 2002—these figures come from Carlton Television—City analysts reckon that the range of the further fall in net advertising receipts will be between 15 per cent. down at worst, and 4 per cent. down at best. According to Carlton Television, the figures for ITV as a whole would have been down 12 per cent. in 2001. The introduction of Ofcom could not come at a better time. As the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, this is indeed the time for a light regulatory touch.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk, speaking from the Front Bench, asked the Minister how many people will be working for Ofcom. That is an important question for a number of reasons. There are only 40 or 50 people working for the Federal Communications Commission in Washington DC, which is ably chaired by Michael Powell, son of Secretary of State Colin Powell.

I wonder how many people will work for Ofcom. If the numbers are too high, there will be a temptation for the staff to show that they are well employed by introducing too strong a regulatory burden on broadcasters. That will also put up the cost to broadcasters, who have to pay for the funding of Ofcom. The Minister will no doubt confirm that once it is up and running, Ofcom will not be funded by the Treasury, but will be self-financing. The Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport nods. The body will be self-funding from fees paid by those whom it is trying to regulate. For that reason, too, it is important that the operating costs of Ofcom are kept down. We all know that the largest contribution to the costs to any organisation arises from the number of staff employed in it.

Finally, various organisations have lobbied us, including the Royal National Institute for the Blind, which emphasises the need for commentary to be available, over and above television programming, which is possible on digital TV. Furthermore, the RNIB asks

> "what high-level discussions Ministers and officials are planning to initiate with disability organisations on the scope and detail of the draft Bill".

That was not addressed by the Minister in his introductory speech, and I hope that the matter will be dealt with by the Under-Secretary when he winds up.

There is much to be said about the structure of Ofcom, but this is neither the place nor the debate in which to do that. We are merely debating the paving Bill, which sets up Ofcom. I could have gone into much more detail, but I am showing considerable restraint, as I know that others wish to speak, and as the debate started rather late today.

I am pleased that the former Secretary of State now agrees that there ought to be equal controls over the BBC. I am pleased that, so far, there seems to be general agreement in the House that Ofcom should be a light regulator. Most of all, I am pleased that the Government recognise, some four years after the Select Committee wrote its report, that because of the advance of technology

[Michael Fabricant]

and because of a changing world, Ofcom needs to be introduced. I echo the words of the former Secretary of State by saying that the legislation must not only mirror the existing position but try to anticipate technological and economic changes that will happen over the next five or 10 years. That will be a real challenge for the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Let me offer some advice to the House. If all hon. Members who are seeking to catch my eye are to be successful, it would be helpful if, in the remaining time, speeches were nearer 10 minutes than 20. In order to help in that regard, hon. Members might like to bear in mind that they should not stray too far into the territory of the anticipated Bill, and that they should stick more broadly within the confines of the present paving Bill.

7.49 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I should put it on record that I am non-executive chairman of Spafax. We sell media to the airlines, including British airlines, but sadly also including Swissair.

A hundred years ago, there was a major debate in Europe about electricity. British politicians and scientists recommended that a 1 amp system should go into businesses and homes because they confused electricity with lighting. German politicians and scientists decided to introduce a 3 amp and then a 13 amp system. They jumped to the 13 amp system very quickly. When the scientists were asked about the change, they said "We are not sure exactly what electricity can be used for, but we know that it is more than lighting." That is exactly where we are in terms of the Bill because of the debate about broad band. The Bill is an enabling measure for broad band, but I want to ask a few questions about how it can be enabled through this Ofcom paving Bill.

It is clearly very important to have a digital terrestrial box for the 24 public-service channels that are free to air and to the population. We should be keen for that public service to be available. If we were to sponsor the process, we could go from analogue to digital overnight without having to worry about television sets, as we could provide the box in each home, but where can we get the money and who will pay? The change could be paid for fairly quickly by adding to the licence fee. The facility could be given away free in the next financial year and then clawed back in the two following financial years through a £20 surcharge to the licence fee. Very quickly, this country would be broad band and digital, and we would be leading the rest of the world. That would be a huge and important development for the British economy and would take us into first position.

If the BBC is not inside Ofcom, however, how on earth will broad band be paid for and how will we move to a digital environment? I want the BBC to be included in Ofcom. I do not think that the licence fee should be the BBC's territory 100 per cent. That is what part of the fight is about. The BBC has got wind of something: if Ofcom takes over the reins, who will control the licence fee? Will it be the chief executive of Ofcom, or will the BBC governors remain in charge? That is why there is some reluctance on the part of the BBC regarding inclusion in the Bill.

The matter creates a conundrum for the Government. We have friends at the BBC and they are resolutely opposed to having anything to do with this paving Bill. Yet, if we want the best media environment in the world and aim to attract increasing investment, we must have a single point of call for business and it must be Ofcom, which must regulate the digital future and digital broad-band players. We cannot have one of the biggest players, if not the third or fourth biggest player in the world, half a leg in and half a leg out. That makes no sense whatever.

Asking questions about the BBC in this place is nearly impossible. I wrote to the former Speaker asking whether I could table such questions for inclusion on the Order Paper and she referred me to the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. He referred me to the then chairman of the governors at the BBC, who referred me back to the Speaker. If it is incredibly difficult to ask questions about the BBC in the House, how is it democratically controlled and how do we have any authority over it? We do not have such authority. Is that right? I do not think so, and one of the ways in which we can move the goalposts is to include the BBC in Ofcom. I liked the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) in relation to the Bank of England. I like the analogy of an all-party or Joint Committee before which Ofcom would appear once a year.

I suspect that the reason why the BBC is playing hard to get is not too difficult to work out. The next licence fee is due. As I understand it, the review will take place next year, for implementation on 1 July 2006. The BBC does not want to discuss the matter with Ofcom. It wants to discuss it only with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and friends at No. 10. That is why it does not want to be inside Ofcom. Let us get real. It wants to get the matter out of the way before it comes and plays with Ofcom at all. I think that that has constantly to be resisted. The BBC must be in the paving Bill and it must be Ofcom that deals with it.

Hon. Members have pointed out that five players that are currently outside Ofcom will form its constituent parts. I see that only the chief executive of Oftel is present to listen to the debate, which I find instructive. I wonder where the other four chief executives are. On a cautionary note, I am very nervous that the Independent Television Commission currently feels that it will be Ofcom and is making a lot of play in that regard. We wish the chairman and chief executive to be new people who come from outside the existing five bodies. That is very important.

I want to mention two other issues, as time is short. One of the biggest developments occurring in the new technologies is community television and radio. There has been an anomaly with regard to school radio. When a radio station was situated in a school, the airwaves had to stop at four o'clock. They were switched off because somebody from the community was not allowed to come into the station and open it for community use beyond that time. I am glad to say that the previous Secretary of State changed that situation and we are piloting some community radio and television channels.

Piloting is one thing, but every community needs community radio and television. It is not clear to me where the remit resides in Ofcom, how such community services will be paid for and where responsibility lies in terms of the directors. I would like one of the directors to be concerned specifically with community television and radio and regional broad-band hubs and television, because television as we know it will be broad band. I would like one dedicated person inside Ofcom to have the remit. I think that the BBC and ITV have missed a real trick by not creating regional broad-band hubs and becoming the focus in terms of regional development agencies in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. We, too, have missed a trick, because we could have created through such services many more jobs in the creative industry.

It is pretty obvious that if we do not include the BBC in this paving Bill, it will not be a paving Bill at all.

7.57 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Like all other hon. Members who have spoken this evening, I welcome the Bill—or at least what we have been given so far. The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) said that it was something of a thin gruel, which was to my mind a tad ungenerous. I think that this point will bear being made again: the devil will come in the detail of the later legislation. Briefly, I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) on the establishment of a Joint Committee to consider that legislation. The point that he made was extremely valuable. I hope that, although such a proposal will ultimately be a matter for Parliament, the Minister will give it serious consideration.

My concern is that there is a great deal in the current regulatory framework that works very well. Although I applaud the Government for the general thrust of bringing together the framework under one umbrella, I must ask whether the specific position of regional broadcasting can be considered at a later stage. It is very important that we provide an exact definition of such broadcasting. I know that many hon. Members and people in southern England would regard Scotland as a broadcasting region. We view things rather differently in the northern isles.

We have been very well served by BBC local radio and in terms of the BBC television output north of the border. We have also been well served by the local ITV companies that operate in Scotland: Border, Scottish Television and Grampian. The latter is a very good example of the way in which the current regulatory framework has been made to work. The Minister will no doubt recall that not that long ago, the company was taken over by the Scottish Media Group. The very fine practice of providing strong news and local affairs coverage, based in Aberdeen and Inverness, which Grampian had built up over many years, covering north-eastern Scotland, the highlands and islands and the northern isles in particular, came under threat. It is as a result of a strike by journalists at Grampian and subsequent intervention by the ITC that the threat has been removed and the Scottish Media Group has been unable to pursue its agenda of insisting that those outwith the central belt must suffer hearing what is going on in Glasgow, Edinburgh and even, dare I say it, Paisley, when we have much more local and direct concerns.

The other point that I wished to make was raised by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I gave a silent cheer when he mentioned the most neglected aspect of the debate: broad-band access. The right hon. Gentleman said that the focus and purpose of Ofcom would be to bring together infrastructure and content. I am delighted to hear that, but I shall be even more delighted if current Front-Bench Members express that view. That important aspect of broad-band regulation is currently in the hands of Oftel. I am mindful of the presence of that body's chief executive in the Chamber, and I therefore say gently that regulation of broad-band access has not been the greatest advert for regulation by Oftel.

Broad-band access and its regulation marks the Bill as being more than a measure for broadcasting wonks. It is a significant social inclusion measure from the point of view of my constituency and many others. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) indicates that the Welsh valleys are in a similar position. Access for people in remote and island communities is crucial. We are told that we should move towards teleworking and telecrofting. I invite the Minister to visit Foula in Shetland and tell the people that. They ask simply for a microwave, digital link to replace the current analogue link, which is useless for access to the internet and broad-band communications.

As I have said previously, the Shetland Islands council charitable trust is pursuing a scheme to lay a fibre-optic cable from Shetland through Orkney to the Scottish mainland to allow us to have proper broad-band access. We have long resigned ourselves to the fact that we shall be at the end of the queue for help from anyone else to gain broad-band access. We have therefore taken the initiative.

We are putting in money that the Government might arguably invest. Yet they are threatening to take no less than £64,000 a year out of the scheme to pay rates to the Crown Estate Commissioners. When will they get to grips with the conduct of the Crown Estate in dealing with such projects? It presents a good opportunity for the Government to show that joined-up government, about which we have heard much in the past, has some practical application.

I could speak about other aspects, but other hon. Members wish to speak, and they are probably better qualified than me. I shall therefore end simply by saying that Liberal Democrat Members support the Bill and wish it well.

8.4 pm

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): I support the Bill, which will bring about much needed reform in regulating our broadcasting and communications industry. It may not provide the detail of regulation—several hon. Members have mentioned that—but that will come in the future. I hope that it is the near future. The measure will allow a newly formed Ofcom to prepare for a difficult but none the less exciting task of regulating the fast-moving broadcasting and communications industry.

Since the previous broadcasting measure, the industry has changed almost beyond recognition. The latest Independent Television Commission figures show that investment in programming increased from £4.5 billion in 1994 to £7 billion in 2000 as the number of channels has grown. We have access to a plethora of channels, and more than 40 per cent. of United Kingdom homes have multi-channel TV. If we turn on our televisions, we can watch almost anything at any time of night and day, although we cannot guarantee its quality. Expansion has even allowed for the proceedings of the House and its

[Ms Claire Ward]

Committees to be broadcast, although I am not sure that viewing figures could compete with one episode of "EastEnders" or "Coronation Street", despite some of the characters in the House.

Michael Fabricant: Speaking of characters, will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Ward: I shall.

Michael Fabricant: Is she aware that the Parliamentary Communications Directorate started a webcasting experiment only yesterday? It is therefore possible that people in New Zealand are currently watching our debate on the beach or elsewhere.

Ms Ward: I applaud the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues for making such a leap forward. However, if members of the public in New Zealand are watching the debate in such beautiful weather, they need their heads examined.

It is interesting that 60 per cent. of those with access to multi channels prefer public service, free-to-air channels.

The convergence of broadcasting and other media has become commonplace. Mobile phones carry radio, and text messages have become the most popular form of communication among the young. We can gain access to the internet through our television sets, and we can see almost any film that we want at almost any time through video on demand. Internet access opens the door to all forms of media and communications. A revolution has occurred, and if we are to support the industry, we must recognise the changes and provide a framework for even greater support.

I am sure that in a future debate, we shall have more views to express about the detail of the regulatory powers. However, the principle of a single regulator, taking on powers currently held by the ITC, Oftel, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the Radio Authority and the Radio Communications Agency, has received widespread support throughout the industry and among viewers and consumers. The five regulatory agencies already collaborate, but the Bill will make a statutory duty of assisting Ofcom in preparing for its new powers.

I support the establishment of Ofcom, and I want to say a little about what I believe it should do. I appreciate that we are considering a two-stage process, and that the draft communications Bill will be available for debate here and in the other place in due course. However, we are debating the establishment of a body, and it is important to have some thoughts about what it should do. I am pleased that many hon. Members attempted to do that in the early part of the debate.

The scope of Ofcom as it stands is not as wide as I would wish. I believe that the BBC should be included in Ofcom if the body is to be the single source of regulation of the industry. It is not fair and it does not make sense to consider establishing a single regulator and leave out our most important public sector broadcaster.

I served on the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport during the whole of the previous Parliament. I was a member when it produced the report in 1998 under the chairmanship and, in my case, under the wing of my hero and right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Despite that, I still support the BBC and wish it well. However, its unique role should not mean that it continues to be maintained at great public expense—more than £2.5 billion of guaranteed funding a year—outside the regulatory regime. It is not the only public sector broadcaster. As we have heard, ITV and Channel 4 also have statutory roles.

The BBC is a public sector broadcaster with not only a proud past but the potential for as great a future. It should have the confidence to welcome regulation with its competitors, rather than shy away from it. If we are to make these major reforms to the industry, we must do it right, and I hope that, when we come to the fuller discussions on the details of the communications Bill, the Government will reconsider this issue.

The direction that Ofcom receives in the year before it gains its regulatory powers will be essential. It will not be an easy task to appoint a chairman—or chairwoman—and executive directors of the new board. I know that the Nolan procedures will be in place, but we need someone who can command the confidence of consumers and the industry, and be independent of political influence. Will the directors have security of tenure and, if so, for how long? What will we know about the chairman's role? Whoever is appointed will have an important dual role. They will be responsible for protecting the interests of citizens as well as for ensuring that the industry receives the support that it needs to flourish.

We must not forget that the ultimate purpose of regulation is to ensure that the consumer benefits, and is protected. That will be tested in many ways in due course—for example, through the role currently held by the Broadcasting Standards Commission in relation to the content of programmes. That will be controversial, to say the least. I hope that Ofcom will ensure that the balance of representation on any committee that it establishes reflects the broad range of views that exist not only in the House but throughout the rest of the country.

Michael Fabricant: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Ward: I want to move on, because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

We shall also need to consider how we expand in the digital age to ensure that many more of our constituents benefit from the real revolution taking place. This paving Bill is a start, but I look forward to the next debate, and to seeing the detail of what Ofcom will be responsible for. Then we will know that the promises that the Government made in their manifesto to establish Ofcom will have been kept, and that the work that the Select Committee did in 1998 in producing its report will have made an important and beneficial contribution to the overall debate.

8.12 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I thought that I was not going to have to declare an interest in this debate—as I am merely the editor of an "old-technology" magazine—until I looked at the awesome powers to be assumed by this Ofcom that will apply to *The Spectator* online, which I also edit. I do not necessarily resent the wide powers that are to be taken. If this body is to take over five separate regulatory bodies, producing a smaller number of bureaucrats overseeing the media, that will be all to the good. However, I confess that I have some anxieties about Ofcom and, in particular, its establishment, which is what we are discussing tonight.

Whoever is in charge of Ofcom—Mr. or Mrs. Ofcom—will be a very powerful person. This regulator will, as has repeatedly been said, have authority over the most various and dynamic sector of the British economy. He or she will be ultimately responsible not only for all kinds of difficult questions of taste and decency—and content generally—but for vast competition issues. I ask Ministers to consider what will take priority in the mind of this person in the case of a conflict between, say, questions of competition and of decency. Who will vet the appointment of this person, and who will ensure that they are not the toady of some Government or other, as suggested earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo)? I do not believe that the House has had convincing answers to those questions. It would be a good thing if this person were in some way accountable to Parliament, perhaps to some Committee or other—why not?

That is my first anxiety about the great Ofcom creation: that whoever is in charge will be unaccountable. However, I have a more profound anxiety, which has also been well rehearsed by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) in his excellent speech, the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, as well as by several Conservative Members. That is that this new body does not include the BBC within its remit. Five regulatory bodies have been folded in, but not the BBC board of governors. It is difficult to see how any sensible decision can be taken about competition when the BBC falls outside the purview of Ofcom.

Let us consider this extraordinary anachronism, the BBC, in which one has—the country has—20,000 taxpayer-funded journalists. It would be fair to say that many of them, because they are state funded, have an inbuilt tendency to favour the case in support of state control or state interference. They continue to produce 37 per cent. of the terrestrial TV programmes that we watch, and 27 per cent. of all cable and satellite programmes. That is an extraordinary achievement, but it is made slightly less extraordinary by the fact that they receive £2.5 billion of state aid to do so.

I am not saying that the BBC should be abolished or privatised, but I do not see how this anachronism can last. Indeed, I am not sure how well it coheres with the state aid articles of the treaty of Rome. I often wonder whether the BBC's decidedly gentle approach to matters such as the single European currency—and to Europe generally—might be linked to some deep cultural awareness on the part of its 20,000 journalists that they depend for their very existence on the leniency of Brussels. If we look at articles 85 and 90 of the treaty of Rome, we see that many of the things that the BBC does in its current form do not cohere with state aid rules.

On the BBC news the other night there was a flagrant plug for—[HON. MEMBERS: "Boris Johnson!"] On the contrary, it was a plug for a film about Iris Murdoch, which was partly funded by the BBC. The corporation does this all the time. Whenever one turns it on, one sees a plug for the *Radio Times* or some commercial arm of the BBC or other, which is competing in a commercial market with other concerns. I am not saying that the *Radio Times* competes with a magazine with which I am associated—far from it. It does, however, compete on commercial terms with other magazines and, in so far as it is in receipt of state money, that is unfair. It is absolutely absurd that these competition questions should not fall within the scope of Ofcom. I hope that the Minister, having heard a fusillade of comments on this from both sides of the House, will address the matter in a slightly more robust way than he did at the outset of the debate.

I shall finish by examining one body that is being wound up and folded into Ofcom—the Radio Authority. I know that this is a paving Bill, but I want to make a point about what I hope Ofcom will do when it takes over the functions of that authority. I hope that it will change the policy on religious broadcasting. I am not suggesting that I would listen to a national Christian radio station, were one to be created. I would probably not listen to it as much as would be good for my immortal soul, but I cannot see why we should not have such a station in this country. It seems absurd to imagine that there could be any disadvantage or danger involved in having one.

The only example I have been able to think of, of anyone being adversely influenced by listening to a Christian radio station is in the famous Mick Jagger song "Far Away Eyes". In it, he sings about someone listening to a gospel radio station and driving through 20 red lights because he is so confident that the Lord is holding him in his arms. However, I do not think that anyone else is likely to be so [illegible]luenced.

Michael Fabricant: I am listening to my hon. Friend with great rapture and there seems to be support in the Chamber for permitting a Christian radio station, but if one is allowed, should not Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and other religious radio stations also be permitted? If they are, where will the frequencies come from, as national frequencies are not available?

Mr. Johnson: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I merely draw it to the House's attention that there are national Christian radio stations in Argentina, New Zealand and even Iraq, I am told. If we are moving to a new era of broad-band radio—the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) made a good point about electric light and how people did not know how much would be needed—it is wholly possible that there will be scope on the spectrum for a variety of religious broadcasting. If hon. Members feel seriously worried that its content may influence them in some way, I suggest that they could always turn it off. Ofcom is about freedom, choice, diversity and all the rest of it. If that is true, I hope that changing that policy will be among its first moves when it is called into existence. I would be grateful for an indication from the Minister of whether I am right to hope that that will be so.

8.21 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I do not think that my contribution will be as entertaining as the last one, but I shall do my very best. I am delighted to participate in the debate, but I must declare an interest. Before entering Parliament, I worked for BT for 31 years and I am a member of Connect, the union for professionals in communications, which part-sponsors a researcher to assist me with research on the communications industry. I am also chair of the newly established all-party

[John Robertson]

telecommunications group. Therefore, I have a long-term interest in communications and I have experienced at first hand the rapid change of the communications sector.

I shall not go into the figures that some Members have mentioned, but people understand that the communications industry has come a long way over the years. It is interesting to note that it took about 38 years to build up a figure of 50 million television watchers in America—a country run by television—yet it took only a decade for the number of mobile phones to increase from 1 million to 30 million today. It took only four years for the internet system to achieve 50 million users, so the communications industry has moved on from a can and two bits of string. That is why Ofcom must take over from the previous regulatory bodies and why the Government's introduction of a Bill that proposes the creation of a unified regulator is timely.

The industry, in terms of service providers and content, is becoming increasingly convergent, and separate regulation will not be able effectively to monitor areas that are now essentially intertwined. I want to consider first the way in which the new regulator should work. Ofcom needs to be able to act independently, as many have said, but I agree that the new body must work closely with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that the transition is smooth. However, Ofcom must be able to respond to changing circumstances in what is new terrain.

The White Paper set out the Government's proposals for the creation of Ofcom and attracted more than 250 responses from interested parties—broadcasters and service providers as well as trade unions, which look after people who work in the industry, and consumer groups, which protect users. I am glad that there is widespread support for the proposals. The general feeling is that the creation of Ofcom will simplify the complex web of existing regulators, removing problems in the current framework such as regulatory overlap and double jeopardy whereby the same issue can be investigated in parallel through different regulators. However, concerns have been raised and I seek clarification from the Minister.

First, how will we ensure that the concentration of authority in one regulatory body does not lead to unchallenged industry control? We must ensure that the checks and balances that exist where bodies have different remits are not lost through the creation of a single entity. Others have expressed concern that content regulation might overshadow competition and that those two aspects must be examined separately. Perhaps the Minister can put meat on the bones of that perceived problem.

We need to ensure that Ofcom is properly resourced; some companies complain that there have been difficulties with the current system due to the high staff turnover at Oftel. We must put checks in place to ensure that ongoing investigations by the new body are as smooth as possible.

The Scottish Consumer Council has raised concerns of particular importance to me. It is disappointed that the initial proposals failed to acknowledge the realities of constitutional change in Scotland. Ofcom can perform its role in Scotland only if the framework takes account of the specific political, social and economic environment in Scotland, and the SCC points out that for Scotland's interests to be represented and addressed in the new structure, the organisation must have a positive relationship with the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive.

The SCC also stresses that Ofcom must maintain an office in Scotland to ensure that the protection of consumers in Scotland is addressed at UK level. Many respondents to the White Paper argued that Ofcom must maintain local offices and ensure that the relevant issues are devolved as much as possible, to reflect the cultural diversity of regions and communities.

We must address the way in which the new body will work alongside the Office of Fair Trading. I am pleased that the Minister made a contribution on that matter and that it will be considered. If I put my two pennyworth in, that might help him on the way. The proposed reorganisation of the regulatory structure will better suit the converging market place, and I support that. Multiple bodies have created a regulatory patchwork, so we need a clear description of Ofcom's mandate to act, especially on competition.

It is important that the OFT continues to lead on issues relating to competition regulation, and the OFT leadership must ensure continuity and consistency in decisions about market definition and market power. It would be detrimental to the entire process to transfer the lead role in investigations into competition from the OFT to the new regulatory body.

In some countries, such as Australia, where the industry regulator and the general competition functions are combined, overall regulation can be achieved under one roof. However, as in the United Kingdom where responsibility for competition and for industry-specific regulation is separate, the competition regulator should maintain primary responsibility for issues relating to competition. Perhaps we should consider a system similar to that in Australia. It was helpful to hear the Minister's views on the OFT, and I hope that this matter will be taken care of in the future Bill.

I want to deal with Ofcom's role in consumer protection, as I have been disappointed in the amount of attention that has been paid to the consumer in the debate. I hope to rectify that. In the United Kingdom, 4 per cent. of consumer spending goes on telecommunications, television and other communications services. As the White Paper rather nicely points out, that is more than we spend annually on beer. I have to tell the House that I do not spend that much on beer.

British businesses increasingly rely on new technology to thrive, irrespective of the sector to which they belong. However, when things go wrong their reliance is highlighted in a very alarming way. I was approached by a number of constituents who had been hugely affected by the demise of Atlantic Telecom, which went into receivership in November. Businesses that used Atlantic Telecom's services were suddenly without phone lines. All material, such as stationery and advertising, was wasted because it contained a non-existent telephone number. Some companies still face the possibility of going out of business.

The Office of Telecommunications was of no use to the people who were affected, and PricewaterhouseCoopers, which was in charge of the receivership, was also unhelpful. In fact, as they say where I come from, and as

I said to the Leader of the House in business questions in November, in this respect the current system is about as much good as a chocolate fireguard.

BT wanted to take on responsibility for the service provided by Atlantic Telecom, but unfortunately that was at a cost, and nothing could or would be done. No one was willing to pick up the tab. Regulation exists to protect the consumers' interest, but this example has highlighted that that is not always the case under the current system. I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). We need to be rigid on consumer protection. The introduction of this legislation is an excellent opportunity to provide more effective protection for consumers.

Mr. Alexander: I hope that my hon. Friend will bear in mind the fact that joint action was taken by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish Executive to ensure the extension of the service for Atlantic Telecom customers, and that when this issue was addressed in an Adjournment debate I gave an undertaking to consider the specific issue of regulation thrown up by the Atlantic Telecom case after I had put the rescue package in place.

John Robertson: I thank the Minister for that information. I did not know that, and I will take his comments on board. I realised that the Scottish Executive had done something, but it only provided service on an incoming call basis for about six weeks. Although that helped businesses over the initial period when they were trying to get their communications systems sorted out, many of them that did not have that extra money to take on the new operator were left in a bit of a state. I am glad that the Minister has taken that on board, and perhaps he will do the same regarding the next item I want to raise.

There is little point in having any regulatory framework if consumer interest does not underpin its entire operation. I would welcome Ofcom having powers along the lines of those of the Association of British Travel Agents, which investigates claims for compensation for people with a complaint against a travel agent. Although I welcome the creation of Ofcom, my concern is that it will be a toothless tiger, and we need to ensure that the consumer is not left to flounder when things go wrong. Ultimately, we need to make sure that there is sufficient scope for customer redress.

For example, there could be a bond for a licence based on projected turnover. That would ensure proper cover for the consumer, and would pick out the cowboys as they would not be bonded. I am sure that the Minister could think of other ways to look after the consumer, and I would be interested to hear his ideas on the subject.

Mr. Alexander: I can give my hon. Friend an assurance that we are considering all the options in the light of the Atlantic Telecom case. We will examine the specific example that he has given, not just in relation to this Bill but as part of the Department's ongoing work.

John Robertson: I thank the Minister once again. I welcome the Bill. I have raised a number of issues. We need to ensure that the design of the new body is right: it must be transparent, the regulation process must be clear, its objectives must be clear and it must be governed to the highest possible standards. Most of all, it must protect the customer and the industry.

8.34 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I should like to state my qualified support for the Bill. There is an urgent need for a major revision of, and general deregulation in, broadcasting and communications. It is good news that the Government are taking steps in the right direction. However, those steps are yet to be defined, so the Government should get on as quickly as possible with producing the main Bill on the communications sector. As Ofcom will undertake its regulatory role when the communications legislation receives Royal Assent, I look forward to seeing the draft Bill. As ever when complicated subjects such as this are involved, the real interest of the House will be in the detail of the future legislation.

The creation of Ofcom as a single, all-encompassing regulator is welcome, but it should of course include the BBC, which will be an essential component. This is a wonderful opportunity for the Government, once and for all, to stop interfering in the media and communications industries.

We need to ensure that the legislation is right not just for now, but for years to come. The speed of development of digital technology, and the convergence of communications, have highlighted the inability of the regulatory framework to keep up with the rapid pace of change. After all, the current framework was designed at a time when the full implications of the digital age could not have been predicted either by politicians or by the industry. We need to get right—and get right for a generation—the proposals in this paving Bill, as well as those in the communications Bill. The structure and span of control therefore need to be flexible and open to change, just as businesses regulated by Ofcom need to be.

We should be proud of the lead taken by the industry in this country, in both telecommunications and broadcasting, and should be waiting impatiently for the next stage of convergence of the sectors. Let us hope that the legislation we pass allows the industry to be something of which we can be proud in years to come.

Without doubt, there should be a coherent and consistent approach to regulation of the converging communication industries. At the same time, the Government need to ensure that Ofcom adopts a restrained approach in regulation. A light touch is essential to allow the various media industries to thrive, and to exploit the new levels of competition that we are witnessing across the globe. Competition should be embraced actively. I hope that the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) will be pleased to note that I do not split my infinitives.

A positive approach to legislation should be the foundation on which Ofcom is based. An example might be an abiding desire to avoid interference in emerging markets unless significant disadvantages to consumers are apparent, and no credible way for the market itself to deal with such problems is in sight. The Commercial Radio Companies Association has said that the commercial-radio industry in this country has experienced improved revenue and audience figures owing to reduced regulation since 1990. The Government must ensure that there is no reversal in the trend because of the application of excessive burdens and regulations to an industry in which they would be wholly unwanted and unwarranted.

As I am sure the House knows, over-regulation and excessive burdens on industry have become the Government's forte. As I said earlier, as ever in the case

[Angela Watkinson]

of complicated subjects, the real interest of the House will be in the detail of future legislation. I hope that the scope of the legislation will not be too detailed, allowing the media and communications industries to operate without Big Brother watching over them. Ofcom should be a new and fresh regulatory body, reflecting the new opportunities and challenges facing the communications sector.

In connection with the delicate but important issue of appointments and general accountability, the Centre for Policy Studies expressed valid and succinct concerns in its document "OFCOM is watching you":

> "OFCOM will be remote from democratic control. Its chief executive will be a political appointment, making him or her one of the most powerful unelected figures in the land."

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), I hope that all appointments to these powerful positions will be achieved through considered, apolitical debate. That will ensure that OFCOM is led by individuals with the good of the whole communications industry and of consumers, rather than the wishes of their political masters, in mind.

The Government have had more than five years since they started drafting their 1997 general election manifesto to formulate detailed proposals in that sphere. However, whatever the drafting problems, we cannot establish an elaborate and potentially powerful organisation, with an equally powerful chairman and chief executive, without knowing precisely what qualifications may be best suited to the performance of their duties, what the organisation will do or even when it will do it. Indeed, we could witness a ludicrous situation: if there are considerable delays, the officers of the new organisation could be sitting around with very little to do while drawing pay. The only way of aligning Ofcom with the eventual substantive legislation that it will administer is to link them by ensuring that Ofcom starts to operate only when its brief and duties have been fully defined.

I finish on a positive note. Prior to the various stages of debate in the other place, the concerns on accountability that were held by many people in the communications sector were numerous and valid. I applaud the sensible revisions to the Bill that were carried out in the other place, notably requiring Ofcom to keep a register of members' interests, to publish its regulations and procedures, to record decisions and to maintain those records. I hope that with further scrutiny and debate in the House we will ensure that the communications industry is regulated by an organisation with a broad remit that expresses a light touch with its regulation. Ofcom promises to have the opportunity to become extremely powerful. It will have an impact on every part of society through the very nature of the industry that it will oversee. Let us ensure that Ofcom does just that: oversee and not over-regulate.

8.41 pm

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): I want to concentrate on the comments about the BBC made by my right hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I make two preliminary remarks. First, I welcome the concept of a board of regulators, which seems to be winning through. The hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) spoke as if there were a single regulator. There is a board of regulators; that is an important concept. That will ensure greater consistency in regulation. I hope that the Government are firmly committed to that model.

Secondly, I endorse the points that were made by the hon. Members for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) about the importance of radio. The hon. Member for Twickenham said that he listened more to the radio during the week than he watched television. He is not alone. Some interesting figures over the weekend show that he is representative of the British population. Television viewing went down last year. Radio listening was maintained. People spend more hours listening to the radio than watching television during the week.

The radio sector is buoyant. Incidentally, it is characterised by strong co-operation between the public service, the BBC, which has about 50 per cent. of the market, and the independent sector, particularly in driving forward new technology and digital radio. There will be a powerful role for Ofcom in ensuring that that development continues in the years ahead.

The BBC has been one of the principal matters of contention in the debate. If one took at face value what my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton said, one would believe that there was going to be no relationship between the BBC and Ofcom. In fact, as various hon. Members have said, there will be a direct relationship between Ofcom and the BBC if the White Paper proposals are followed.

In terms of tier one regulation, the BBC will in matters of taste, decency and programme content, be subject to an external regulator. After all, the Broadcasting Standards Commission has that role at the moment and that will transfer to Ofcom. Ofcom will have a direct role in the economic regulation of the BBC, as it will in that of all other broadcasters. The BBC has recently combined the management of the World Service with that of BBC World. It will have to be careful in that regard. It will have to be careful to keep distinct and transparent the different revenue streams: the licence fee, the grants from the Foreign Office and commercial income. That is right and proper.

Under tier two regulation, for the first time, like other public service broadcasters, the BBC will have to provide prime time news and be subject to Ofcom regulation for that purpose. It will also be subject to Ofcom regulation in terms of programme quotas produced by independent television companies.

The expression "a level playing field" does not fully describe our broadcasting ecology. If there were a completely free market, there would be no BBC. It is there to distort the market, in the same way as the NHS is there to distort the health market. It is there to raise standards and aspirations and to increase equity. We should not forget that role.

Clearly there is a cross-party debate on the matter. I was delighted to see the hon. Member for Lichfield supporting the retention of the BBC in the public sector. I hope that that is the conclusion that his party—which, quite properly at this point in the parliamentary cycle, is reviewing its policy—will reach also. Given that Channel 4, with its mix of private and public sectors, was a prime achievement of the last Conservative Government, I hope that the Conservatives will come to the same conclusion regarding Channel 4.

We then come to the contentious third tier. I listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury suggested. He said that the backstop regulator for the third tier should be Ofcom for the BBC. He also said that new channels and changes to channels should be approved not by the Secretary of State, but by Ofcom. There is a danger in that.

Let us take as an example the recent approval of the three new digital television channels and five new digital radio channels by my right hon. Friend's successor as Secretary of State. That was a courageous decision, against a lot of commercial lobbying. In the case of the new children's digital channels, some of the lobbying came from the Disney corporation, which runs the Fox Kids channel. The corporation has extensive lobbying capabilities, which have been extended recently. In addition, Nickelodeon—a joint venture of BSkyB and Viacom—argued fiercely against the proposal because it provides children's television channels.

However, the Secretary of State decided that there was a market failure. He decided that public enterprise should lead the way; it should keep the private sector honest and provide two children's channels of largely British content that did not consist of American cartoons. For those reasons, he approved the channels. It would be difficult for a regulator who, quite properly, was looking at promoting commercial channels to weigh those questions in the balance and take such a judgment.

Listening to some hon. Members today, one would have thought that the BBC governors should be abolished; some Members would undoubtedly want that. That would be a retrograde step, as the governors have an important role in protecting the ethos of public service broadcasting. However, the governors should reform themselves. They should have a separate secretariat and should not be dependent on BBC personnel who serve the Director-General. They need to modernise but they have a crucial role.

On the roll-out of digital television, it is important that digital terrestrial television thrives and that we have the three platforms; satellite, digital terrestrial and cable. I am heartened by newspaper reports that ITV, the BBC and other terrestrial broadcasters are involved in talks about how to popularise digital television, particularly non-subscription digital television. My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) said that digital set-top boxes should be given away free. I think that they could at least be provided cheaply by a consortium of broadcasters.

Is it necessary to have one date or "big bang" for the complete digital switchover? Or is it worth considering whether, transmitter by transmitter, we have a process over a number of years by which the switch-off takes place? There is merit in having some pilot schemes and in getting the technology right. There is merit in not just having a final end date, but in working over a period of years, as different areas will have a different take-up of digital television.

I welcome the Bill and look forward to the full Bill coming before the House in due course.

8.49 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): In describing the legislation, my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) used what I thought was a good analogy, of a harness and a horse. I have picked a different analogy, seeing it as a legislative meal: this Bill is the starter, with the principal Bill coming along later. In common with the approach that many of us who have been here throughout the debate would take to physical food, we have been waiting so long for the legislation that we are tempted to devour the Bill as quickly as possible and get our cutlery poised for the main course.

It is right to be concerned about the gap that will follow, just as too long a gap between courses can spoil a meal. We have been told that something will be introduced in the spring. That sounds rather like a software developer's timetable, with quarter 1 and quarter 2. In 2001, we have been told that the beta version of the legislation will be along in Q1 2002, with the expected product delivery date towards the end of year 3. Those of us who have had experience of dealing with software developers know that Q1, especially when it is described as "the spring", can become Q2 and then Q3.

The Bill may end up being more significant than we think, because the Ofcom that we are setting up may have to make do in its shadow form with the existing powers of the regulators for which it will be acting as an umbrella for far longer than we have anticipated. One of my pleas is that we do not simply say that everything can wait until the main legislation, because even on the most optimistic timetable, we will have missed the boat on many issues if we do not deal with them until we have the new framework at the end of 2003. I remind hon. Members that the existing regulators still have all their statutory powers, and I hope that Ofcom will set a new direction for the use of those powers, rather than being an adjunct waiting for any future powers.

The legislation is complex and it is important to get it right, so I sympathise with the Government to some extent on delay. I have positive experience of pre-legislative scrutiny from the Special Standing Committee on the Asylum and Immigration Bill. Those who considered the legislation in detail had the opportunity to hear expert evidence. That was especially beneficial for Government Back Benchers, because those who hear expert testimony in a Select Committee are often not appointed to the Standing Committee, whereas Opposition Members more often share duties and serve on both the Select and the Standing Committee.

I understand that Parliament will have to decide, but I hope that those who will deal with the legislation in detail will get the expert testimony. That expertise should not be presented to some other group, however beneficial that may be in itself, leaving the Standing Committee members inexperienced in what will be complex technical matters.

The Ofcom framework will be in place as the principal regulatory game in town for some time to come, regardless of whether it has the powers under the new legislation. The coming two or three years will be critical. It is right, as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham said, that every time we create a new regulator we should examine the rationale for our regulation. We do not want regulation for its own sake. Liberal Democrats believe that in many aspects of telecoms and entertainment the

[Mr. Richard Allan]

market will provide, but we see a role for a regulator, not to delve into every aspect of how people carry out their business but to act as the consumer's champion and in particular to challenge strongly when there is market failure.

In radio advertising, as I understand it, the authority does not set down a fixed number of adverts per hour, because it feels that the market can decide, as we have a good range of radio stations to choose from in any part of the United Kingdom: if there is too much advertising, people can turn over. The same applies to the internet: if there are too many banners on a website, we can go to one with fewer adverts.

To date, we have not felt confident about doing that for television, and we have spelled out in detail how many adverts there can be per hour at peak and off-peak hours. We may reach the stage at which we do not need to regulate in such minute detail, but until we have a genuine market in which people can choose between attractive options—which is not yet true of television for most people, who do not have the option simply to switch over if a channel has gone over the top with advertising—we will need some sort of consumers' champion.

I hope that one of the briefs that Ofcom will have will be to be as open and accessible to the consumer as possible. Our constituents should not have to come to us to ask about the regulation of those issues, be they connected with radio, television or the internet, that will increasingly impact on their lives. Our constituents should feel confident about approaching the regulator to deal with technical problems, so the regulator should have a public, open and accessible remit.

We should not lose sight of the telecoms issue either. The tendency in the debate today has been to lay into the BBC, which is an emotive issue. However, what happens to the future governance of the BBC pales into insignificance next to the broad-band debate. The BBC recognises that with its offerings, including its digital services and the BBCi offering. That is a positive approach, with a great product, and the BBC knows where the future lies. The legislative process should also reflect that future, which lies with the BBC and outside in broad-band access. Those issues should be prominent in our debate and in Ofcom's approach.

The regulator will face key priorities before the main legislation comes into force. The Minister is well versed on the technical issues, as I know because I heard him speak on them at a dinner. Despite his busy schedule, he came to speak to us and showed that he has a grasp of the issues. The first priority is broad-band roll-out, but the Government should take the leadership role. The role of Oftel, and later Ofcom, will be to respond to the steer that it gets from the Government. Important decisions will need to be made, for example, on the future structure of British Telecom, on new entrants into the market and how to ensure a level playing field. On all those questions, Oftel will need to take a clear steer from the Government, despite being an independent regulator.

The second issue is that of digital television. The Government will not be able to advance their objectives without some form of free-to-air digital service. People need to be able to go into their high street store, buy a box for £99 or less, install it and watch a digital service without paying a penny more. Such a service might reinvigorate the BBC licence fee, because people would compare the cost of £99 for the box and £100-odd for their television licence with Sky's offering. Unless and until a free-to-air service is available, the analogue switch-off is not a realistic option. Consumer resistance will be high, and that issue will need to be addressed sooner rather than later.

The third issue is the development of narrowcast television. We have focused on broadcast television in the debate, but much of the future of the new media will be in narrowcast television. People will choose their options and perhaps store them offline to be watched at a later date. That service was originally called video on demand, but it has gone a lot further and has the potential to become hugely important in the evolution of the new media. A similar process has happened in the music industry, which is in some ways ahead of television. The music industry had traditional distribution channels via record shops and CDs, but it was threatened by Napster, which offered a new delivery mechanism. The industry took Napster on and now the big boys such as Sony are developing their own mechanisms for the new media channels. AOL Time Warner is poised to do that and the big UK media channels will also do so, sooner rather than later.

Ofcom will have to deal with two key features of that development. The first is that the content will be unregulated, and, in a way, that is right. If data come over a wire, not the airwaves, they are unregulated. The second feature is that it is global. Even if we seek to regulate it in the United Kingdom, we cannot, because I can go to a provider anywhere and access those services.

I hope that the Government will ensure that there is not too great a gap between the legislative courses and that they will be clear that Ofcom has a big job to do through its constituent regulators. We must all keep our eye on the ball because this matter is very important for the UK; it is not a political football that we can kick around. Opposition Members are acting as the gadfly on the body politic, if I remember my Socrates correctly, pricking the Government into action rather than trying to kick the ball off the pitch.

9 pm

Mrs. Helen Clark (Peterborough): As time is short, I shall make just a few points, having shredded the rest of my speech.

My first point deals with the issue that was the subject of extensive debate in the other place—the omission of the BBC governors' regulatory remit from Ofcom. The BBC has long been a great source of national pride and an example of excellence in broadcasting worldwide. However, it has an enormously privileged position. It receives significant sums annually of what is effectively a regressive tax, without the licence payers having the full redress on taxation that they would expect through Parliament. That fee has been rising for some time in advance of inflation.

The BBC has privileged access to scarce spectrum and to cable and satellite, and it has been able to launch new services even where those have been virtual clones of commercial channels. I am thinking in particular of Network Z, which was set up with an almost identical format to One Word Radio, the future of which is now in doubt. I wrote to the BBC to protest at that last summer and found its reply dismissive and rude to the point of arrogance. It is relevant to note the disturbing number of in-house lobbyists that the BBC employs—40, I believe—in addition to a number who work out of house. All are presumably paid out of public money.

I do not understand why the BBC needs or indeed deserves the privileged position of self-regulation outside Ofcom to maintain its deserved reputation and status, particularly as it is publicly funded.

The National Consumer Council has pointed out that excluding the BBC from the full remit of Ofcom limits the potential benefits to consumers of an improved regulatory system. Lord Dubs argued in the other place that inclusion would be in the interests of the BBC, as it would mean that any future dispute over regulation would be between the BBC and Ofcom rather than the Secretary of State.

One does not have to raise the spectre of state-controlled radio, as did Lord Eatwell, to agree that inclusion in Ofcom should lead to greater accountability. I understand that there are examples elsewhere, notably in Canada, of the communications regulator having public service broadcasting as part of its remit. We desperately need a debate on the nature of public broadcasting. In any case, if Parliament decides that the BBC should be brought fully under Ofcom's remit, the Bill will have to recognise that.

My second point is about the protection of diversity and independence in regional broadcasting. The Welsh language channel, S4C, has its own authority. That is generally considered to be better than when Welsh language broadcasting was on a national basis with a remote regulator and a centralised approach. That may seem inconsistent after what I have said about the BBC. However, I understand that S4C has established strong and functional links with the Welsh Assembly, and that could suggest a precedent. I certainly believe that Ofcom must be sensitive and able to respond flexibly to regional needs. It must therefore have direct links to the devolved bodies. It must not be, or appear to be, a centralised body born and bred in London.

If these precautions are not taken, there is a serious risk that good local political coverage will disappear and local debate will therefore be stifled. It would surely be a sad—indeed, a tragic—irony if the main casualty of the ever more diverse and interactive forms of communication was their varied content.

I have no doubt that these matters will be much debated when the proposed communications Bill is introduced. At present, however, we should be sure and certain that the body that we are establishing through this Bill to regulate our communications does so in a way that serves the best interests of our society.

9.5 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I declare my interest. I am a consultant at Carlton Communications where I worked for seven years before becoming a Member.

As many Members have said, the Bill is quite empty. It has been described as a paving measure and many Members have put the key question, "What happens next?" Many people in the industry are asking, "Will one body with a board of only six people be able to do the job?"

My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) asked whether radio would suffer from regulation by this megalith. The answer is that we do not know because we do not know exactly what job the body will be asked to do. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said, the cart has been well and truly put before the horse.

The answer from Ministers on the Treasury Bench is that everything is in the White Paper—that what comes next is in the White Paper, so we know what is coming. However, in many ways, we do not. That is the point I want to emphasise. What will be the exact format for regulating the BBC? We do not know exactly.

The right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said that he had changed his mind. Many other people will probably also change their mind. It is wholly illogical for the BBC to be regulated differently. The BBC, Channel 4 and ITV do the same things: they make programmes and broadcast the news, so they should be regulated in the same way.

When there is only one regulator—as Ofcom will be—that regulator will be doing different things, such as economic regulation, competition regulation and content regulation; yet although the BBC, Channel 4 or Channel 5 are doing many of the same things, they will not be regulated in the same way. That makes little sense.

We do not know what the rules will be for cross-media ownership. By and large, they were not covered by the White Paper. The Government are holding consultations about them, so we do not know exactly what the rules will be.

What about the big question? Do we actually want one regulatory body? The standard industry view, which I broadly share, is a strong yes. There are too many bodies. When I worked at Carlton, I frequently dealt with regulators. We had the BSC, the BCC, the ITC, the board of governors of the BBC, Oftel, the OFT and then of course the DG IV of the EC. That is enough regulatory bodies to put anybody into a spin, although as they will not all be amalgamated under the Bill there will still be a certain amount of alphabet soup to deal with.

Some people in the industry hold a second view. They are concerned about pluralism and think that just as we need a variety of media companies and media outlets, so we should also have some pluralism among regulators. The creation of Ofcom will place a great deal of power and responsibility in one pair of hands, so I offer this cautionary note. Let us imagine that a broadcaster has a disagreement with Ofcom about the content of a programme that has been broadcast. The broadcaster is having a row with Ofcom and will be worried that that will affect Ofcom's judgment about something else—a competition issue or a future regulatory issue. That is important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield referred to radio broadcasters. Let us imagine that a small radio station wants Ofcom to deal with an urgent problem. How high up the organisation will that radio broadcaster be able to go? Will they be dealt with by a regulator in a small room on the 12th floor of a 25-storey megalith? Some people in the industry are concerned about how quickly they will obtain a decision. That is why, when we discussed the issue when I worked in the industry, the body was often described as "Offyawn"—

Dr. Howells: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way as I know that he does not have much time, but I am

[Dr. Howells]

fascinated by the point he is making. No one has raised it and it is important. In the light of the hon. Gentleman's experience, how does he assess the performance of the existing regulators? Can they respond to a small company when it needs help or guidance at present?

Mr. Cameron: That depends on the issue, but companies at least know which body to approach with content or advertising issues. The Office of Fair Trading deals with competition issues and the ITC deals with content issues, but I am concerned about smaller companies worried about dealing with this megalith.

The key point—this is my conclusion—is that what matters is not that a single body will be set up, but that we must have light-touch regulation, as many hon. Members have said. If we try to make Ofcom do too many things, with just six people on its board, it will have a queue of decisions stacked up like jumbo jets outside Heathrow and media companies that need decisions will not get them, so we must have light-touch regulation.

I am proud of the fact that I worked in the media industry for many years. It is a great industry in this country, and we need to set it free. We must try to allow the people who work in that industry to make decisions without always having a copy of one of many broadcasting Acts by their side.

I finish by referring to what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) said when he made his food analogy. Broadcasting Acts are sometimes like Chinese meals—when people have just finished one, they become pretty hungry for the next. We must try to ensure that the regulatory system that we set up endures for longer.

9.11 pm

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I declare an interest as chairman of EURIM—the European Informatics Market group—an organisation that brings together parliamentarians, the industry and civil servants in talking about forthcoming draft Bills.

I welcome the Bill, and several of my comments follow on from those of the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron). I share several of the same concerns, but my experience comes from Oftel, rather than from the media industry. I am concerned that several of the problems with the way that Oftel operated may be carried forward into Ofcom, and it is important that we do not do that. I have cut out a large amount of my speech because of the length of time that Privy Councillors took earlier, so I shall be brief.

We need to recognise that convergence is happening, but not universally or at the same speed. We also need to recognise that divergence is happening in the marketplace and that new products are distorting the current market. We need to be aware that the situation is far more complex than simply one in which everything is converging.

As the hon. Member for Witney said, the proposed Ofcom will have to deal with myriad interests—economic, social, content, the protection of new entrants to the market and the creation of new markets. The way that Ofcom is set up must allow it to react quickly to those issues. One of the problems with Oftel was that it did not react to broad band quickly enough, and my fear is that that could be repeated with Ofcom.

The assumption is that a regulator independent of Government represents the way to proceed. If I had more time, I would have challenged that assumption and begun to talk about some of the issues. I wish to make the point that it is important to consider that assumption very carefully.

Ofcom will have to deal with a number of issues. It needs to take on competition, but competition is not a panacea. It needs to take on consumer interests, but there is no single consumer interest. It also needs to support the industry, and I was interested to hear the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), the shadow Secretary of State, argue for a British champion along the lines of Deutsche Telecom, as that would completely undermine the Conservative party's original privatisation proposals.

How will Ofcom respond to Government policy and the leadership role that the Government will play, which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) talked about? There is a role for each of those, but there are conflicts of interest. How will Ofcom be set up? How will it deal with those conflicts of interest? Will it be a neutral umpire, a catalyst, an arbiter or a restrainer? What will its exact role be? All those questions must be addressed.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have talked about light-touch regulation, but there are as many definitions of that as there are vested interests, and we need to be careful.

There is not much competition between the different platforms—between satellite, cable and terrestrial—nor is there much competition within them. The area where I live has cable, satellite and digital television, but there is no competition between the companies. I cannot get an ASDL line from BT or cable from NTL because the places that lose out do so to all the organisations, and we need to address that issue.

Ofcom also needs to examine differences, because differences enhance competition and innovation. If my Darwinian analysis is correct, is a single regulator—albeit a board—the right body to deal with the matter? Will it be able to recognise diversity or will it seek bland conformity? Will there be a level playing field and the promotion of opportunity? The answers to such key questions about the way in which Ofcom will operate will determine whether it is successful. At present, there are myriad appeal processes. How they come together to recognise the interests that I mentioned earlier is critical.

Much of the legislation relates to the United Kingdom only, but there is a wider debate. The European debate and the global aspects of the internet have not been touched on in this debate because it has been dominated by an archaic, if interesting, debate about the BBC. We must talk about structures and some of the other serious issues. If Ofcom is involved only in an argument about the BBC and commercial television, it will fail. It must have far wider horizons than that and it must deal with the issues of broad band that my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) mentioned.

Many analogies have been used in the debate and I would use the analogy of a jigsaw. It is the interrelationship of the pieces, and not necessarily the picture, that is important. The Bill is welcome and I support it. However, a number of key issues will be debated in the spring and they will be fundamental to the setting up of the shadow Ofcom and to the way in which it relates to the existing regulators and the new Bill.

9.16 pm

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): Like my colleagues, I shall be brief. I associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) in that this should be a debate not about the BBC, but about a whole manner of issues. They include the role of Ofcom, the way in which it will work, digital television and broad band.

I will restrict my comments to the consumer and to the needs of the consumer. However, I must declare an interest as a former employee of Connect—the union for professionals in communications—where I was assistant national organiser and to whom I am grateful for ongoing assistance in research on issues relating to the communications industry.

With Connect, I have witnessed at first hand the impact that an increasingly expanding and developing industry has on not just the consumer, but the business as well. Some businesses have grasped the importance of the new technology and individual customers enjoy the wealth of information and entertainment that it provides.

Many Members—I include myself among them—were brought up in a world where there were very few television channels to choose from and where mobile phones and, bless them, pagers, e-mail and the internet were in scarce supply. However, the way in which we communicate with our constituents is changing. My website had 800 hits in December, twice the number that it had the month before, which was twice the number in the month before that. If I do nothing else in my speech, I shall give www.parmjitdhanda.co.uk a plug, because I anticipate something like 10,000 hits. One in fifty of my constituents who make a hit on the website invariably leave an e-mail message as well.

We now have more than 250 television channels in the UK. In 1980, the British viewer could chose from 300 hours of television; today, we can choose from more than 40,000 hours. More than 30 million people in the UK now have a mobile phone, which is more than double the number who had one just two years ago. Two thirds of British households have more than one television and most of them have a land line and a mobile telephone line.

We live in a world in which hand-held computers can operate as mobile phones, as music players and as digital cameras. Laptop computers can be used to play film and television footage. The new computer game consoles allow people to access the internet through televisions. We are surrounded by new technologies that have brought all these different forms of media together in a way that we never thought possible.

The communications industry is increasingly intertwined. With broadcasters moving into e-commerce and internet service providers offering television channels, there is a need for a regulatory body that can cover all such activities. Nine separate regulators cover the communications industry, with different regulators dealing with issues such as decency in content, and economics and competition. That system of regulation dates from the last century. Back then, telecommunications, television and radio developed more or less independently and could be monitored individually. The question is how the separate regulators can continue to cover an industry that is converging. The answer is that they cannot.

The existing framework for regulation is immensely complex and technology is moving too quickly for current regulations to keep up with it. The pace of convergence is accelerating and unless regulation is simplified the complexity of new technology will cause more confusion and uncertainty within the industry and, in particular, for the consumer. We are starting to see that, which is why the Bill is welcome.

The creation of a unified regulatory body is essential to keep the industry alive, to allow it to thrive and to encourage innovation. However, a complete overhaul of the system of regulation is not the way forward either. I am glad that the Government do not intend to do that with the creation of Ofcom because we need the balance between current methods of regulation to continue, with some co-regulation and self-regulation for print media and external regulation for broadcast media, as well as the obvious continuation of the legal aspects that cover all media, such as libel law and the use of obscene publications.

The consumer is interested in the new opportunities that new technology offers them, such as choice, accessibility and quality television. They are also interested in cheap telephone calls and free internet access. I welcome the Bill and hope that the creation of Ofcom will iron out some of the complexities and enhance some of the opportunities for the consumer.

9.22 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I want to begin by thinking about my constituents' expectations of communications policy. Above all, they want programmes that reflect their lives, interests and passions rather than television and radio programmes that were bought off the shelf from the United States of America, Canada or Australia. My constituents want Channel 4 and S4C, not Channel 4 rather than S4C or S4C rather than Channel 4. I hope that the Government will ensure that my election pledge in my constituency will become a reality and that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport appeases me on that in the near future.

My constituents also want affordable sports channels that are not bundled together in such a way that they have to fork out £35 or £40 a month for them. As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) said, they also want access to the broadband economy. My hon. Friend will know that that is a phenomenal problem in my constituency. It seems impossible to get BT to address it, and I hope that we will make progress on it soon. In addition, my constituents want telephone bills that they can understand. If an hon. Member is present who can understand his bill, perhaps he could explain mine to me.

The Bill will help to provide all those things to my constituents. Ofcom will be robust, resilient, strategic and simplify the system. To use a valleys word, it will be "tidy". Some specific issues, however, should be examined. First and foremost, I want to congratulate the Government on making the board of Ofcom small. It should have a membership of no more than six individuals and I urge the Government to resist the entreaties of the Scottish National party, which called for national members to sit on the board. I do not want a board that grows to 10, 11 or 12 members because it would be too difficult for it to do its business swiftly and expeditiously.

As always happens in any debate about communications anywhere in the United Kingdom, we have ended up talking about the BBC, even though the BBC is not mentioned in the Bill, as several hon.

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

Members observed. I do not believe that the issue is the BBC, in or out. In answer to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), who ungenerously refused to take an intervention from me—

Michael Fabricant: I took two.

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman took two interventions from me, but he would not take a third, which was by far the most important. Every regulator mentioned in clause 6, which the hon. Gentleman said does not affect the BBC, already regulates the BBC in some shape or form. As my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) said, it is unfortunate if we believe in that dichotomy—the BBC, in or out.

The Consumers Association is wholly wrong when it calls for the abolition of the governors of the BBC. Even if the entire BBC were under the remit of Ofcom, there would still have to be governors to play the shareholder function within the organisation. With regard to state aid and the nonsense spouted by the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson), who I notice is not in the Chamber, the issue of state aid and the BBC licence fee has been addressed on numerous occasions by the European Commission, which rightly found that the licence fee in this country and in every other country in Europe bar Spain and Portugal does not constitute a state aid; it is a service of general economic interest. It provides something which the market cannot, and that is right and proper.

Pulling in a slightly different direction, I offer some comments about the BBC. Having said that the issue is not the BBC, in or out, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Selby that it is time that the BBC governors were separated to some degree from the BBC management. It is wholly inappropriate that the secretary to the governors is the secretary to the board of management. The governors should be housed separately and funded separately. Only then can they provide the shareholder function within the BBC that stands up for the rights of my constituents. That recommendation is hardly news. It was first made in the Dearing report in 1948.

Regulation of the BBC might change in another respect. It is my experience that the BBC tends to hoard its radio spectrum. It is time that the whole radio spectrum was managed by Ofcom, rather than the BBC managing parts of the radio spectrum for itself. That would be wiser and more efficient.

I end my remarks on the point made by several hon. Members today about the nature of public service broadcasting. Whether one believes that public service broadcasting is performed solely by the BBC or also encompasses ITV or, heaven forfend, Channel 5 and Sky, as was mentioned earlier, the point that I would make fiercely is that when politicians speak about public service broadcasting, they start with Shakespeare, Schiller and Shostakovich and work down, whereas when my constituents think about public service broadcasting and what their licence fee buys, they start with "EastEnders" and work their way upwards.

In the political debate about broadcasting, we must understand that the British people have had a profound love affair with the BBC throughout its history, and that that love affair is probably at its strongest now. We can make pious and sententious remarks about the BBC, but it is delivering against that remit, and I would oppose any attempt to make the BBC licence fee solely a fee that should be paid for something that is not available anywhere else in the market.

There are many issues that we will face in the debate over the next few months. In the pre-legislative scrutiny of the full Bill, we will consider whether it is possible to legislate to create a single ITV, without letting other broadcasters take over the entire communications sector. We will consider whether gateway regulation should be left to competition law, or whether, as I believe, we will need robust gateway regulation, which should be maintained by Ofcom as a means of making sure that consumers have access to the programmes that they want, and that broadcasters have access to the audiences that they need.

We will be considering many issues in relation to regulation of the internet. I know that some hon. Members will believe that it is physically and morally impossible to regulate the internet. A few years ago, it was suggested that all spam should have the prefix "zz". For hon. Members who do not know what spam is, I should say that it is all those unsolicited e-mails that we get, which are sent out in large numbers and directed to thousands of names gathered from the internet. Unfortunately, the proposal bit the dust, but it would have allowed people to edit spam from their inbox. It would be good if we could consider still further issues relating to regulation of the internet. Many people will say that we should have light-touch regulation, but we also need regulation in every part of the converged communications sector where it is necessary for our constituents' needs to be met.

9.31 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): This has been a wide-ranging debate that has certainly not been limited to the specific scope of the Bill. It was right and probably necessary for it to range so widely. Although many of the issues that have been addressed relate to the more substantive matters that will be considered in relation to the communications Bill, they are relevant in determining how Ofcom should look and be structured—the precise purpose of the Bill.

I suppose it was inevitable that the debate would focus on the BBC, partly because it is such a politically sensitive topic but also because its role and its relationship with Ofcom raise very important and much wider competition issues. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) that, in view of the importance of these subjects, it is a pity that the Government did not put forward either of the two Secretaries of State who are involved with the Bill to open the debate. I am delighted to see that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is present for the winding-up speeches, but it is a pity that she did not take part in the debate, as she may have had the opportunity to clarify some of the issues that are clearly troubling many hon. Members in all parts of the House with regard to the future relationship of the BBC and Ofcom. She could also have clarified some of the comments that she is reported to have made about the possible extension of Ofcom's scope to embrace more control over the BBC.

Even if the BBC was the overarching theme of the debate, as it will be reported to have been, a couple of other significant issues were raised by many hon. Members.

The regional agenda was mentioned and we heard questions about how Ofcom's structure would reflect it. Comments were also made about consumer protection and the proper role of economic regulation in ensuring that proper consumer protection is delivered. I was especially grateful to the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), who livened up the debate with a novel and Machiavellian explanation of the BBC's apparent desire to remain outside the full control of Ofcom. Time will tell whether he is on the right track.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Henley (Mr. Johnson), for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) and for Witney (Mr. Cameron) for their contributions. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), who, as always, spoke knowledgeably about these subjects. We heard valuable contributions—they were often informed by expert knowledge—from hon. Members in all parts of the House.

Twenty years ago, UK television viewers had access to three channels and 300 hours of television a week. I could recite statistics that several other hon. Members have given during the debate, but I shall not take up the time of the House by doing so. The point is that we are approaching what the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) described as convergence becoming a discernible fact. In those circumstances, the objective of converging the regulatory environments of the broadcasting and telecommunications industries must be sensible. The Government's White Paper promises to

> "make the UK home to the most dynamic and competitive communications and media market in the world".

Those are fine words, but half a dozen years ago, that is all we had. The Government's lack of urgency in tackling the modernisation of the regulatory regime must be at least partly to blame for our relative decline. Our challenge now is to put in place the structures that will stimulate development of access infrastructure and content provision to ensure the re-establishment of our pre-eminence.

The Government promised a communications Bill in their 1997 election manifesto. They subsequently decided to remove telecommunications from the Utilities Bill in 2000. That decision may have been embarrassing at the time, but it was right, given that few characteristics of the industry as it is developing could be described as "utility". The decision to deal with telecommunications and the broadcast media through a single regulatory body is probably also right. We shall not know for sure until we see the substantive communications Bill.

The Government claim that they need a paving Bill to avoid unnecessary delay in implementing the communications Bill. The logical way to proceed would have been to publish the communications Bill earlier, get it on the statute book and subsequently establish the necessary structures, properly reflecting the functions that Parliament had determined to give Ofcom. To use the analogy of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), we are putting the cart before the horse.

We are being asked to approve a structure for and give the Secretary of State powers to appoint members to Ofcom, an organisation whose remit we do not precisely know. Of course, the White Paper provides an outline of the Government's thinking, and we have the benefit of the debate that took place in another place. A clear advantage of that is that we can all agree that many aspects remain wide open for debate—for example, the relationship of Ofcom to the BBC and to the economic regulation function of the Office of Fair Trading, and the relative weight that should be given to the different objectives that Ofcom will be required to pursue.

Hon. Members will wish to consider many other issues in greater depth when the substantive Bill is published. Today's debate has provided a flavour of some of them. I appreciate that it is not the right time to discuss them in detail, but they are relevant to this Bill. It is clear from our debate that hon. Members from all parties wish to scrutinise carefully the Government's contention that the BBC needs to be excluded from the full scope of Ofcom's powers to create a level playing field for broadcasting.

We want to ensure that the body that the Ofcom Bill and the substantive Bill create is efficient and that the whole costs less than the sum of its parts. We should have liked Ofcom to have a specific duty to identify cost savings from the merger of the regulatory functions. We want to ensure that the regime has a light touch and is sufficiently flexible to respond to the rapidly changing needs of the converging marketplace. It should also be properly independent from the Secretary of State.

We want to know how Ofcom will approach its two distinctive roles of content and economic regulation. We especially want to ensure that Ofcom is structurally designed to focus on the active promotion and development of access infrastructure—the broad-band roll-out—and that that is at least as important as content regulation. Politicians are perhaps more familiar with dealing with the latter.

We are conscious of the dangers of different parts of a body being effectively owned by different Departments. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton mentioned that when he reminded us of the recommendation of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport that a single Department should deal with such matters.

Ofcom should have a clearly ordered set of priorities so that when different priorities and targets conflict—I can envisage that happening in respect of regional content and analogue switch-off—it is clear where they should lie. Only when we know how these and other issues should be resolved will it be clear what the appropriate structure, membership and staffing of Ofcom should be. It is not clear how Ofcom will prepare for a function as yet undetermined, or how the Secretary of State can properly appoint people with the right skills to a body whose remit is not fully defined.

The approach that the Government are taking in setting up Ofcom, appointing its members and getting the whole enterprise up and running with staff seconded from the existing five regulators, which will all remain in existence, is fraught with risk. If Ofcom is to be a success, creating and nurturing an environment in which Britain can resume its leading role, it needs to be a genuinely radical and innovative body. It needs to be a product of the converged world, not merely the bolting together of pieces of the old-world regulatory apparatus.

I fear that quangos can take on a life of their own. By creating Ofcom before Parliament has finally defined the regime that it is to regulate, by staffing it with secondees, by giving the existing regulators the power to make payments to Ofcom and by giving Ofcom an explicit role in developing the scope, extent and accountability of its own future activities, we risk creating an organisation that

[Mr. Philip Hammond]

will be riven from the outset by internal turf wars. Convergence of technologies is probably rather easier to achieve than convergence of people's thinking after years of adhering to tribal loyalties and territorial instincts in different regulatory bodies. I would suggest to the Minister that it is unrealistic to expect such thinking to be set aside on the day that Ofcom is created. The practical danger is, therefore, that as Ofcom becomes established, as its institutional structure becomes entrenched and as personnel are appointed, it will effectively begin to limit the discretion of Parliament in relation to the substantive communications Bill that is to follow.

The Minister with responsibility for e-commerce said earlier that the Bill had a single function: to establish Ofcom. That is certainly not my reading of the Bill. It suggests quite clearly that Ofcom is not just a body charged with setting up structures and administrative organisations. Clause 2(1) gives Ofcom the function not only of facilitating the implementation of

"any relevant proposals about the regulation of communications"

but of "securing the modification" of any such proposals.

In other words, Parliament is being asked to establish, staff and pay for a body that will explicitly be given a lobbying role in relation to the substantive legislation that will define the regime that it is to enforce. It does not seem excessively cynical to suggest that those appointed to membership of Ofcom, and those seconded from the other organisations, will use the resources available to them to lobby for a regulatory regime in their own image. That strikes me as a fairly unusual, and perhaps unwise, way for us to proceed.

The Bill also tells us that Ofcom's functions will be complementary to the current regulatory regime, and specifically that Ofcom shall not interfere with

"the effective carrying out by the existing regulators of the functions conferred on them".

Contradictorily, the Bill requires each of the existing regulators to carry out their functions in

"such manner as appears to that regulator best to secure that Ofcom is able"

to carry out its functions and future functions. In my interpretation, that subordinates the work of the existing regulators to the requirements of Ofcom from the date that the body is created. Indeed, it will go further, in requiring the existing regulators to second-guess Ofcom's functions and subordinate their current functions to the facilitation of those of Ofcom.

This debate has identified important issues in relation to the Bill and issues that will come before the House when the substantive legislation is available to us. We are being asked to approve a paving Bill because of the delay in bringing the substantive communications Bill before the House. The Government must take a large share of the responsibility for that situation. We, on this side, having endured a Government delay of five years in that respect, do not wish to do anything that would hinder the recovery of the pre-eminent position in communications and broadcasting that Britain enjoyed just a few years ago.

We therefore reluctantly accept the need for the paving Bill in an unsatisfactory situation wholly of the Government's making. However, the Government must be in no doubt that the substantive issues must be dealt with when the communications Bill is debated. The challenge for Parliament is to ensure that that Bill genuinely promotes the future of the converged industry in Britain.

We believe that the job will be made more, not less, difficult by Ofcom being created before the underlying legislation is in place, but we must minimise any negative impact that that causes. The way to achieve that is to get the Bill in Committee as quickly as possible so that we can scrutinise its detailed provisions. Therefore, we shall not oppose Second Reading. I have outlined some of our concerns and I assure the Minister that we shall make constructive proposals in Committee to address them.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I thank the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) for his constructive approach and I am glad that he talked about timing. He warns us of the risks of introducing this paving Bill before the details of the main communications Bill are finalised, but I have to tell him that we are aware of those dangers. We remember, for example, that in 1992 the Conservative Government introduced the British Coal and Rail Transport paving Bill before even a White Paper had been published. What was the legislation about? It effectively paved the way for rail privatisation. We do not need any warnings, as we have been dealing with that disaster ever since.

I have listened with interest to the wide range of views expressed by right hon. and hon. Members throughout the debate. We heard a great deal about broadcasting and the part played by one broadcaster in particular—the BBC. As many hon. Members reminded the House, Ofcom's responsibilities will range much wider than what appears on our screens or is heard over our airwaves. A range of complex economic and technological issues relating to telecoms and the spectrum will also play a vital part in Ofcom's remit. We shall expect it to treat all its duties, be it safeguarding consumers and citizens, promoting competitiveness or ensuring access to high-quality services, in a balanced and transparent way.

Much of what has been said today does not relate directly to the Ofcom paving Bill. In fact, very little of it does, as the main communications Bill will deal with those matters. The debate on them will, quite properly, continue to evolve over the coming months and, as we have promised, Parliament will have the opportunity to revisit them when the communications Bill is published next spring. None the less, I am grateful for the comments made today, and in the few minutes available I shall try to deal with some matters that have arisen. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will forgive me if I do not get to their point, as so many have been made. We have been debating the Bill for a long time.

First, I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) for his most vivid comments. He said that the governance of the BBC is wildly out of date and run by a group of amateurs. There were sentences in between those remarks, but that is essentially what he said. The BBC, of course, retains the broadest and most obvious public service remit, although, as many hon. Members said, it is by no means the only broadcaster with such a remit.

That historic role and the fact that the BBC receives the benefits of a unique tax—the licence fee—have made its relationship with successive Governments very special.

For those reasons, the form and extent of self-regulation will differ and it is being proposed that the BBC governors retain their core responsibilities. As it stands, they serve to protect the BBC's political and editorial independence and they will be expected to call BBC management to account. Under the proposals, which will go out for consultation, the governors' internal role will be unchanged, but the BBC will, in addition, be subject to new external requirements policed by Ofcom.

Broadly speaking, the BBC will be subject to the same external standard setting and monitoring as all other public service broadcasters for each of the three tiers regulated by Ofcom. In addition, the introduction of self-regulatory measures for commercial broadcasters, which will require them to review their own performance, will also help to create a common framework for all broadcasters. Broadly the same balance of self-regulation and external regulation will be struck for the BBC and other broadcasters. That is an important difference.

The overall result will be that the BBC will be subject to greater external regulation, and its position will be brought much closer to that of other broadcasters.

The debate has been a good start to a profoundly important and much larger debate. It will not be ignored. I have great sympathy with the views that have been expressed about the relationship between the BBC and Ofcom, and I hope that the BBC gets the message on that front. I still believe that we must be careful when it comes to ditching a form of regulation that has served this country well for a long time.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) asked about the costs of setting up Ofcom and then winding it up if the whole project were to fail. That is dealt with in the Bill. I assure the House that those costs would not fall on industry.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton emphasised the huge importance of the communications industry. It is instructive that the great bulk of the debate has been about what we see on our screens, and not about the vital issues of broad-band access and the need to make that technological change. Ofcom must have a duty to get on with that agenda.

My right hon. Friend said that when it comes to picking people for Ofcom we should not choose from the usual suspects. One of the most dismal features of going into a Department as a new Minister is being confronted with books of usual suspects for placing on quangos. It really is appalling, and we must do something about it. We must ensure that we get fresh people with ideas, and not just the great and the good and the recently retired. That is not entirely unheard of—I have appointed some good people recently—but it is almost unheard of.

I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) for his usual thoughtful contribution, and tonight it was exceptionally good. He emphasised how important it is to ensure that the debate focuses not merely on what is on the screen, but considers the much larger picture. I endorse his argument that Ofcom must be independent. The Competition Act 1980, the enterprise Bill and the independence given to the Bank of England are proof that we have been moving in that direction over the past five years, and I see no sign that that will not continue. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Ofcom must be accountable to Parliament.

The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) asked about the Joint Committee of the two Houses. I was fascinated, because I did not know how its membership is chosen, and I doubt whether many hon. Members in the Chamber know. Apparently, the usual channels—

Mr. Allan: Digital or analogue?

Dr. Howells: I wish we could switch the usual channels off. I am told that a pre-legislative Committee comprises members nominated in the same way as members of a Standing Committee. Members of a pre-legislative Committee can be from all parts of the House, and membership of a Select Committee does not preclude any Member from serving on such a body. That is good news. I hope that the very best Members are nominated, and chosen, for the Joint Committee, because we need them.

The hon. Member for Twickenham, to whom I have devoted much time, mentioned the importance of getting the competition issue right. I entirely agree: we must make certain that whatever Committee is established ensures that the concurrent powers operate properly and responsibly.

Call me old-fashioned, but I do not think we will ever achieve the digital switchover if people do not consider the content offered by digital broadcasting to be better than that currently offered by analogue. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) pointed out, that is true regardless of the number of technological anoraks working on the system. I am sure that I speak for every hon. Member present when I say that what our constituents want is the best television and radio possible. That does not mean turning it over to the "techies", and it does not mean figuring out how to turn up the juice on the transmitters. We must do all that; but, much more important, we must ensure that the content is the best that can be offered. That is the way in which we continue to nurture the creative industries that are such an important part of our economy—and let me add, returning to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, that we cannot do it by appointing the usual suspects to quangos and committees, wherever they are.

The Bill provides for three to six board members, because we think that a small board is appropriate for the preparatory stage. I know we have not talked much about the Bill, but that is what it is about. The Secretary of State has power, subject to negative resolution, to vary the number. As the time approaches when Ofcom will be regulating, it may be necessary to increase the board's size and expand its range of expertise, but we want to keep it fairly small so that it remains effective. It should be remembered that it is essentially a substitute for one regulator, although five or six may be involved in this instance.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said that we might be able to approach the whole question of the relationship between the BBC and Ofcom by looking at the backstop powers in the tier 3 regulation. We will take that suggestion very seriously, and I am sure it will be debated when we discuss the main Bill—the communications Bill.

My right hon. Friend also said that we must protect the remit for public-service broadcasting, wherever it is on the spectrum—whether it happens to be with the BBC at

[Dr. Howells]

one end, or with Channel 5 at the other. Channel 5 has been vilified for not having much of a public service remit, but it is currently transmitting a very good arts series, which is more than I can say for the other end of the spectrum.

My hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes, North-West (Mr. White), for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) and for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) and many others spoke of the importance of bringing together the content and infrastructure providers. That is indeed enormously important if we are to achieve our ambition of "broad-band Britain". I acknowledge the challenge, as do the Government. Only last month, my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness convened a summit entitled "Broad-band Britain: the content challenge" specifically to advance the important dialogue between the providers. That was an important step, and I sense that the message is getting through everywhere.

I think this is an excellent Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Office of Communications Bill *[Lords]* (Programme)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Office of Communications Bill *[Lords]*:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

(2) All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further message from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(3) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 5th February 2002.

(4) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(5) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(7) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 74.

Division No. 129] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*

Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin

Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm

Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Holmes, Paul
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim

Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS BILL *[LORDS]* *[MONEY]*

Queen's consent having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Office of Communications Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act; and

(ii) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums of money so payable under any other enactment; and

(b) the payment of money into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Fitzpatrick.]*

Question agreed to.

Home Energy Conservation Bill *[Money]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

10.13 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Home Energy Conservation Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of —

(a) any expenditure of the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided by virtue of any other Act.

The motion concerns the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner). On Second Reading, the Government said that they were content for the Bill to proceed into Committee, and that was agreed by the House. As the Under-Secretary with responsibility for housing, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) said on Second Reading, the Government recognise the merits of the Bill, although there will be work to do in Committee to ensure that the provisions are technically watertight.

We will need to reflect further on some points of detail and seek to ensure a close fit with the modernising Government agenda. The purpose of the Bill is to increase energy efficiency and help to eradicate fuel poverty in England and Wales. The Bill also seeks to make provision for the licensing of houses in multiple occupation.

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requires local authorities to prepare reports setting out energy conservation measures that are likely to improve domestic energy efficiency in their area. However, local authorities are not required to implement those reports. The main requirement of part 1 of the Bill is for local authorities to take measures, so far as reasonably practicable, to achieve targets for energy efficiency improvements set out in their reports under the 1995 Act. Part 2 of the Bill would enable the Secretary of State to issue guidance to local authorities on how they may discharge their functions under the 1995 Act to assist with implementation of the Government's fuel poverty strategy.

I recognise that parts 1 and 2 of the Bill will mean additional costs for some local authorities in implementing the requirements of clause 1. A sizeable number of authorities are making substantial progress in implementing, so far as reasonably practicable, the energy conservation measures set out in their reports under the 1995 Act. I will be looking closely at the issue with local government.

Part 3 of the Bill relates to houses in multiple occupation, or HMOs. The Government have had a long-standing commitment to introduce licensing of HMOs as part of a wider package of measures to address problems in the private rented sector. The Bill reflects what we are trying to achieve in respect of targeting the worst properties in that part of the market. Work on our own proposals involved detailed discussions with the Local Government Association about the likely additional cost to local authorities of implementing a licensing regime. As my hon Friend's proposals are broadly in line with the Government's—in respect of coverage and the property and management standards required—that work would seem to provide a sound basis for looking at the additional costs of implementing the Bill.

The new burdens amounted to £13 million, based on an estimated minimum of 120,000 HMOs in England being subject to the schemes. In practice, we expect the additional costs to local authorities to be spread over a number of years before income they receive from fees makes the regime self-financing. In Wales, it is estimated that up to 5,000 HMOs would be covered. Extrapolating that from the above figure would imply a comparative cost in the range of £500,000 to £700,000. I commend the resolution to the House.

10.18 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The Home Energy Conservation Bill received its Second Reading on 30 November 2001 and the Conservative party was pleased to be able to support the Bill in principle, although we had certain questions about it. Part 2 of the Bill is about the elimination of fuel poverty, which is something that our party has consistently supported. We know that the most vulnerable people in our society are hard hit by the winter and often lack the income to keep warm. A Bill that seeks to redress the issue of fuel poverty, and a money resolution that funds its elimination, will receive the support of the Conservative party.

Part 1 of the Bill concerns home energy conservation. The explanatory notes Bill gave five reasons why the target stipulated in the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 of achieving a 30 per cent. improvement in energy efficiency in residential accommodation by 2010 is not likely to be met. We agree with those five reasons. We have yet to receive from the Government a reassurance that the implementation of the Bill and the money provided by the resolution will enable the Government to guarantee that the targets of the 1995 Act will be achieved by the set date.

We have certain reservations and doubts about the licensing of homes in multiple occupation. The House will be aware of the problems that were found in Scotland since the scheme went live in October 2000. We are anxious that those problems are not repeated in England and Wales. Although we are broadly supportive of the intention to license, and view it as an opportunity to support the good tenant and deter the negligent landlord, we must ensure that we do not ignore the legitimate concerns of the private rented sector.

Many representative organisations have expressed their concerns about the Bill. They have described the proposed system as unnecessary regulation that will drive out the decent landlord and discourage others from letting their property. We all know that most landlords are good landlords because it is in their interests to be good landlords. We will deal with the licensing aspect in Committee.

Other problems have been discovered in Scotland. Many local authorities have been left to determine their own licence fees, which have varied widely. There has been considerable complaint about the lack of consultation. Moreover, there is no appeal system against arbitrary power exercised by a local authority. So with regard to the financial aspects of the Bill and the scheme, it is important to get from the Government clear advice on their estimates of the time scale as well as the amounts of funding. Landlords want to know whether they will receive assistance in making the considerable changes that they will have to make.

Local authorities are worried that they will yet again be asked to fund a new and increased duty out of their very limited resources. It would be helpful if the Minister could reassure the House that the funds that the Government will provide will cover local authorities' costs in the beginning before the scheme has got under way to such an extent that the licence fees can fund the scheme in full.

Generally, we support the Bill and are consequently happy to support the money resolution.

10.23 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): The Liberal Democrats were delighted when the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) introduced his Bill. We are happy to support it not only for what it does in improving tenants' quality of life but for its impact on the saving of energy that can be achieved at national level. We therefore support the money resolution. We can all make nit-picking points about what we would like changed, but the most important thing is for the legislation to pass through the House and be implemented as quickly as possible. The Bill's rapid passage, together with the money resolution, is important in achieving that objective.

10.24 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): With the leave of the House, perhaps I could respond briefly to the points that have been made.

I am grateful that both Opposition parties are broadly in favour of the Bill. I look forward to examining some of the detail with them. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) referred in particular to HMOs, licence fees and appeal systems, all of which are matters for the Committee stage.

I do not wish this to be a partisan Bill but I was stunned to hear the hon. Gentleman say that the previous Tory Government, in their 18 years in office, were committed to the elimination of fuel poverty. My recollection of the figures—I do not have them in front of me—is that poverty trebled under the Conservative Government. The figures for fuel poverty must have been similar. However, I always welcome a sinner who comes to repentance.

The hon. Gentleman made a just point about whether the Bill was adequately funded. I am glad to assure him that, in our view, it certainly is. That is good news because it represents a marked departure from the practice under the previous Government, whereby more and more burdens were placed on local authorities and allegedly funded from efficiency savings. We are abandoning that practice and taking the realistic view that if extra duties are imposed they should be reasonably funded. That is the Government's policy. The figure of £13 million to which I referred, based on an estimated 120,000 HMOs and covering the cost of licensing regimes, shows that we take our new principles seriously. I hope that I have answered the points and I look forward—

Mr. Sayeed: The right hon. Gentleman made a certain statement and I want to respond to it. I am glad that—after five years—the Government have decided that if they impose extra burdens on local authorities, they will fund those burdens. That is good news and we look forward to that funding in future.

As regards the suggestion that the previous Conservative Government were uninterested in home energy conservation, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that it was a Conservative Government who brought in the rules and the ability to fund—from public moneys—home energy conservation.

Mr. Meacher: I was not suggesting in any way that the previous Conservative Government were unconcerned about energy efficiency, although the range of measures that we have produced in five years has certainly accelerated the process substantially. I do not want to make much more of this point, but I was responding to the extraordinary statement that the Tory party is committed to the elimination of fuel poverty. I do not think that the record remotely suggests that—indeed, it suggests the opposite; but let us band together, in all the parties, in support of a good Bill. I commend the motion to the House and look forward to debating the measure in Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

BROAD ECONOMIC POLICY GUIDELINES

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Union Documents 8261/01 and 9326/01 on the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines; and supports the Government's welcome for the publication of the Guidelines in giving operational content to the conclusions of the Lisbon and Stockholm summits, in reflecting the importance of structural reform in tackling successfully the challenges of globalisation and competitiveness; and in promoting employment and social inclusion.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Motion made,

That, following the Order of 20th November 2000, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Frank Cook and Mr. Edward O'Hara be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Mr. Fitzpatrick.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That David Wright be discharged from the Administration Committee and Mr. John MacDougall be added to the Committee.—*[Keith Hill, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Orphan Funds

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

10.28 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): It may amuse the House to discover that shortly after the title for the debate was posted my office received a telephone call from an earnest young man in the Department of Health. He asked which orphans I was referring to and which of their Ministers would be the most appropriate person to respond. I trust that by the end of the next half hour, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury will not be wishing that the debate had indeed been assigned to one of her colleagues in the Department of Health.

The orphan assets to which I am referring are those held by life assurance companies. They are sometimes known as inherited estates and the Financial Services Authority has helpfully provided a working definition in its recent issues paper, No. 1—part of the with-profits review. The definition is as follows:

> "It is defined as the excess of assets maintained within the long-term fund over and above the amount required to meet liabilities."

Orphan assets are enormous. At the last estimate, 12 months ago, it was calculated that £45 billion-worth of orphan assets are held in the life assurance sector in this country, £30 billion of which is held in public limited companies and £15 billion in mutual companies. Even allowing for the decline in equities during that period, it is clear that the figure is of huge significance to the economy.

Those funds result from the build-up of successive reserves from years of over-cautious returns to with-profits policyholders. Life companies use them as an important tool to support their businesses. They provide companies with investment flexibility by enabling them to invest more in higher risk assets, thus achieving better investment returns than rivals which have to maintain greater liquidity. They act as an insulator against adverse market conditions. They are used as working capital to develop business lines and to expand into new services. Sometimes, they are used to underwrite market share by supporting commissions on new business. Above all, they are used for what is called market smoothing of the fund.

Those are not only legitimate uses of those funds; they are precisely what those funds should be used for, and it is only when an actuary advises that all those functions can be adequately met by a smaller sum than the fund contains that the question of distributing a part of the inherited estimate can arise.

In a ministerial statement on orphan assets issued on 24 February 1995, the then Minister with responsibility for corporate affairs stated:

> "A life office may make distributions from surplus in the long-term fund as shown by the statutory annual actuarial valuation. It is common practice to make distributions to policyholders and shareholders in the proportion 90:10. In assessing policyholders' reasonable expectations, the Department would expect this ratio to be used as the basis of attribution between policyholders and shareholders."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 1995; Vol. 255, c. 361W.]

Just over a year ago, in December 2000, the AXA Life Insurance Company drove a coach and horses through that definition of the policyholders' reasonable expectation by forcing a deal through the High Court whereby it obtained for shareholders not 10 per cent. of the value of the company's orphan assets but 45 per cent.

Given that the AXA inherited estate was valued at £1.7 billion, its shareholder value was enhanced by £595 million at the policyholders' expense. Some say that the sum is larger, but I will stick with the figure calculated by an independent actuary for the Consumers Association, which challenged the deal on behalf of the policyholders. I pay tribute to the work that it did in pursuing the case at the time. It rightly saw that the case would inevitably establish a precedent in the industry and encourage other life companies to do the same.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will be pleased to hear that I do not propose to rehearse tonight all the details of AXA's deal with the policyholders, if indeed one can call it a deal—rip-off might be more accurate. However, I want to challenge her to act in concert with the Financial Services Authority, so that similar deals cannot be struck in future. As she will know, it is rumoured that the Prudential is considering what the market euphemistically calls a re-attribution and distribution of its orphan assets—a deal whereby the policyholders would be swindled out of their own inheritance by lawyers who tell them that, in exchange for giving up their contingent rights to the fund, they will get jam today.

My hon. Friend will recall, in the Old Testament, the selling of Esau's "contingent interest" in their father's estate to his brother Jacob for what was described as a "mess of pottage"—or a bowl of soup. For policyholders in Prudential, the orphan assets are evaluated at between £5 billion and £7 billion. That is an awful lot of pottage, but I suspect that it would provide very little comfort to the thousands of policyholders who are currently receiving advice from the Prudential that their policy is not on target.

Let me read to the House the lines that have become the most dreaded communication to home owners around the country:

> "We consider it is possible that your Plan may not pay out enough. To repay the target amount for this Plan when it matures needs future investment growth to be towards the top end of the current projection rates set by the independent regulator. In view of this you may wish to think about taking action."

These are the words highlighted on the Prudential endowment plan update of Mrs. Nancy Yuill, a copy of which I have here. It shows a potential shortfall of £14,600 against her mortgage repayment target of just £53,500. What Mrs. Yuill wants to know, along with tens of thousands of people like her, is why the orphan assets are not being used in the interests of policyholders to smooth out the peaks and troughs of the market as fund managers have always claimed that they would do. The money is there—all £30 billion of it. It is not being used to help the policyholders now that they need it.

Does my hon. Friend not share my disgust that people who have planned their savings and retirement on the basis that with-profits policies would provide them with a stable return are now seeing companies, such as the Prudential, sharpening their carving knives to cut them out of their fair share of the orphan assets that are supposed to underwrite their security?

With-profits funds are marketed to consumers as a lower risk way to invest. They are supposed to protect policyholders from the vagaries of the stock market by drawing on the reserves built up over years. They may not climb the heights of direct market investment vehicles, such as unit trusts, but they do not plunge the depths either. That is the theory.

In practice, there is a weak regulatory framework for with-profits funds. Directors have their obligations to maximise shareholder returns but have no corresponding duty to policyholders. The operation of the funds is not transparent. There is no obligation to disclose the amount of charges or the allocations made to policyholders or why these may differ from investment returns such as when money has been transferred into the reserves. There is no clear link between the investment performance and the annual bonuses.

Such a lack of transparency has been heavily criticised by the Consumers Association, which complains that such complexity can act as a barrier to competition. It says:

> "It makes it virtually impossible for consumers to work out whether or not they are getting a good deal and if it's worth switching to another provider. Moreover, even if it is possible to work out the merits of switching, it's often futile. The charging structures of many of these products is such that in many cases it's not worth switching to a new product as there won't be enough time to claw back the losses. This feature of product design means there is little scope for consumers to put competitive pressure on insurance companies."

I trust my hon. Friend will agree that because policyholders are effectively locked into the contracts, there is a special obligation on the regulator to protect their interests.

The FSA's paper "Process for dealing with attribution of inherited estates" is an interesting discussion document that I welcome, but it fails to address the central issue of valuation and simply sets out various suggestions about the process itself. The FSA has been particularly reluctant to disclose the names of those companies that have been in discussion with it about orphan assets re-attribution or distribution. As ever, it hides behind the cloak of commercial confidentiality. It is a card that my hon. Friend may consider it has overplayed.

I suggest that my hon. Friend submits section 348 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, which prohibits release of commercially sensitive information, to the Lord Chancellor's advisory group on the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for review. Section 348 should be amended to restrict the prohibitions on disclosure and to allow the release of information that is in the public interest. Most information relating to attributions or re-attributions of orphan assets would, I believe, be in the public interest when one considers the need to protect the consumer in respect of funds that represent such a vast sum as £30 billion.

Transparency on that matter will certainly restrict the scope for creditors to act on behalf of shareholders to maximise their interests against the interests of policyholders. To that extent, I do not doubt that transparency would be extremely commercially sensitive. In fact, I hope that it may be considered prejudicial to commercial interests, just as withholding that same information is prejudicial to policyholders' interests. In my view, the Government and the regulator must act to protect the weaker party.

I urge my hon. Friend to ask the FSA to publish the names of companies that recently have been, or are currently, in discussion with the FSA regarding attribution, re-attribution, distribution or valuation of their inherited estate. I urge her to ask the FSA to publish both the shareholder value, disclosed to policyholders during any attribution or re-attribution, and the value subsequently presented on the balance sheet to shareholders, with an account of any discrepancy between the two. I urge her to ask the FSA to make it clear to the industry that any deals relating to orphan assets should not proceed until the review of the process and issues about ownership and valuation are conclusively established in regulation.

I also urge my hon. Friend to ask the FSA to reinforce the 90:10 rule, so that any proxy negotiator, such as those proposed by the FSA in its issues paper, should only be able to negotiate upwards from a base of 90 per cent. of policyholder value. The orphan assets should be ring-fenced so that at any given valuation point the economic value of the estate to the respective parties can be identified. That would ensure that deals represent a clear choice for policyholders between accepting a one-off payment or retaining valuable rights with a worth that is clearly quantified for their future benefit.

In particular, I urge my hon. Friend to ban deals, such as the AXA case, in which ownership is not clearly identified. Shareholders are not philanthropists and deals for contingent rights in the inherited estate are presented as if there may never be a time when the value of the fund is crystallised in a distribution. They are simply scams. Shareholders would not pay supposedly good-will gestures up front without the certain knowledge that the re-attribution of the estate following the deal is going to increase substantially shareholder value or shareholder dividend, and usually both.

Finally, I urge my hon. Friend to examine carefully, in respect of corporate accountability matters, the use to which companies have been free to put the orphan assets. Pension mis-selling was an industry scandal that went to the heart of corporate accountability. In a mutual company, the policyholders share in the risks and profits of running the business, and they must therefore bear the costs of any corporate wrongdoing. However, the whole purpose of a public company is that shareholders, not the policyholders, bear the corporate risks.

It is outrageous that many companies have sought to pay their pension mis-selling compensation out of the orphan assets. It is even more outrageous that companies such as Prudential, which was recently fined £650,000 for its delay in paying such compensation, should proceed to raid the orphan assets to pay its fines as well. That must be stopped.

The FSA has been extremely lax on the matter and has allowed the industry to use the inherited estates as some sort of shareholder slush fund to the detriment of the policyholders. In any future re-attributions, I trust that the FSA will make sure that all such borrowings from the orphan assets to pay out compensation and fines will be credited back to policyholders.

I welcome the fact that the FSA has started to examine the matter of with-profits funds. It has examined the process, and I welcome that. I trust that my hon. Friend will agree that the process alone is not enough. Policyholders must see effective regulation that protects their interests, so that the orphan assets are properly used to smooth the market downturn currently causing misery to policyholders such as Mrs. Yuill. Those assets must not

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

become the target of shareholders' greed, to be carved up behind the back of the very policyholders whom the FSA is supposed to protect.

10.47 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I welcome once again the opportunity to speak about life insurance issues, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on securing the debate. As I am sure he appreciates, the life insurance industry is currently being examined closely from various directions—not just from the perspective of the Department of Health. It is right that hon. Members with an interest in these matters should try to make sure that Ministers are aware of their views on developments.

It may help if I run through the general background to the issue. The inherited estate, also called orphan assets or orphan funds, arises as a natural consequence of the smoothing of investment returns, which is such a significant part of the with-profits concept. In years when investment returns are good, a percentage of those investment returns is retained within the fund instead of being added to annual bonuses, so that in a year when investment returns are poor, bonuses can be supplemented from those retained funds.

However, in the long bull market in equities in the 1990s, some companies found themselves with significant surplus assets over and above those needed to meet not only the bonuses that they had already guaranteed but any future discretionary terminal bonuses. In some cases, the funds have been allowed to accumulate over such a long period that they have effectively passed from one generation of policyholders to another, hence the term "inherited estate".

My hon. Friend mentioned some of the sums involved, which are indeed huge, and he set out some of the uses of orphan assets. The inherited estate can act as the insurer's working capital, giving the business greater stability. That can act in policyholders' best interests: it provides the investment flexibility to enable greater exposure to higher risk assets such as equities, which over the long term should deliver higher investment returns; it facilitates the smoothing of bonus rates; it provides cushioning against a sudden or prolonged downturn in investment returns; and it can be used to support the costs of writing new insurance business, or can be invested in better services for policyholders.

As my hon. Friend said, however, questions then arise about how the funds are quantified, who actually owns them and how and when they should be distributed. That situation is further complicated for some life companies by demutualisation, which leads to the end of ownership of the fund by policyholders and to the introduction of shareholders who then also claim an interest in the inherited estate.

As my hon. Friend knows, the principles governing the attribution of the inherited estate between policyholders and shareholders were set out in a statement on 25 February 1995 by the then Minister with responsibility for consumer affairs, who was responsible for insurance matters within the Department of Trade and Industry, which then had responsibility for the life insurance industry. Those principles have been accepted by subsequent Governments.

Where a distribution is to be made from the surplus in the long-term fund, or rather from the inherited estate, it is common practice to make distributions to policyholders and shareholders in the following proportions: 90 per cent. to policyholders and 10 per cent. to shareholders. That is subject to variation where there is clear evidence, whether it is based on the company's circumstances, statements or practice, that a different proportion is appropriate in respect of the surplus arising from a particular part of the business. The main difference between the situation in 1995, when those principles were set out, and today is the existence of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and the Financial Services Authority. The Government are no longer the regulator; that role is now taken by the FSA.

The FSA also follows the principles set out in the ministerial statement made in 1995. My hon. Friend raised the case of AXA. When AXA Equity and Law took its proposed attribution of its inherited estate to the courts for approval, the FSA made a witness statement that included a further statement of the principles generally to be followed in respect of proposals that are different from the circumstances contemplated in the 1995 statement. More recently, as he has noted, the FSA has launched a with-profits review, including an issues paper under the heading "Process for dealing with attribution of inherited estates", which was published in October 2001. The results of that consultation will feed into the overall conclusions of the with-profits review, which should, I think, be available in spring this year.

The options for review are wide ranging. Broadly speaking, they range from modification of the status quo to more radical alternatives. A modified status quo would see reports from an appointed actuary plus either an independent actuary or independent expert coupled with FSA scrutiny and greater disclosure to policyholders of the progress of the company's proposals. Alternatively, the roles of negotiating on behalf of policyholders and scrutinising proposals from a regulatory point of view could be combined within the FSA. As a variation on that alternative, an independent actuary or independent expert could be appointed as the policyholders' negotiator, leaving the FSA solely with its regulatory scrutiny.

The other options on which the FSA has consulted are either to have a proxy negotiator acting on behalf of policyholders, with the responsibilities of the FSA and of an independent actuary or independent expert left unchanged, or to have consultation with policyholders on a company's proposals in a manner that is sufficiently public to allow other interested parties to contribute.

Mr. Gardiner: Those are the proposals that are set out in the issues paper, but my hon. Friend will know that the negotiator who is acting on the policyholders' behalf is said to be there in order to obtain the best possible deal. Of course, that is based on a presumption that a deal should be done. Does not she agree that, until we move from the issue of a process in which somebody negotiating on the policyholders' behalf is looking to achieve a deal, rather than to say that there may be no deal on the table, and until the issue of valuation is addressed, it will be impossible for us to move forward from that point?

Ruth Kelly: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I am sure he agrees that transparency is an important step forward, and that moving along that road will mean a significant improvement for policyholders. I look forward to his contribution to the FSA review.

The introduction of more open consultation with policyholders as a body raises difficult questions about commercial confidentiality and possible delays. My hon. Friend has raised several anxieties about that and I listened to his comments with interest, although I do not understand exactly how to get around the problem of commercial confidentiality when trying to encourage contributions from as wide a range of parties as possible. Perhaps we will discuss the matter after the debate.

The Government know that the Consumers Association has consistently argued that ownership of the inherited estate needs to be established before attributing or reattributing all or part of the surplus assets. The Consumers Association also disputes that the attribution of the inherited estate in the AXA case conformed with the 90:10 principle, as my hon. Friend said earlier. However, I may disappoint him by not making a definitive statement on those issues tonight.

When an insurer presents proposals to the regulator on its inherited estate, they must be considered on their individual merits, bearing in mind the general principles that I have outlined, to which the regulator and the Government have already subscribed.

It is right that orphan assets are used to smooth investment returns, but that does not automatically mean that policyholders have a right to draw them down in times of difficulty. Orphan assets should have a proper use, partly to cushion the company from unforeseen circumstances in future. If surpluses go too low, that opens the company to risk in the event of a sharp fall in the stock market, or another external event. However, I understand my hon. Friend's comments about the rightful demands of policyholders and the need to take their interests into account.

I am sure that a wide range of views has been put to the FSA in response to its issues paper on inherited estates. Attributions and proposals to buy out policyholder interests in an inherited estate are typically very lengthy processes and involve complex technical and actuarial considerations. None of that makes transparency or communicating what is happening to policyholders or their representatives any easier. Some of the information provided to the regulator as part of the process will inevitably be market sensitive and it may not be possible to share it with policyholders. However, the FSA is actively considering how the process of negotiation and the scrutiny of proposals can be made more transparent as part of its with-profits review. I await its findings with interest.

Outside the regulator, we have the Sandler review that the Treasury commissioned into the structure of the UK retail investment market. It is too early to speculate about its recommendations, especially as it has been established as an independent review.

However, much activity touches directly on the nature and scope of the life insurance industry and the products that it creates and markets. That should go some way towards reassuring my hon. Friend that we take the matter seriously. It is important to recognise that the FSA, as the regulator of the insurance industry, seeks to operate fairly within its statutory objectives and is moving to improve the regulation of insurance—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

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House of Commons

Tuesday 15 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Free Television Licences

1. **Mr. David Marshall** (Glasgow, Shettleston): How many pensioners in Scotland receive the free television licences for people over 75 years of age. [25070]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): More than 300,000 pensioners in Scotland benefit from free television licences, but this measure forms just part of our overall package of generous support for pensioners.

Mr. Marshall: I thank the Minister for his reply, which shows just what an excellent and worthwhile measure that is. Will he convey to his ministerial colleagues the suggestion that the qualifying age should be reduced from 75 to 70? In view of the difficulties that many poor people and those on low incomes have in meeting the ever-increasing cost of the television licence fee, will he also convey to them that now is perhaps the time to consider alternative methods of funding the BBC?

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his initial helpful remarks. As far as funding the BBC is concerned, it has been looked at a number of times and this and previous Governments concluded that the licence fee is the best way to achieve that. On reducing the age of qualifying for free television licences, perhaps my hon. Friend and, indeed, I might have to declare an interest in that in the near future.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I used to be director of Age Concern Scotland, and we had a number of demands for the then Tory Government, none of which was accepted. This Government have implemented those demands one by one by one, including free television licences for the very elderly, who are less able to take advantage of other things, such as concessionary fares. That shows the generous way in which the Government have dealt with our old people.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): As we are discussing benefits that are available to pensioners in Scotland, are the Minister and his colleagues in the Scotland Office disappointed that the dead hand of Westminster has put paid to free personal care for Scottish pensioners as originally envisaged, or are he and his—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should sit down. She is going way beyond the scope of the question, so the Minister should not respond.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Can the Minister give an idea of the cost of reducing the age of those eligible for free television licences from 75 to 65?

Mr. Foulkes: I cannot off the top of my head give an exact figure, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would not expect me to. What I can tell him is that the cost would be very substantial and we would have to consider it in the light of all the other demands placed on the budget, especially as they relate to the elderly. I think that it was more important to introduce the £200 winter fuel allowance for every old person than it was to provide free television licences for them, which would be very expensive.

Regulation

2. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): How many new regulatory measures affecting Scottish business the Government have (a) introduced and (b) abolished since 1999. [25071]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): In introducing new regulations, the Government are very careful to take account of the needs of the business community.

Mr. Prisk: I am grateful for that concise reply. Given that small businesses in Scotland spend more than 31 hours every month trying to comply with regulations, does the Secretary of State agree that those regulations represent a burden and put Scottish businesses at a competitive disadvantage? Does she also agree that the improving regulations in Scotland unit has failed in its particular task?

Mrs. Liddell: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I know something about the small business community in Scotland, having previously run a small business, having been a sole trader and having set up other small businesses. I believe that the small business community in Scotland, like the overall business community in Scotland, is very grateful for the fact that since 1997 the Government have reduced corporation tax by nearly 25 per cent. In addition, we are committed to extending the 10p corporation tax rate, we are reducing and simplifying value added tax procedures and our capital gains tax regime is one of the simplest in the world and much more favourable than that in the United States. Indeed, in introducing what is in effect an MOT on regulation, which ensures that regulations are checked on a 10-yearly basis, the Scottish Executive are taking the sensible way forward, and it has been mirrored in the approbation that the small business community has shown towards such an approach.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the recent Trades Union Congress research on the burden of regulation on business? Does she agree that at 5p a week, the cost of maternity provision is certainly a price worth paying for women of child-bearing age? Does she also agree that issues such as fire prevention, which costs less than 1p a week, are very important? If our businesses honoured their responsibilities, we would not need such legislation.

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes a good and important point. In reality, much regulation is aimed at ensuring that the good employers who implement good conditions of work for their employees are not undercut by unscrupulous cowboys. Indeed, I draw attention to the fact that the national minimum wage has transformed the lives of 135,000 Scots. The benefits of regulation far outweigh the costs. Notwithstanding that, the Government have been anxious to ensure, through the introduction of the Small Business Service, that the level of regulation is proportionate, so that small firms continue to grow and our economy becomes even more competitive.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Is it not the case that much unnecessary regulation in Scotland comes from the Government's block on using derogations available under EU legislation? In that regard, will the Secretary of State seek to persuade the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to use the derogations available to alleviate the plight of small farmers and crofters who are drowning under a sea of paper?

Mrs. Liddell: One of the Government's commitments is to be an active player in the European Union, but we also want to make sure that the systems under which we operate are proportionate and suited to the operation of our economy and our industries. I believe that we are doing that. In 1997, Britain was very much on the sidelines of Europe, and we have since become leaders in the EU. As a consequence, we are able to have a much greater impact on regulation to suit the economy not only of the urban but of the rural community.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May I caution the Secretary of State against the siren voices that call for complete absence of regulation? We are mindful of the financial scandals that are occurring—for example, those concerning Independent Insurance Co. Ltd. and Equitable Life, whose policyholders are writing to us. We need to exercise a light regulatory touch while fostering economic progress. Is not the big issue in Scotland's economy today the historically low growth of Scottish businesses? There is a need for the Government and local communities to ensure that those businesses are stimulated so that their growth equals the UK average and there are least 200,000 more people in employment.

Mrs. Liddell: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Like most Members of the House, whenever Equitable Life is mentioned I have to declare an interest because, again like most Members, I have policies with that company. It is important that we create the proper climate for entrepreneurship so that new firms can be set up. Historically, Scotland has a problem with the formation of new firms, and the Government and the Scottish Executive are working together to address that. At the same time, there is a need for transparent and easily understood regulation to ensure that the most vulnerable in our communities—in that group I include pensioners and those nearing retirement age—have the maximum protection available.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Will the Secretary of State come clean and admit to the House that Labour's extra burdens on business are destroying jobs? Is she aware that, in 2001, 20,842 jobs were lost in Scotland and that Britain as a whole fell from ninth to 19th in the world competitiveness league? How many more people have to lose their jobs before Labour realises that the business of government is not the government of business?

Mrs. Liddell: Despite the fact that many members of the right hon. Gentleman's party lost their jobs in 1997—losses that were consolidated in 2001—I point out that Scotland has the highest levels of employment and the lowest levels of unemployment for more than a generation. Perhaps if he knew rather more about Scotland he would be able to understand that, and he would be prepared to join me in congratulating those businesses that have created jobs in Scotland and those people who have moved themselves from welfare into work, particularly the long-term unemployed, and he would be prepared to recognise the scale of the achievement in Scotland. There are more people in work now than there were when his Government left office in 1997.

Friends of Scotland

3. **Mr. John Lyons** (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): What plans she has for future activity as part of her Friends of Scotland initiative. [25072]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): At the end of this week I shall travel to Hong Kong and Guangzhou in China and to Malaysia on trade-related business, and I shall take the opportunity to launch the Friends of Scotland initiative there. Indeed, in all my international travels I shall make a point of raising the initiative, both with posts abroad and with the expatriate Scottish community.

Mr. Lyons: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. It is important that we use her visit to make sure that millions of Scots all over the world know about Friends of Scotland and know that they can play a part in the initiative. To some extent, we are pushing an open door. People want to help and we need to use my right hon. Friend's visit to say to people, "If you want to come back to Scotland on holiday or on business, you will be made very welcome and you can play an important part in shaping Scotland's future."

Mrs. Liddell: I thank my hon. Friend. I am looking forward to attending a Burns supper in Hong Kong next Tuesday night, and I shall certainly make a point of reiterating the fact that we always welcome expatriate Scots who return to Scotland. My hon. Friend made an important point. I am have been much taken with the response of the business community and people in diplomatic posts abroad and their enthusiasm for the Friends of Scotland initiative, which has been helped by the ready response to it from the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the First Minister and the leaders of Scotland's business and commercial communities.

We are pushing at an open door and it is incumbent on every Member of Parliament, regardless of which political party they support, to do what they can to encourage expatriate Scots and those who regard themselves as friends of Scotland to come back and visit Scotland and see the changes that have taken place, not least the establishment by the Labour Government of the Scottish Parliament, of which Robert Burns would have approved.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that some of the best friends of Scotland work in the film, television and music industries and that one of the best ways to help them in their work promoting Scotland throughout the world would be an early start to the construction of a central Scotland film studio?

Mrs. Liddell: Matters such as the construction of a film studio are for the Scottish Executive to deal with, but I entirely support the hon. Gentleman's point about the importance of the creative industries, particularly film and television. We have only to consider the huge success of "Monarch of the Glen", which is now viewed by 50 million people, to see that it is a fantastic showcase for the highlands of Scotland. I was glad to be able to support that with a reception in Dover house just before Christmas. The advisory committee that I have formed to help me with the Friends of Scotland initiative includes Douglas Rae who, of course, is the producer of "Monarch of the Glen" and the upcoming new film "Charlotte Gray".

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): When my right hon. Friend makes her visit to east Asia, on which I warmly congratulate her, will she take the opportunity to reach out to the many thousands of Malaysian students who have studied in Scottish universities, many of whom have got degree certification at their universities through a joint partnership with the university of Abertay in Dundee? Will she use the connections that she will make with Malaysian business men who have graduated from Scottish universities to bolster Scottish commerce and trade in future?

Mrs. Liddell: As the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), my Opposition shadow, well knows, Scottish universities have strong links, especially with Malaysia. She and I, as graduates of Strathclyde university, know about huge initiatives in Malaysia, particularly in business education. I know from the connections of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) with the university of Abertay that he is well aware of the huge opportunities available there.

My officials have met, and are meeting, representatives of the Scottish universities so that we can join together to promote Scottish education internationally. In both China and Malaysia, I intend to meet representatives of the academic community so that we can showcase the best of Scottish education and the huge benefits that our economy derives from students from the far east coming to Scotland, particularly to get postgraduate degrees.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the Friends of Scotland initiative and I look forward to the day when we have a dedicated Westminster Minister to promote friendship with Northern Ireland as well. When the Secretary of State is in the far east, I hope that she will be mindful of the near west and the strong Ulster Scots tradition in Northern Ireland. We are willing to be supportive and trust that she will develop further the existing links with Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Liddell: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his supportive remarks. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is very much a friend of Northern Ireland and, indeed, a friend of Scotland. As the Prime Minister has recognised, in showcasing all the component parts of the United Kingdom we present an even more attractive picture of the UK, not just to tourists but to bring in inward investment. Our standing in the world is high at the moment; this is an ideal opportunity for us to cement warm feelings for all the component parts of the UK, wherever we work internationally.

Barnett Formula

4. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): When she last discussed the future of the Barnett formula with Treasury Ministers. [25073]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have regular discussions with Treasury Ministers on a wide range of issues. I can tell the hon. Gentleman and the House for the third time that there are no Government plans to review the Barnett formula.

Mr. Winterton: I ask my supplementary question as a totally committed Conservative and Unionist Member of the House. Does the Minister accept that the Barnett formula was introduced some two decades ago as a temporary measure, and that it currently produces levels of public expenditure per capita in Scotland far greater than in many areas of England, where there are equal problems of poverty and deprivation? For that reason, does he not believe that the current situation is unfair? Although he speaks as a Scottish Minister, does he not believe that there should be a review and reform of the Barnett formula, despite his initial response to my question?

Mr. Foulkes: I have never doubted the hon. Gentleman's Unionist credentials. One of the reasons why I enjoy Scottish questions is that I hear English Tories such as the hon. Gentleman say that the Barnett formula is far too generous to Scotland. I am fed up of hearing the other point of view—the moaning minnies, the whingers of the Scottish National party, saying that the formula is unfair to Scotland. The truth is that the Barnett formula is stable, flexible and fair. If the English Tories think that it is too generous and the SNP thinks that it is too mean, I think that it is just about right.

Mr. David Stewart (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Barnett formula has brought tremendous benefits to Scotland? For example, in 1997 when the Government came to power, the Scottish Office spent £15 billion. Today, the Scottish Executive spends almost £21 billion. Is not that the benefit of Scotland being within the United Kingdom?

Mr. Foulkes: There speaks the real voice of Scotland. It is the success of the United Kingdom Government's economic strategy and our policies that enable the Scottish Executive to have the extra money to spend. An extra £3.4 billion of new money has been spent in Scotland over the period of the current spending review, plus an extra £200 million in last year's Budget, and, as if that were not enough, an extra £86 million in the pre-Budget review. I wish that some of those who try to pretend that they represent Scotland would understand, appreciate and acknowledge that.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): As health spending comes under the terms of the Barnett formula, can the hon. Gentleman tell us whether Scotland Ministers have had discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions or the Scottish Executive since 12 October last year on the subject of attendance allowance for the elderly receiving free personal care in Scotland, what advice they have given, and whether they would be prepared to publish the correspondence?

Mr. Foulkes: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for asking me that question. I can therefore announce to the House that the Executive have announced today, after dialogue with the Department for Work and Pensions and other Whitehall Departments, that they will meet the full cost of delivering free personal care from within Executive resources.

Mrs. Lait: I am delighted that the Scottish Executive have resolved the dilemma that they had with Whitehall, but that does not negate my question about the discussions that Scotland Office Ministers have had. For the sake of clarity, can the Minister tell us whether he or the Secretary of State backed the transfer of funds from Whitehall to Scotland or supported the Scottish Executive?

Mr. Foulkes: I had a number of discussions with Malcolm Chisholm during the consideration by the care development review. I made the views of Whitehall extremely clear on every occasion.

Economic Trends

5. **Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): When she last met the Chairman of Scottish Enterprise to discuss trends in the Scottish economy; and if she will make a statement. [25074]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I meet regularly with a wide range of bodies and people to discuss aspects of the Scottish economy, including Scottish Executive Ministers and senior officials from Scottish Enterprise. The fundamentals of the Scottish economy as part of the United Kingdom remain strong—high levels of employment, low levels of unemployment, strong public finances, low inflation and the lowest interest rates since the 1960s.

Mr. Salmond: Is the Secretary of State aware that, since she told us last month that the Scottish economy had been performing well, there have been further thousands of job losses in Scotland? We are only three months away from the imposition of the aggregates tax, which will take another £40 million out of the Scottish economy and increase the cost of every infrastructure project in every constituency and council area of Scotland. Now that the Northern Ireland Assembly has successfully negotiated with the Treasury exemption from certain aspects of the aggregates tax, will she open discussions with the Treasury, or will we have another swindle in which, as we have just heard, Whitehall Departments take more money out of the Scottish economy, with further thousands of job losses in Scotland?

Mrs. Liddell: Not only is the hon. Gentleman content to whinge for Scotland, but he does not even care about its environment. The extent of his self-interest is dramatic. This is the man who was going to leave Parliament and decried us; he was going to go to the Scottish Parliament and then he was going to come back. At Christmas time he told us that the Scottish Parliament would soon be good enough to accept him back. There is no end to his self-interest—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State should tell us about her policies, not those of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Sewel Motions

25. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): If she will make a statement on the operation of the Sewel motions procedure. [25039]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): The Sewel motions procedure, which is reflected in the memorandum of understanding between the Government and the devolved Administrations, states that this Parliament would not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the agreement of the devolved legislature. The devolved Administration are responsible for seeking such agreement. Sewel motions are the method by which the Scottish Executive seek to obtain the agreement of the Scottish Parliament. They are a matter of practice, not law. A Sewel motion, whether it is approved or not, has no bearing on the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, as set out in the Scotland Act 1998, or on the legislative competence of the UK Parliament.

Mr. Carmichael: I thank the Advocate-General for that answer, but does she agree that the operation of Sewel motions presents a number of practical problems? It does not allow Members of this House to question the Ministers who have direct executive responsibility, because they are part of the Scottish Executive. Will she have discussions with the Leader of the House to ensure that, in future, when legislation that comes before this House as the result of a Sewel motion has been given its

Second Reading, it will be committed to a Special Standing Committee under Standing Order No. 91, which will allow evidence to be taken from Scottish Ministers?

The Advocate-General: I regret to tell the hon. Gentleman that I see no reason whatever to enter into such discussions with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. Of course, he is entitled to enter into such discussions if he wishes to do so.

On procedure in the Scottish Parliament, it is entirely a matter for that Parliament to decide how to deal with the motions. As for procedure in this House, the UK Parliament always has competence to deal with these matters. Hon. Members are always entitled to raise any issues about which they want to speak that are within that competence.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does the Advocate-General accept that the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which is currently travelling through the House, is a very good example of legislation that has been supported by the Scottish Executive and by the Government in this House and that it will bring enormous benefits to Scotland? Does she agree that, rather than trying to invent mechanisms to cause difficulties, the Liberals, whom I thought were our chums, would be much better advised to co-operate with us in processing the Bill as quickly as possible?

The Advocate-General: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The Scottish Parliament has co-operated on many occasions with the UK Government in order to bring forward legislation, probably more quickly than the Scottish Parliament alone might have done, bearing in mind its heavy legislative programme. The Proceeds of Crime Bill is a very good example of that. Therefore, my view is that the two Parliaments are working well together to help the citizens of Scotland to get the sort of legislative programme that they deserve.

Human Rights (Devolution)

26. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): When she last had discussions with the Scottish Executive on human rights cases involving devolution. [25040]

The Advocate-General: My officials and I have discussions with the Scottish Executive when necessary about devolution issues that raise human rights points.

Miss McIntosh: Following my supplementary question on the same point during Question Time last month, will the hon. and learned Lady confirm that she intervened in 20 cases? Rather than simply saying that she has saved money, will she explain, without false modesty, what added value she has brought to her position?

The Advocate-General: I think it was 20 cases—I thought I had written to the hon. Lady about that. I shall give her the exact figure, which is in that region. I cannot go through the whole 20 cases now, but I intervene in cases for a range of reasons. For example, I might wish to bring to the court's attention the position of the law in England and Wales. In the misuse of drugs legislation, it was important to clarify the position and its effect in England and Wales. The reasons therefore differ in the 20 cases. I am more than happy to hold informal discussions with the hon. Lady about them.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Lay Magistracy

29. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): What plans he has to encourage more applications to join the lay magistracy; and if he will make a statement. [25043]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): The Lord Chancellor's local advisory committees tailor recruitment initiatives to local needs so that magistrates benches are representative of the community. In Norfolk, the advisory committee participated, for example, in a regional television broadcast and had interviews with magistrates published in the local press. Such activities led to an increase in the number of magistrates in Norfolk from 13 in 1997 to 30 in 2001.

The Lord Chancellor has commissioned a national strategy for recruiting lay magistrates, which will be announced shortly.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful for that reply, but the Government are not doing enough. Is the Parliamentary Secretary aware that a record number of lay magistrates resigned last year? Many of those in my constituency cited low morale and a sense of being undervalued by the Government. Is he also aware that 22 magistrates courts closed last year and that Fakenham court in west Norfolk is threatened with closure? That makes local justice more remote from local people, not least because the local press does not report cases in much detail. Why do not the Government do more for local justice?

Mr. Wills: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to my answer. I explained that the number of magistrates recruited in Norfolk increased from 13 in 1997 to 30 in 2001. That hardly squares with his allegations of a lack of interest or morale among those who wish to be magistrates. We take local justice seriously, but he knows that the closure of magistrates courts is a matter for magistrates courts committees.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend knows that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has, through the advisory committee for the appointment of magistrates in Lancashire, tried to achieve a better representation of people on the magistrates bench. Does he appreciate that employers make it increasingly difficult for working people to take time off to be a lay magistrate? Can we do more to ensure that employers recognise that we need ordinary working people to serve on the magistrates bench and that that is an important element of justice in this country?

Mr. Wills: My hon. Friend is right. That is why the Department is supporting the Magistrates Association project, which tries to draw employers' attention to the transferable skills that magistrates acquire through their work and training, apart from the civic appropriateness of people serving as magistrates.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does the Parliamentary Secretary accept that the number of magistrates will increase and people will be encouraged to join the magistracy by a confirmation that Government policy under the Auld proposals and the subsequent legislation supports an increase, not a reduction? Will he confirm that it is Government policy to increase the number of lay magistrates in England and Wales, not reduce them? Does he have figures to show the number of new appointments of people aged between 18 and 38, not between 38 and 58, since the Labour party came to office in 1997? Without significant new recruitment of younger people, we shall have an imbalanced bench, which is unrepresentative of the community with which it deals.

Mr. Wills: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the need to ensure that magistrates benches are properly diverse and represent the communities that they serve, and that is clearly something that we strive to achieve. I do not have the figures for precisely those age breakdowns to hand, but I shall be happy to write to him with the details. He will be aware that we are still consulting on the proposals made by Lord Justice Auld, so I am not in a position to announce policy on the matter today, but I can assure him that the House will have plenty of opportunity at the appropriate time to debate our responses to Auld.

Magistrates Courts (Fines Enforcement)

30. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the system for enforcement of payment of fines by magistrates courts; and if he will make a statement. [25044]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): Responsibility for warrant execution for non-payment of fines was transferred from the police to magistrates courts committees on 1 April 2001. The Lord Chancellor's Department conducted a review of the new enforcement regime and concluded that, although there is significant room for improvement, the foundation has now been laid for the more effective enforcement of fines in future.

Mr. Luff: I am encouraged by that reply, as it suggests that the anecdotal evidence collected by me and other hon. Members that there is quite a serious problem with the enforcement of fines in magistrates courts is correct. Will the Minister do all in his power to make it easier for people to pay their fines—for example, whenever possible by retaining the facility to pay fines at the point of delivery, the magistrates court?

Mr. Wills: Of course we acknowledge that the situation is not all that it should be and that is why we are taking a range of actions to ensure that performance is better in future. We have been encouraged by the performance so far, but it could be still better. Of course the Government believe that defendants should be given the opportunity to pay their fines promptly and conveniently. A range of methods is now available for paying fines—for example, cash, cheque, credit and debit cards, bank giro, Transcash and Paypoint—so it is not absolutely necessary for there to be a cash office in every courthouse in the country. Furthermore, the hon. Gentleman will be well aware from his own experience that the closure of cash offices is a matter for individual magistrates courts committees.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Would the Minister be surprised if I pointed out to him that I am anything but encouraged by the way in which this system is operating? To give just one example, in London the latest figures show that the fines imposed in magistrates courts amount to £92 million but, astonishingly, the fines collected are no more than £41 million, which I think the Minister knew when he got up to speak. Does he also accept that the Lord Chancellor has effectively declined to provide additional resources to make up the difference—so much so that a number of judges have been writing to one another complaining bitterly on behalf of prosecutors, the police, the Prison Service, probation officers and others? Will the Minister do something about that?

Mr. Wills: The answers to those questions are no, no and yes. No, I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman makes the point that he does. No, I do not accept that we have not made extra resources available. In 2001–02, £14 million has been allocated for the enforcement of fines and, as a result of the netting-off scheme, of which the hon. Gentleman will be well aware, magistrates courts committees will have nearly £10 million extra to spend on enforcement during the next two financial years. Finally, of course we will do all that we can to improve the record. It is not as good as it should be, and we are taking a wide range of actions to ensure that it gets better in future.

Patient Advocacy and Community Legal Service (NHS)

31. **Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): If he will take steps to promote the establishment of a patient advocacy liaison service and community legal service information point in every NHS hospital. [25045]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): The Lord Chancellor's Department supports the development of community legal service information points in places that can be easily accessed by members of the public. This includes primary health care outlets such as general practitioners' surgeries and NHS hospitals, where we are considering ways in which links might be established with the new patient advocacy liaison service.

Mr. Hopkins: My hon. Friend will know that, at my local hospital, the Luton and Dunstable, we have the first such facility in the eastern region, and that, so far, it has been a great success. It has been welcomed unanimously by staff and patients. I made inquiries today and found out that, in its first quarter of operations, patient complaints went down by 21 per cent. and, year on year in December, they were down by 59 per cent. Does my hon. Friend agree that that makes a powerful case for every hospital having such a facility?

Ms Winterton: I am well aware of the project in my hon. Friend's constituency, and I also know that the support that he has given to it personally has been extremely welcome. Luton and Dunstable hospital was the first hospital to be quality marked as a community legal service information point. We shall certainly consider whether the project could be an example of good practice that we could encourage other hospitals across England and Wales to follow.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Has the hon. Lady been in touch with the Department in Northern Ireland to make sure that such a system is working there? Is she aware that, at times, the patient advocacy liaison service apparently advocates more for hospitals than for patients?

Ms Winterton: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the particular aspect for which I have responsibility is the community legal service, but I am sure that his comments will be noted by other Ministers. I can assure him that we are trying to ensure that there are community legal service information points in as many places as possible, including GP surgeries and NHS hospitals.

Asylum Seekers (Appeals)

32. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): How many appeals against refusal of asylum have been lodged and are awaiting a hearing. [25046]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): Of the 32,874 cases received by the Immigration Appellate Authority between 1 April and 30 November 2001, 11,554 asylum cases were awaiting a first substantive hearing as at 30 November. The remaining 21,300 were either completed, under consideration or awaiting a further hearing at either adjudicator, application for leave to appeal or tribunal stage.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. We have had exchanges about delays in those appeals for some time and I know that she is putting a lot of effort into trying to improve the situation, but I am concerned about that group of appeals for which notification of the result comes from the Home Office, not her Department, following the changes to the regulations. What steps has she taken to ensure that the Home Office gives that notification swiftly to an appellant whose appeal has been refused? If it does not provide notification in a reasonable time, will she take action to ensure that appellants know the results of their appeals? We all know that the Home Office is not exactly a speedy animal when dealing with immigration and asylum matters.

Ms Winterton: I understand my hon. Friend's point and I know that she takes a close interest in the issue. Perhaps it will help if I explain the process. The Home Office will sift appeal determinations to identify those suitable for delivery in person. Resources will initially be focused on delivering decisions in person to failed asylum seekers who are at risk of absconding and whom it is possible to remove. Increasing the number of decisions delivered personally and speedily will depend on evaluating the success of the new measures and the gradual introduction of the new reporting centres, accommodation centres and removal centres. I hope that that reassures her.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Minister is aware that, following a day of pressure from Conservative Members yesterday, led by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary, the Home Secretary finally agreed late in the afternoon that special arrangements would be made for asylum claimants from Zimbabwe. They will not be returned, rightly in my view, but what will be the effect on her Department, now that the Home Secretary has wisely changed policy?

Ms Winterton: Home Office policy has obviously—[HON. MEMBERS: "Changed."] The change that the Home Secretary announced is that removals to Zimbabwe are temporarily suspended until after the March elections. The Home Office will continue to monitor the situation with a view to making a reassessment after the elections. In terms of the effect on the asylum system, outstanding cases will be considered in the light of those new decisions.

Sonia Deary

33. **Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): If he will make a statement on progress in the case of Sonia Deary. [25047]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): The question concerns the progress of a long-standing High Court claim by Sonia Deary for an increased share in the estate of her late husband. The resolution of this claim is dependent on her and her solicitor either agreeing a settlement with other family members or bringing the claim to trial. I understand that the legal proceedings have recently been revived and I would not wish to comment further on a pending case.

Mr. Pickthall: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her reply and for her energy in pursuing this case since she assumed her office. Does she agree that whoever is to blame for the delay—I noted carefully what she said on that score—it is unacceptable for any citizen to have to wait for more than 16 years for an estate to be settled? Does she agree that it is at least part of the functions of the Lord Chancellor's Department to seek to clarify, simplify and streamline the systems in such cases to avoid circumstances in which British citizens find themselves akin to characters in "Bleak House"?

Ms Winterton: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's interest in the matter and I know that he has done everything that he can to assist his constituent. I am sure that he is also aware that this is an extremely complicated case. The intimate family and financial details of the estate should not be discussed in the House, but the role of the Official Solicitor and the matters that he has to deal with in such cases can be extremely complex. The time taken to resolve an estate might depend on many issues. For example, the deceased might have assumed several identities or outstanding business problems might need to be resolved. In that situation, the Official Solicitor should of course act expeditiously, but we must recognise that the cases can be complicated.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The President of the Council was asked—

Oath of Allegiance

43. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What proposals he has to reform of the Oath of Allegiance for hon. Members taking their seats in the House. [25058]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The form of the Oath is prescribed by statute. The Government have no plans to amend it.

Mr. Winterton: The Leader of the House will appreciate the reason for my question and, I am sure, my total commitment to this place. Does he believe that anyone who becomes a Member of Parliament should have a true allegiance to the country in whose Parliament he or she seeks to serve? Is not there a danger in what the Government have done recently that we will establish two classes of Member of Parliament, which is a dangerous precedent indeed?

Mr. Cook: I fully recognise the commitment of the hon. Gentleman to this place and the service that he has given to it. I assure him that I fully endorse his view that people should not take their seat here unless they are committed to making a success not only of this place but of the nation that this place represents. That is why we have made no change that would enable any of the Sinn Fein Members—or anybody else who does not take the Oath or affirm—to take their seats, to take part in votes or to speak. On the issue of two classes of Member of Parliament, I take the view that what we did in December erodes the distinction between those who have not taken the Oath and those who have in relation to allowances and access to this place, but in no way does it erode the difference between those of us who take our seats and those who do not.

Appointments Commission

44. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): If he will invite the House of Lords Appointments Commission to discuss with people's peers their experience of their membership of the Lords with a view to informing its future recommendations. [25059]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The first round of appointments made by the Appointments Commission included the chief executive of Centrepoint, the chief executive of Childline, and a trustee of Oxfam. The appointments also brought a welcome balance to the membership of the Lords. *[Interruption.]* I shall get to the question, if Members will be patient. Almost a third of the new members belong to ethnic communities and a similar proportion are women. They have brought their experience and authority to proceedings in the Lords on immigration, child poverty, equal opportunity and public services. I cannot speak for the Appointments Commission but I am sure that both my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and I would listen with respect if its members wished to comment on their experience.

Mr. Prentice: If appointed peers are expected to make a contribution in the House of Lords, is the chair of the Appointments Commission setting a good example by having spoken twice in the two and a half years since he was ennobled in 1999?

Mr. Cook: I do not think that it is any part of my remit or that of the Government to encourage even more people to speak in debates in the House of Lords.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): In addition to taking advice from the Appointments Commission and the people's peers, will the Leader of the House say what his proposals are for a further consultation period beyond the end of this month? He will be aware of the gathering consensus that the White Paper represents nobody except the Lord Chancellor, and that he is in a minority of one. What steps will the Leader of the House take to ensure that the House and the other place have a proper opportunity—without the Whips and on a free vote—to discuss the issues, and when does he expect us to be given that opportunity? Does he accept that there is one thing on which there is a unanimous view—that doing nothing is unacceptable?

Mr. Cook: I wholly endorse the last sentence of the hon. Gentleman's question, and since it is the only part of his question that I can wholly endorse, I shall seize upon it. It is important that we continue the process of reform of the House of Lords to create a modern second Chamber. As I warned last week, we must not let divisions among those who want reform to prevent there from being any reform. We had a full opportunity for the House to express itself last week and, as someone who sat through the entire debate, I can say that the House expressed itself robustly. The views expressed last week are being reflected upon. The consultation process goes on until 31 January. It is perhaps premature now to announce any further consultation. It is important that we reflect on the views expressed in the House and in the country and, as I said last week, seek to find the centre of gravity that will enable reform to proceed with support.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If only the Government had kept to the 1976 policy and abolished the House of Lords, they would not be suffering all this heartache at the present time. It is sad that nobody knows what the new proposal will be at the end, despite all the consultation that is taking place. In the knowledge that there are not enough Members like myself who want to abolish the House of Lords completely, irrespective of the percentage who are elected, my right hon. Friend must remember one thing—do not give it very much power.

Mr. Cook: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that I am in no danger of forgetting that very important maxim. It is precisely because of that that I sought to warn the House last week of the danger of a wholly elected second Chamber. I find it hard to see how we could preserve the present supremacy of the House of Commons and the present balance of power between us against a second Chamber that would claim an equally valid democratic mandate.

With regard to my hon. Friend's first point, I do not wish to rehearse the debates of 1966.

Mr. Skinner: 1976.

Mr. Cook: 1976. I have enough difficulty rehearsing the debates of last week. However, it has been the case in the past, particularly in the 1966 Parliament, that what stopped reform was division among the reformers. We must not let that be the case now.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Before the Leader of the House has any discussions with the Appointments Commission, will he confirm that his own proposals for reform of the Lords, which were criticised in every quarter of this House last week, are in effect now a dead duck? Will he seek to use his influence with the Prime Minister—however great or small that might be—to ensure that the correct way forward is to propose a House of Lords where the majority of the membership is elected, not where the majority in the House are Tony's cronies?

Mr. Cook: Without getting engaged in a discussion about the extent of my influence with the Prime Minister, I suspect that, such as it is, it would be sharply diminished if I announced to the House in advance what my advice would be.

The right hon. Gentleman has to take on board the fact that Conservative Members must also face up to problems with their proposals, as some Labour Members have pointed out. The Conservative party has supported the hereditary principle for a century, so it is entirely welcome that it has finally recognised that that principle is indefensible, and has been so throughout the century that the Conservative party has defended it.

I welcome the Conservative party's move towards democracy, but its proposals show that it believes that democracy means providing in the second Chamber the same representation for Surrey as for London. That shows that Conservatives have some way to go before they understand democracy as it is understood in Britain, and certainly as it is understood in London.

Information Technology

45. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will ask the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to consider in what further ways the use of Information Technology can assist the work of hon. Members. [25061]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): The memorandum from my right hon. Friend the President of the Council to the Modernisation Committee raised a number of ways in which information technology might be used to assist hon. Members, ranging from electronic voting in the Lobbies to ways of giving opportunities for communication between members of the public and Members of the House.

I believe that the Select Committee on Information may soon look at the issue of information technology in the House, and I very much hope that the Modernisation Committee will draw on its work.

Mr. Jack: I thank the Minister for again giving an enthusiastic and encouraging reply. As part of his agenda of action, will he look at the possibility that Departments might send answers to parliamentary questions by e-mail? Will he also investigate the feasibility of a case-tracking system, so that hon. Members might know where letters go to when they disappear into the black hole that is a Department, and of supplying information electronically to hon. Members about what has happened to them? Finally, has any progress been made on the question of using laptop computers in Committees of the House?

Mr. Twigg: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on the persistence with which he has pursued that final point. I believe that the matter will be addressed by the Information Committee and the Chairmen's Panel. The right hon. Gentleman also raised some broader issues, some of which fall within the Modernisation Committee's remit, but others of which fall within the remit of the newly established Cabinet Committee on e-democracy. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will chair that Committee, which will have its first meeting next week. I shall ensure that the matters raised by the right hon. Gentleman are drawn to the Committee's attention.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): When my hon. Friend the Minister looks at the rules governing the modernisation and constitution of the House of Commons, will he bear in mind that, as a member of the Council of Europe and the Western European Union, I find it very difficult to get oral questions accepted by the Table Office? The office will not allow my research assistant to hand in a question from me, so he has to run about to find a Member who is willing to hand in the question for him. Some Members are too busy and do not want to hand in a question.

Mr. Twigg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter, which clearly falls within the remit of the Modernisation Committee's discussions. We want to ensure greater flexibility, so that hon. Members from all parties can balance their commitments outside the House with their commitments here. I shall ensure that the point is considered in the Modernisation Committee's inquiry.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was asked—

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

46. **Peter Bottomley** (Worthing, West): To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, which recent letters to the Commission from the Commissioner for Standards have not been published to hon. Members. [25062]

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): I understand that the letter of 28 November from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to Mr. Speaker was released to the media on the evening of 4 December 2001. The Committee on Standards and Privileges requested on 9 January that the commissioner's letter of 14 December be published. The Commission will consider that request, and the commissioner's letter of 8 January, at its next meeting.

Peter Bottomley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and to the Commission. It would be a happy thing if it agreed to publish the letters. Will the hon. Gentleman consider the report from the predecessor Commission that was published on 9 November 1998, and the words in the initial speeches in the debate of 17 November 1998? Tributes were paid to the then incoming Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. I commend the words in that report that referred to her personal qualities, and the House will expect those sentiments to be reflected in the letters, when they are published.

Mr. Kirkwood: Obviously, I cannot commit the Commission to anything, but I give the hon. Gentleman the undertaking that the matter will be given serious consideration. Important issues of precedent are involved, and we must be jealous of them. The correspondence between the Commission and senior officers of the House is not something that should easily be made transparently public on every occasion. We must therefore be careful that we do not establish precedents that could be dangerous in the future. However, I give the hon. Gentleman the undertaking that the matter that he raises, and the request from the Standards and Privileges Committee, will be given urgent consideration when the Commission meets early next week.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): On the subject of the correspondence, is the hon. Gentleman aware that many people in the House and certainly outside it consider that the way in which the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has been treated is very shabby given the view, which I share, that she has carried out her duties very conscientiously? This matter is unfortunate and brings into question the self-regulation that exists for Members of Parliament.

Mr. Kirkwood: I hope that when the hon. Gentleman sees the provisions that are made after the open process for the nomination and appointment of a successor to the current commissioner is completed, he will believe those fears to have been misplaced. An open competition is now in its final stages. The current commissioner has been invited to submit her name for the final interviews. If she does so, she will automatically go on the shortlist, and if she is found to be the best candidate, she will be nominated by the Commission to this House.

The President of the Council was asked—

Sitting Hours

47. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw): What assessment he has made of the impact of his proposals for changes to the sitting hours of the House on hon. Members with school age children living outside the London area. [25063]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): The main purpose of the proposed changes in sitting hours is to increase the effectiveness of the House of Commons both in legislation and in scrutiny of the Executive. We anticipate that the changes to sitting hours proposed by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will benefit all Members with children.

John Mann: It is most laudable that Members of the House who live in London—and indeed civil servants—and have expressed the view that they should be able to spend more time having breakfast with their children will be given the opportunity to do so. I hope that the Leader of the House will give equal consideration to all Members, regardless of where in the United Kingdom they live with their children, and that this does not apply just to those Members who happen to live with their children in London.

Mr. Twigg: My hon. Friend raises an important issue which has been raised by Members on both sides of the House. A number of the other changes proposed by my right hon. Friend would benefit Members with families, such as making permanent the Thursday experiment on hours, having fewer sitting Fridays and having a more predictable annual pattern of sittings.

NHS Hospital Management

3.32 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about his proposal to allow NHS managers to establish non-profit-making companies to manage hospitals, as outlined in today's edition of *The Times*.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The NHS plan that we published in July 2000 set out how power and resources would be devolved to front-line NHS services. It said:

> "NHS organisations will be rewarded with greater autonomy and national recognition"

including

> "greater freedom to decide the local organisation of services."

The proposals for foundation hospitals are rooted in the NHS plan. They come about as a consequence of discussions that we have had with the best performing NHS hospitals. Those hospitals are already beginning to get greater freedom and more resources. For hospitals which are not performing well—the poorest performers—we will consider franchising their management to bring in fresh blood.

The best performers, however, have now put to us proposals for a change in their structures, not to take them out of the national health service but to have greater freedom to improve care for NHS patients as part and parcel of a modern health service. These proposals clearly draw on precedents in other parts of the public sector such as schools or further education colleges and the growing interest that there has been in recent years in public interest companies and mutuals as an alternative to either purely state-run public or shareholder-led private structures.

Our three-star hospitals have now asked us to look at whether such models could be applicable to local health services to form foundation hospitals within the health service but run more independently than now. I think it right that we should examine the case that they have made.

We will consider the applicability of foundations not just to the best hospitals but to the best primary care trusts. Over the next few months we will be working with them to examine the legal, financial, governance and accountability issues.

While this will only ever be voluntary not mandatory for the health service's best performers, alongside new incentives, more devolution and greater patient choice it will help make for a different sort of NHS: where there is more diversity and less top-down control, with a framework of national standards in place and a means—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is getting very excited—it is easily done. With a framework of national standards in place and a means of independently inspecting them, there is now the opportunity to set free the best hospitals and the best primary care trusts to improve NHS care for NHS patients.

Patients will remain NHS patients, treated according to NHS principles, with care that is free and available according to need—not as some Members advocate, according to their ability to pay. Those are the right values for the NHS. It is not NHS values that need to change, but NHS structures.

Dr. Fox: Only a few weeks ago we were told by the Prime Minister that we were at the end of the era of spin, but here we are for the second day in a row having to drag a Secretary of State to the House. In *The Times* this morning, the Secretary of State tells us that it was the most important speech in his time as Health Secretary. If that is true why was that speech not made to the House of Commons? If it is not true, it is indicative that the spin goes on.

Well, the right hon. Gentleman has the headlines and we rather like those headlines; or in new Labour speak we rather like the direction of the journey—it is in our direction of travel. There is more than a little suspicion that this is yet another example of the Secretary of State, when under pressure, adopting the "Blue Peter", 'Here's one I made earlier'" approach to policy, so let us see if we can get some details.

The Secretary of State wants to give management more freedom—but does he? Management would generally assume that four things were needed to give proper freedom: to be able to borrow from the markets; to set strategy; to set pay and conditions; and to contract for services independently. How many of those will be given in the foundation hospitals?

In his speech this morning the Secretary of State said, in reference to further education colleges, that buying and selling of assets is one of their freedoms. Will these foundation hospitals be able to buy and sell assets? How many of these hospitals does the Secretary of State intend to see by the time of the next general election? Will they still be subject to the star rating? What if they lose a star? Will they be brought back under central control? If so, how—and what legislation will be required? How much freedom will they have in determining pay and conditions?

The Secretary of State said in his speech that four functions will be left for the Department of Health: setting strategic direction; the integrity of the whole system through IT and staff training; developing the values of the NHS through education, training and policy development; and securing accountability for funding and performance, including reports to Parliament. There was nothing at all about pay and conditions as one of the functions for the NHS, so perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can enlighten us on that point.

What will any freedom on pay and conditions mean for the current negotiations under way with GPs and consultants over their contracts, or the 18-month negotiations with the nurses over their pay and career development? What does the Secretary of State mean when he says that we will have to find

> "new ways of money flowing around the system to sharpen incentives to respond to patients"?

Is that money following the patient, or is that money following the patient? That is exactly what the Secretary of State set out to abolish. .

When it comes to asking for meanings, what exactly did the Secretary of State mean when he said that we need:

> "Customisation wherever it can be made but standardization where it is appropriate."

[Dr. Fox]

What on earth did he mean when he said that we need:

> "Management through hierarchy alongside management through networks?"

We have not the faintest idea what any of that meant.

This response has not been thought out; it is a panic response by the Secretary of State to orders from No. 10 to try to regain the agenda on the public services. We have had the Health Bill. We have had the NHS plan. Today we have before us the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill and now we have the master plan. We are used to having votes of no confidence in Ministers but not usually by themselves in their own Bill on the same day that they are considering it.

This is not about the future of the NHS: it is new Labour, new year, new panic, new policy.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman made five substantive points. As for being dragged to the House, I understand that the House will have an opportunity this afternoon and this evening to discuss NHS reform in copious detail. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Tomorrow, on a Liberal-Democrat motion, hon Members will discuss health issues and, on Thursday in Government time, they will have the opportunity to discuss changes to structure and culture in the NHS, when we produce our response to the Kennedy report on the inquiry into events at the Bristol royal infirmary.

The hon. Gentleman says that he could not understand the speech that I made this morning. If he spent a little more time talking to NHS staff at home, rather than running down the NHS abroad, he might be able to keep up. As for the issues that the hon. Gentleman raises, yes, we have set out today proposals for greater independence for the highest performing hospitals. He asks how many. I said in my statement and, indeed, in my speech that that would be a matter of voluntary discretion. It would depend on the number of hospitals or primary care trusts that wanted to move in that direction.

The hon. Gentleman always urges on me less day-to-day management, less interference and less centralisation, but he does not seem to like it when it happens. As for the sort of powers, resources and responsibilities that the foundation hospitals and others—the primary care trusts, too—will have, as I said in my statement, we will discuss those issues precisely with the primary care trusts and the hospitals. As for pay and conditions, I believe in a very simple principle: if NHS hospitals that have done really well and are performing the best in the NHS, providing high-quality care to NHS patients, want to give extra rewards and more pay to the staff—whether a porter or a cleaner, let alone a doctor or a nurse—whom they employ, they should be free to do so.

The hon. Gentleman seemed to allude to the internal market. I shall tell him the difference between these proposals and the internal market. The internal market involved using one club—competition—to try to lever up standards. It did not induce competition, and it certainly did not lever up standards. The difference is that we now have in place a clear framework of national standards, national service frameworks, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which evaluates new treatments and new drugs as they come on to the market and into the NHS, and an independent means of inspecting them.

We want to see high standards everywhere, but we also recognise that the NHS cannot be subject to day-to-day running from Whitehall, as it has been for 50 years; it has to have power, resources and responsibilities located in the hands of doctors, nurses, porters, cooks, cleaners and mangers—the people who actually deliver NHS care to NHS patients. The big divide in British politics is between those of us who say that NHS values should be maintained, but its structures changed and the Conservative party, which says that NHS values must be abandoned and that the people must pay for their treatment.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I am reluctant to say what I am about to say or to ask the questions that I am about to ask, but will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that the fact that some NHS hospitals are outstandingly successful demonstrates that NHS hospitals are capable of doing a first-rate job without their management being franchised to the private sector? Will he also bear in mind the fact that private sector health care managers are unlikely to have appropriate experience, as most private hospitals are small, low-tech and have few, if any, emergency admissions compared with a very large NHS teaching hospital, which probably has more emergency admissions, involving great complexity, than the private sector hospitals' total admissions, and perhaps 1,000 doctors on their staff? Will my right hon. Friend guarantee that absolutely none of those outside managers come from such private sector disasters as Railtrack, Equitable Life, Marconi, or the accountants, auditors or management consultants associated with those private sector disasters?

Finally, will my right hon. Friend at least give some thought to the fact that the public service ethic managed to maintain the national health service through all the Tory years of underinvestment and malignant policies? In those circumstances, would it not be right to give the public service ethic the opportunity to flourish with the extra resources that are now available?

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): That was an endorsement, wasn't it?

Mr. Milburn: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is alive and awake for once. *[Interruption.]* God, Conservative Members are in a tetchy mood today—they really are. I understand why the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) is tetchy; he has been brought back from his inter-railing holiday in Europe. He is bound to be a bit uncomfortable. However, I do not know about the rest of them.

As far as my right hon. Friend's points are concerned, yes, the NHS has very many outstanding managers. There is absolutely no doubt about that. He has some of them in his area; thankfully, I have some of them in my area, too. It is right that NHS managers should be given opportunities, particularly when they are running high performing NHS organisations that have a track record of success. However, if we have poorly performing NHS organisations, it seems to me highly appropriate that we use the expertise of such managers and garner that for the benefit of other NHS patients.

However, we must also look more broadly than that. What patients everywhere—and not just those in some places—deserve is the best quality management and the best quality services. I simply do not believe that good quality managers begin and end at the public sector's door. We should consider using high-quality management wherever it exists to improve care for NHS patients.

On my right hon. Friend's point about Railtrack, he is right. What the Conservatives did when they sold off the rail network was catastrophic. *[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend asked about Railtrack. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There was a request to hear the Secretary of State and we must give him a hearing. *[Interruption.]* Let me decide whether he is in order.

Mr. Milburn: I know that Conservative Members do not want to hear about Railtrack.

Mr. Speaker: I do not want to hear about Railtrack, either. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Milburn: In relation to my right hon. Friend's question, the fundamental difference between what the Conservatives did with the railway network and what we are proposing is that they sold off lock, stock and barrel public sector assets and sold them to the highest private sector bidder. There is no question whatsoever, under any of these proposals, of selling off NHS assets. What we are doing is franchising the management of NHS organisations that are not performing as well as they should.

I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend when he says that the public service ethos should be maintained at all costs. I think that the best way of strengthening the public service ethos is to get the investment in, but to make some fundamental reforms too.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Is not the Secretary of State creating a two-tier system of hospitals? The first is for those hospitals that he judges to be performing well and to which this most centralising of Government claim to be giving independence. The Commission for Health Improvement is being charged with inspecting these hospitals based on performance criteria laid down by him—political hoops that hospitals will be asked to jump through. The commission will have to examine how well they are doing not whether it is worth their time doing that. In providing freedom to pay more to staff in better-off hospitals that are doing well, is not the danger that they will simply recruit staff at the expense of the poorer hospitals that have been even more under-resourced by the Government?

On the so-called failing hospitals, does the Secretary of State recognise that, by his criteria, hospitals could be judged as failing because they put patients and clinical priority before politics and political targets? They will be judged to be failing if they suffer from the Government-induced crisis of bed blocking due to underfunding of social care and the crisis in the care sector.

The Secretary of State used a comparison with schools. Does he not recognise that naming and shaming to shift the blame from him creates a crisis in confidence that will worsen staff retention in the health service? If it comes to bad managers being removed, he need look no further than himself as the worst manager of a centralising Government who try to micromanage the whole health service.

Mr. Milburn: Thanks for the glowing endorsement. The hon. Gentleman raised, I think, only one substantive issue—who would determine the ratings of individual hospitals. He could have mentioned primary care trusts, too. That will be a matter not for Ministers, but for the independent Commission for Health Improvement. No doubt he will have an opportunity to raise those issues this afternoon, either on Report or Third Reading of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill.

On paying staff the same, I do not know about the hon. Gentleman, but I spend part of my week in the north-east of England and more than half of it in the south-east, and I have noticed a big difference between the two. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has also noticed it, but house prices are different, the labour market is different and, by and large, there is full employment down here. To argue that somehow or other we should simply pay everyone the same regardless of the labour market conditions is absurd.

The hon. Gentleman knows that trusts in his area are rightly paying staff more in order to recruit doctors, nurses and other staff. He seems to be arguing for a uniformity that we have not seen for many years in the national health service, but all that would do is plunge NHS trusts in many parts of the country into growing, not diminishing, problems of recruiting and retaining staff.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): May I give a broad welcome to the Secretary of State's comments? May I also congratulate him on finally understanding that if we are to have a health service fit for the 21st century, the old Stalinist structures have to be dismantled?

We can understand why the right hon. Gentleman did not want to come to the House today, given the grim faces of Labour Back Benchers. Will he spread a little more happiness by telling us whether, in the negotiations that he intends to have with health service managers and workers and the private sector, he will also consult the health service trade unions on his proposals to end national pay bargaining?

Mr. Milburn: I do not think that the hon. Lady is up to date. We have been negotiating with trade unions, as the hon. Member for Woodspring said, for the past two years on a new national framework for pay and conditions in the NHS which would also allow for local flexibility. The hon. Lady called the NHS "Stalinist"—

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): No, she did not.

Mr. Milburn: She did; Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen were not listening to their Back-Bench colleague. That is precisely what the hon. Lady said. It seems to me that the Conservative party is becoming more like a modern-day Trotskyist sect. Condemning everything it does not like, including the NHS, is Stalinist.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): As a moderniser, I welcome the idea of devolving decision making nearer to the patient. My concern with the Secretary of State's proposals relates to the clear parallels that can be drawn with what the Conservative Government announced in the early 1980s in terms of the introduction of the internal market and the consequences of that, and the introduction of private sector management. Some of us suffered from private sector managers in our localities. Bearing in mind the concordat that establishes the relationship with the

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

private sector and what the Secretary of State proposes for management, can he tell those of us who have anxieties about the direction that the Government are taking whether any limits will be placed on the involvement of the private sector in the NHS under the Government?

Mr. Milburn: I know that my hon. Friend has a well-deserved reputation as a Labour moderniser on such matters. I agree that devolved decision making is the way forward. The right combination of national standards needs to be in place. However, we have to accept that none of us as Ministers delivers one iota of care. The care is delivered outside Parliament by doctors, nurses, therapists, cleaners, cooks, porters, managers and other staff. We surely need resources and power to be located in their hands rather than ours.

There is a fundamental difference between the situation that my hon. Friend describes in the early 1990s and now. It is worth remembering how far we have come in just four years. When we got into office there were no national standards, no means of inspecting standards, no means of levering in good practice to replace bad and no means of evaluating new drugs and treatments when they came on to the market. For the first time, we have national standards and independent inspection, and it is right and proper that within that framework the NHS should improve services for patients.

The crucial limit to private sector involvement is the fact that, as I said in my opening statement, I profoundly believe, as I know my hon. Friend does, in an NHS that provides care according to the right principles, the right values and the right ethos. I believe that care should be available according to the scale of people's needs, not the size of their wallets. That is the position on the Labour Benches; I am not sure that the same is true on the Opposition Benches.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As another moderniser, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether he agrees that delivering high-quality services to patients is, in the main, dependent on a well skilled and highly trained work force? If managers are brought in from the private sector, how will he guarantee that they do not replicate the activities of their colleagues in the wider world who have, in the main, turned their backs on in-house training and simply meet their staffing needs by poaching from others?

Mr. Milburn: I do not think that we should try to kid ourselves. In the public sector there are good managers and, sadly, some pretty poor ones, just as there are good and bad managers in the private sector. The best managers, whether they are in the public or the private sector, recognise that if they are to provide improved services to customers or, in this case, to patients, they must invest in their staff and make sure that there are more staff and that they are skilled. That is what I expect to see in all parts of the public services, and it is certainly what we need in the NHS.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): In between all the new plans, initiatives and restructuring, can the Secretary of State find the time to visit the Kent and Canterbury hospital? I understand that last Friday, just before my arrival at the accident and emergency unit, the hospital had squirrelled away most of the people waiting on beds in corridors. Eighteen remained, some of whom had very serious conditions and some of whom had been there for over 24 hours. That is totally unsuitable care. Ten consultants appeared, at a few hours' notice, to say that the crisis in capacity cannot go on. When will the Secretary of State take action on the crisis in acute health care in east Kent?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman talks about a crisis in capacity, but he really must have a word with his Front-Bench colleagues because the way to solve the crisis in capacity is to invest. That is what we are committed to doing, and it is a shame that the Opposition are not.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I agree with my right hon. Friend that the NHS is too big to be managed from Whitehall and that it should have access to the best expertise. What concerns me is accountability. There are two ways of getting accountability. The first is through competition, but genuine competition requires a surplus of provision, so that patients can choose who provides their service. Even if that were possible in the NHS, surely it is not desirable purely because of considerations of efficiency and expense. The second way to get accountability is through elected representatives, but sadly it seems that that is not an option, as is demonstrated by the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, which we will be considering later today. What will my right hon. Friend do about the accountability deficit in the NHS?

Mr. Milburn: On the first point, my hon. Friend is right to say that the only way to expand informed choices for patients is to increase capacity in the NHS. As she is aware, from July this year we will be able, for the first time, to give direct choice to NHS patients. Those who have been waiting six months for heart surgery will be offered the choice of continuing to wait, probably longer, for treatment at their local hospital or, provided that it is clinically appropriate, travelling further to get treatment elsewhere. That will not only increase public confidence in the NHS but drive change and provide incentives for hospitals to treat more patients to higher standards. As for issues of governance, my hon. Friend is right that NHS trusts have quite wide-ranging powers of autonomy, but they are constrained by the current governance structures. Effectively, we appoint five non-executive directors and blithely assume that that is representative of the community's interests. Like my hon. Friend, I believe that that is not necessarily so. We shall want to discuss with the best performing hospitals and primary care trusts whether we can change the accountability structures for the best performers to strengthen the relationship between local health services and the local communities that they serve.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the Secretary of State confirm that under his interesting scheme some NHS hospital trusts will be able to buy and sell assets on their own account without seeking Government permission and will be able to borrow money against those assets without needing Government guarantees or permission? Is that the position?

Mr. Milburn: As for buying and selling assets, NHS trusts can currently do so. However, under the current regime, which, I recall, was initiated under the right hon. Gentleman's Government and which we have continued, an NHS trust that sells assets of spare land, for example, is not allowed to keep the proceeds for itself. We should consider a different regime for the best performing hospitals; if those that have spare capacity, land and assets want to sell them, they should get the proceeds.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Can the Secretary of State assure the House that discussion of organisation and reorganisation in that fashion will not divert attention from the key task of delivering the NHS plan? To that end, can he assure the House that he will debate those issues with the NHS modernisation board and patient groups which, I understand, have not discussed or floated them to date?

Will my right hon. Friend also explain to the House the difference between franchising management and dealing properly with NHS management? There are procedures to deal with managers who do not perform; I hope that the House agrees that that minority should be properly dealt with and disciplined if necessary. How does my right hon. Friend envisage managing trusts in which, say, 80 per cent. of the managers are good but 20 per cent. are bad? At what point should the whole lot be franchised out, thereby losing some very good NHS managers along the way?

Mr. Milburn: As I have said, I agree with my hon. Friends that the NHS has some very good managers; I know that it is unfashionable to say so, but that is what I believe. We have some outstanding managers who do a difficult job in extremely difficult circumstances; they manage large, complex organisations and, as we can see from some of the best performing hospitals and primary care trusts, they do so admirably. However, I am afraid that, as in any public service, there are always some that are good, some that are indifferent and sadly, some that are just not up to scratch; I do not think that we should hesitate to say so.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) will know from her own constituency, it is all too often the case that the poorest services end up being in the poorest communities. We should not sanction that situation; we should have the courage of our conviction and say that where management is not up to scratch, we are prepared to change it. The management, in this case, is the leadership of the organisation; we have chief executives and directors of finance to provide leadership in those organisations. If it is not being provided and services are poor, there have usually been persistent problems with organisation, culture, attitude and so on over a period of many years. We should say that that is not good enough and that we are prepared to change it.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): On the earlier subject of Trotskyism, may I politely remind the Secretary of State that he is the real Trotskyist because he is keeping the national health service in a state of permanent revolution? However, if the Government abolished grant-maintained schools, why are they introducing grant-maintained hospitals?

Mr. Milburn: Just as a small historical correction, if my memory serves me right, permanent revolution was more a feature of Maoism than Trotskyism. I am willing to admit that I could be wrong; the hon. Gentleman may be much more of an expert than I am, or was, on that sort of issue. If he cares to look at public services, whether in FE colleges, schools or whatever, he will see that we have a national framework of standards and diversity of provision. That is delivering the goods in improved standards in education, better outcomes for children and so on. We need to apply precisely the same disciplines to the national health service. We have a clear framework of national standards, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was partially responsible for putting in place. We have independent inspection. We have the right ethos, the right values and the right principles. In order to deliver improved services for patients, we must empower the NHS front-line.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What are the special qualities that the private sector seems to have, as opposed to those who have dedicated 50 years to the national health service as a public service?

Mr. Milburn: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon a moment ago, we have some outstanding people working in the NHS as managers, and some outstanding hospitals and primary care trusts. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will know from his constituency experience, as I know from mine, that sadly, in local government services and sometimes in the health service, the fact that service providers are located within the public sector does not necessarily mean that they deliver the best of services. I am interested in what the patient gets. NHS patients should get high-quality care. What we should expect to see in all our constituencies in all parts of Britain is the highest quality of care for patients, regardless where the care is provided.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): What are the implications, if any, of the Secretary of State's proposals for the NHS in Wales and Scotland? In a written question on 26 June, I asked the right hon. Gentleman

"what discussions he has had with the National Assembly concerning the use of private management in the health service in Wales."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 76W.]

His answer was one word: "None."

Mr. Milburn: That remains the position.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): I welcome my right hon. Friend's proposals to give greater freedom and power to succeeding managers, but like my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown), I am concerned that those ought to be balanced by proposals to make it easier to remove failing managers in the NHS.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is right. In these debates there is always a danger that we assume that every hospital will become a foundation hospital, or that every

[Mr. Milburn]

slightly under-performing NHS trust will lose its top management. That is not the case. We have other means to improve performance in the NHS, such as incentives or an NHS modernisation agency to lever up standards and to spread good practice. We have a wholesale set of reforms coming in, but sure, in the exceptional cases where there is a problem with poorly performing NHS organisations, we should not hesitate to change the management team.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): What is the real reason for the Secretary of State not making a statement to the House about a policy initiative that is clearly very significant? Could it be that he realised that there would be considerable support from the Opposition and no ringing endorsement from Labour Members, who look extremely upset?

Mr. Milburn: Anyone doing my job is grateful for ringing endorsements from any quarter.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): As someone who represents one of Labour's new heartland seats, may I encourage my right hon. Friend to come again and visit Northwick Park hospital, where I could introduce him again to first-class management? Those managers are keen to persuade him of the case for more investment in maternity services to revolutionise the quality of care currently available at Northwick Park's maternity unit. I encourage my right hon. Friend to take no lectures from the Opposition, who axed two thirds of the accident and emergency provision available to my constituents, and whose proposals for new charges for access to GPs seem to strike at the heart of the NHS principles.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is right. This morning I listened with interest to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), refusing to rule out charges to visit the GP's surgery. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Woodspring ought to keep an eye on his colleague because that hon. Gentleman was touring the studios—it was on BBC News 24, I think, or it may have been Sky News—and repeating the interview. There is a fundamental difference between the Opposition and the Government. They want to charge; we say that services should be provided free. My hon. Friend is right—the Labour party is building up the national health service, whereas the Conservatives would run it down.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I am intrigued by what the Secretary of State said about the undesirability of micromanaging the health service from Whitehall, given that it was only last month that he pre-empted negotiations between BUPA and the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare trust about the provision of elective surgery at the East Surrey hospital site, which will now be undertaken by BUPA in the old Redwood hospital. Can I now hold on to the hope that, as those elective operations will now be administered and managed by BUPA, there is a possibility that the whole East Surrey hospital could be managed by BUPA, which is a not-for-profit organisation?

Mr. Milburn: I would not have thought that that would be the case, but I can say that the negotiations between the health service and BUPA are going very well.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): It is not true that my right hon. Friend is a Trotskyist, although he is perhaps a Leninist in terms of policy being decided by the few and not the many. My specific question is this: who decides which assets will be sold? For NHS trusts located in the south-east, where property and land values are very high, there is an invitation to asset-strip.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is completely wrong. If he bothers to look at the star ratings that we produced late last year—I urge him to do so—he will see that there is a clear balance between the north and south in terms of NHS trusts with a three-star rating. We must get away from the idea that, because a trust serves a poor area, it is rather like a school serving a poor area and it can be assumed that it must inevitably have poor standards or organisation. That is simply not the case. It is an important incentive to improve performance for people running the services, whether they are in the north or south or in an NHS trust or primary care trust, that, if they want to make changes to local health services that are to the benefit of NHS patients—we must remember that they will continue to be inspected and annually assessed on their performance—they have the freedom to do so.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): The right hon. Gentleman said that he would like more diversity in the national health service. Is that comment linked to the briefing that he gave to journalists before Christmas, which suggested that Ministers were calling for herbal cures on the national health service? The story was published in three or four national newspapers. Does it represent a change of policy at the Department? Is the Department now looking for an integrated health care service and is this development a part of that strategy to roll out more availability of different treatments through a new-style national health service with more diversity and more power given to managers?

Mr. Milburn: As I have told the hon. Gentleman on very, very, very many occasions, both in Health questions and other health debates—*[Interruption.]* I have read the headlines, honestly. I say to the hon. Gentleman that he will have a much happier life if he does not believe everything that he reads in the newspapers. I try not to believe everything that appears in the newspapers, because it would drive me completely crazy. On the particular issue that he raised, he knows the position: it is a matter of local discretion in deciding the services that are provided to NHS patients.

Derek Twigg (Halton): My right hon. Friend will know about the difficulties that we have recently faced in Merseyside in relation to poor management practices, although he will also know that there is lots of good management practice as well. On that basis, I welcome the move to ensure that we have more devolved powers and that decisions can be taken locally. While massive investment is taking place in the health service, the public expect massive change in the management efficiency. That is why I welcome the proposal to give management power and discretion to local hospitals. On accountability, the PCTs will have the bulk of NHS money to spend in the not-too-distant future. How can he ensure accountability to the PCTs, making sure that those hospitals deliver efficient and good services in the locality?

Mr. Milburn: I agree with my hon. Friend. The simple answer is that primary care trusts will hold the budgets, and they will make the decisions, especially when they receive more and more of the NHS budget. By 2004, they will have three quarters of the total budget, and they will determine which services to commission from which provider. I should be surprised if every primary care trust, aided and abetted if possible by the Department, the Modernisation Agency and the Commission for Health Improvement, did not have a clear eye not only on the quality of services but on value for money, including, as my hon. Friend rightly said, the organisation and management of every hospital. Primary care trusts must do that when discharging their functions on the accountability of public money.

My hon. Friend knows that we publish reference costs every year. They spell out the difference in the cost of treatment between NHS hospitals. I should be surprised if primary care trusts did not increasingly use the reference costs manual as a bit of a Bible for commissioning services. It clearly spells out the differences in efficiency between hospitals. That is at least partly due to differences in efficiency in the management of hospitals.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State will know that there are differences between not only areas but management styles. Does he agree that the larger hospitals have an advantage? Time and again, they have gathered more money from the health service but not always performed at the level that they should. That is to the detriment of other hospitals. Has he studied the results of the change of management strategy over the years? We have changed names and paid managers more money, but they have not undertaken the required management. We brought in outside managers, and they did not last the pace. Does he believe that a change of management will transform the health service? He speaks about not-for-profit trusts, but will large trusts continue to exist, eat up the money and rob other parts of the health service of the necessary cash to maintain the required standards?

Mr. Milburn: Like the hon. Gentleman, I believe that we all want high-quality management and services in every part of the United Kingdom. There is no doubt that we need to foster a new generation of NHS managers. It is inevitable that there has been a fixation today on poor NHS management, but we should bear it in mind that we have some fine NHS managers. I can give testimony to that. When we provided the star ratings last year and considered the different performance of NHS hospitals, there were three times as many three-star NHS trusts performing at the highest levels as no-star hospitals. Of course, that is fundamentally due to doctors, nurses and other staff, but it is also due to the managerial leadership in those three-star trusts. We should not be frightened of saying that. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need better management in all parts of the NHS, and more management when appropriate. Management and leadership hold the key to many of the changes that we need to unlock in local health services.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I thank the Secretary of State for his interesting statement. It has not escaped Conservative Members' attention that his best proposals were lifted from the last Conservative manifesto. Imitation is a form of flattery, but I want to ask a specific question about our local hospital. If it opts out and imposes better pay and conditions for its staff, but is subsequently taken back into mainstream NHS management, what will happen to the pay and conditions? Will they be reversed? Will the pay be docked?

Mr. Milburn: I notice that the hon. Gentleman and the Conservative party speak the language of opt-out, while we speak that of one NHS, one set of values, principles and standards, and one inspection. *[Interruption.]* Since the hon. Gentleman is so keen on private sector organisations, he would do well to examine successful examples. He will find that they are held together by a common ethos, but that they give local autonomy to local services when there is an interface between the service and the local consumer. That happens in the best private sector organisations, and must also happen in the NHS.

I read the Conservative party manifesto for the last general election; it was devoid of content.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): It will be no surprise to the Secretary of State that his announcement will stick in the throats of many Labour Members like an unchewed pretzel. Will he reassure Labour Back Benchers that he is not performing a soft shoe shuffle through the private operation of public assets to their eventual private ownership? Will he reflect on the experience of our antipodean cousins? Private management of public hospitals in Australia has been shown to be fraught with problems and difficulties and has led a Committee of the Australian Parliament to recommend:

> "No further privatisation of public hospitals should occur until a thorough national investigation is conducted and some advantage for patients can be demonstrated for this mode of delivery of services."

No such advantage has been demonstrated in practice or in the Secretary of State's statement.

Mr. Milburn: Nobody is advocating the privatisation of NHS services. I am not; the Government are not; nobody is. Indeed, it is quite the reverse. We want patients everywhere, not just in some places, to get high-quality NHS care according to the right NHS principles: care that is provided free according to need, not to the ability to pay. That is the right set of values. However, I simply do not believe that we can continue with the age-old structures, and assume that a national health service of 1.2 million people treating 20 million patients a year can somehow be run from a single office in Whitehall. That simply will not deliver the goods for patients.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I know that the Secretary of State is aware of a recent vote of no confidence in their managers, both at trust and health

[Dr. Richard Taylor]

authority level, by a vast majority of consultants across the whole of Worcestershire. What does he propose to do about that?

Mr. Milburn: In keeping with the spirit of devolution, that is a matter for the management in Worcestershire. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about that issue, he should raise it locally rather than with me.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Will the Secretary of State tell the House what criteria will be used to ascertain which hospitals are deemed to be failing, and which will become more autonomous? Will that depend on the star rating system? If so, as hospitals move up and down that rating system, will that signify a change of control?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, that will depend on the star ratings. Last year—the first year that we used the star ratings—we used certain criteria. I said at the time that the star ratings were far from perfect and that they needed to be improved—and indeed they do. This year, when we do the star ratings, with the involvement of the Commission for Health Improvement—and in future years with growing CHI involvement—the hon. Gentleman will see that the star ratings give a much more rounded assessment of performance, not only in primary care trusts but in NHS trusts too.

Point of Order

4.22 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You know, and we know, that you have recently deprecated the practice of Ministers making important statements outside the House, and then not even volunteering to make them here but having to be dragged here by a private notice question. You reminded us of that very recently. We have now had a blatant example of a senior Minister casually disregarding what you have said from the Chair. Is it now time for you to consider what further action you must take, and whether you might invite Ministers for private meetings—probably without coffee—to discuss this with you? Might you also consider whatever further sanctions may be available to you within the constraints of our Standing Orders and of Erskine May? The House will not put up with this any longer. You have given guidance, and correctly said what must happen, yet here we have another example of arrogant Ministers ignoring the House until they are dragged here.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the Minister was dragged here. *[Interruption.]* Order. No, he was not. A private notice question was submitted, and one of the reasons why I agreed to it was that a statement was made outside the House. So far as Ministers coming to see me is concerned, Ministers and shadow Ministers are more than welcome to come and see me—as, indeed, is any hon. Member—and they will always be able to get a coffee.

Members of Parliament (Employment Disqualification)

4.24 pm

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to regulate the remunerated employment a Member of Parliament may undertake.

In last week's debate on Lords reform, there was broad political consensus across the Chamber on the need to modernise and extend our democracy, not just in the Lords, but in the Commons, to improve Parliament's scrutiny of the Government and to rebuild public confidence in politicians. If we meant what we said last Thursday, I hope for similar agreement from both sides of the House that this Bill would make a modest but important contribution to the reform of Parliament and the rehabilitation of its Members.

There has also been much debate recently about the way in which we do our business here. Why does the House of Commons not sit routinely in the mornings? Simply because in Parliament's so-called golden age running the country and holding the Executive to account were not allowed to interfere with Members' principal interests—making money in the City and the law courts. Why do we have such long summer recesses? So that landowning Members of Parliament could go back to their estates to get the harvest in. In short, for many, the House of Commons has traditionally been a hobby, an inheritance, an exercise of power without much troublesome responsibility.

Times have changed and demands on MPs' time have grown exponentially. In the 1950s, Members of Parliament routinely received 15 to 20 letters a week. That figure is now closer to 300 to 500. Constituents' expectations are justifiably higher. Being an MP is a full-time job—a 24-hour a day job, if we let it be so—but we do not have to be here. We are here by choice. Unlike most people, we do a job that we have chosen to do. We are, or we ought to be, full-time professionals. We are certainly paid as such. Indeed, we are well paid for the job that we do. We earn three to four times the average income of our constituents.

My analysis of the Register of Members' Interests shows, however, that no less than 24 per cent. of our colleagues are not satisfied with the job that they are doing.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Name them.

Peter Bradley: I am sorry, but it would be difficult to name 155 Members who think that they can do this job and, in many cases, several others besides. The House of Commons has become the epicentre of the black economy. No self-respecting employer in our constituencies would tolerate the moonlighting in which many Members of the House are engaged. It would not be tolerated in our constituencies; it should not be allowed here. However, a quarter of MPs are evidently too greedy, too bored or too arrogant to devote the time and energy to the job that their constituents pay them to do.

Those Members have not fallen on such hard times that they are taking in laundry. They are in the City boardrooms and the Inns of Court, earning a small fortune. I am not suggesting that MPs should be required to clock on or that the Bill would stop them sending their apologies to Select Committees from the grouse moors—I had that experience as a member of the Public Administration Committee—but we can stop Members moonlighting. That is what the Bill would do. It is not about setting limits on MPs' incomes.

If hon. Members receive dividends or inheritances, good luck to them, but the Bill would ensure that Members are not paid to be somewhere else when they should be doing the job of MP. It is not unduly prescriptive either. It would allow such occupations—journalism, lecturing, public policy development—that are broadly compatible with the role of MP. It simply is not acceptable for MPs to pursue parallel careers as company directors, Queen's counsel or consultants. The Bill would outlaw those activities for MPs and in so doing help to improve the overall performance of Parliament and its scrutiny role in particular.

My review of the register has revealed that 8 per cent. of Labour MPs would fall foul of the Bill—that is 8 per cent. too many in my view—and that 28 per cent. of Liberal Democrat Members are moonlighting. It is hardly surprising, but the Conservatives carry off the prize and, indeed, the cheques. In recent years, the Conservative party's persistent theme has been that the House of Commons is supine, Parliament is in decline and the Government go unchecked. Why, then, do Conservative Members have the lowest voting records and the lowest attendance records at Select Committees, Bill Committees and statutory instruments Committees? Where are they?

According to my analysis, 66 per cent. of Conservative Members—more than 100—are out there in the marketplace when they should be putting their money where their mouth is and holding the Executive to account. When 57 per cent. of Tory Front Benchers and 48 per cent.—almost half—of the Shadow Cabinet are out there, too, it is little wonder that the Opposition are so roundly dismissed and despised by the public. How can a Tory Front Bencher be doing his job when he has 16 directorships to nurture? How can a Tory Select Committee Chairman find time for that important job when he is the director of eight companies, a partner in another, an adviser to two more and a practising barrister to boot?

The Bill would offer those Members and, indeed, right hon. and hon. Members from all parties a choice—be a member of the board or be a Member of Parliament, but not both. Most Members of Parliament are here because they believe in public service. We need to show our constituents that that is our top priority, first and last. If we cannot commit ourselves to our constituents and keep the faith with them, how can we expect them to place their confidence with us? Reform starts here, and it starts with us.

4.31 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I oppose the Bill. At the outset, I should make it clear that I have nothing to declare, in the sense that I would not fall within the ambit of the Bill because I do not have the sort of outside interest that the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) has described. Incidentally, I hope that the hon. Gentleman contacted the Chairman of the Select Committee to whom he referred to say that he would be impugning his integrity.

I listened to the hon. Gentleman with growing incredulity. He mentioned hon. Members flirting with the boardrooms and the courtrooms. I remind him that many Labour Members who are involved with the boardroom and the courtroom are the most active in cross-examining the Government. No consideration is given in the Bill to the type of work or the amount of time it takes up. It is a catch-all Bill that has nothing to do with the workings of the House, but everything to do with old-fashioned class warfare. Even now, hon. Members are frightened to raise issues of which they have intimate knowledge because current rules say that if Members have an interest, they cannot say anything—even if they know that legislation, for example, is wrong—because it is against the Standing Orders of the House. That is wrong.

The electorate would be wholly disadvantaged by the Bill. The only winners would be Whitehall or Downing street, because it would result in an emasculated Parliament. I note that the hon. Member for The Wrekin has listed some of the activities that would be exempt under the Bill. I have checked the Register of Members' Interests and that list appears to coincide almost precisely with his own declaration of activities.

I was also curious to find out why the hon. Gentleman wished to promote this Bill, so I researched his background. He did a BA in American studies at Sussex university. That is not bad, because I did a masters degree at Sussex university. The hon. Gentleman went on to become a public affairs consultant, a research director for the Centre for Contemporary Studies, a director of Good Relations and managing director of Millbank Consultants. So he has never done a proper job.

I decided to analyse the questions asked of the Prime Minister by those hon. Members who have time to spend—the sort of Member that the hon. Gentleman would like to see in the House. For example, the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) asked:

> "It was great to see my right hon. Friend in Afghanistan earlier this week . . . encouraging our brave troops".—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 543.]

That was a question, apparently.

Just before Christmas, an hon. Lady asked this:

> "My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will know that the Reading urban area has received an excellent local transport settlement of nearly £7 million and that it has also received £38 million for improvements to junction 11 on the M4. Does he agree—"

we have a question at least—

> "that this is a wonderful Christmas present for the people of Reading".

That is an example of incisive questioning. What was the Prime Minister's answer to this difficult question?

> "I agree—I think it is a wonderful Christmas present".

On the same day, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) asked a penetrating question, bearing in mind that thousands of people had been made redundant in the aircraft industry. Nevertheless, he said:

> "I congratulate the Prime Minister on the Government's effective response to the difficulties in the aerospace industry after the events of 11 September."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 280-87.]

[Michael Fabricant]

On 21 November, the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) asked this:

> "After his no doubt healthy breakfast, did the Prime Minister have a chance to read the leader in *The Guardian*? Does he agree that affordable designer casualwear should be available in supermarkets throughout the country?"—[*Official Report*, 21 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 312.]

My final quote comes from the hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams); I will not be too rude about her because she lives in the same block of flats as me and we often walk home together. On 14 November, she said:

> "Now that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues are sorting out Railtrack—"—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 858.]

Need I go on any further, Madam Deputy Speaker?

The Bill is a load of self-indulgent, unreconstructed, ill-thought-out tosh. It would weaken Parliament, not strengthen it. It may not be consigned to the dustbin today, but I have no doubt that the Labour Government will consign it to the dustbin and dump it tomorrow.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business, and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Peter Bradley, Ms Karen Buck, Mr. Iain Coleman, John Cryer, Mr. David Drew, Ms Julia Drown, Clive Efford, Helen Jackson, Martin Linton, Mr. Martin Salter, Mr. Jonathan Shaw and David Wright.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (EMPLOYMENT DISQUALIFICATION)

Mr. Peter Bradley accordingly presented a Bill to regulate the remunerated employment a Member of Parliament may undertake: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 April, and to be printed [Bill 81].

Orders of the Day

National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

READINESS OF PRIMARY CARE GROUPS AND TRUSTS

'(1) The Health Service Commissioners shall investigate the preparedness—

(a) of Primary Care Groups to become Primary Care Trusts; and

(b) of Primary Care Trusts to receive functions in accordance with this Act.

(2) If after conducting an investigation it appears to a Commissioner that—

(a) a Primary Care Group is not ready to become a Primary Care Trust; or

(b) a Primary Care Trust is not ready to receive functions in accordance with this Act

he shall lay before each House of Parliament a special report.

(3) If a special report is laid in accordance with subsection (2)(a) above, no action shall be taken by the Secretary of State pursuant to section 16A(1) or (1A) of the 1977 Act for the period of one year from the date of laying of the report.

(4) If a special report is laid in accordance with subsection (2)(b) above, no functions shall be transferred or distributed to the Primary Care Trust referred to in the report for a period of one year from the date of laying of the report.'.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.38 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 6, in clause 1, page 2, line 11, at end insert—

> '(c) a Strategic Health Authority shall only be established under paragraph (a) above provided that there has been consultation with health professionals, local authorities and the general public in that area.'.

No. 7, line 11, at end insert—

> '(d) a Health Authority shall only be established under paragraph (b) above provided that there has been consultation with health professionals, local authorities and the general public in that area'.

Government amendments Nos. 23 and amendment (a) thereto, 24 to 26, 74, 27 and 28.

No. 8, in clause 8, page 9, line 21, at end insert—

> '(2A) In determining the amount to be allotted to a Primary Care Trust, the Secretary of State shall have regard to any liabilities which have been conferred upon it'.

No. 9, line 21, at end insert—

> '(2B) In determining the amount to be allotted to a Primary Care Trust, the Secretary of State shall have regard to the health needs of the population served by that Trust.'.

Government amendments Nos. 35, 36, 54, 55 and 61.

Mr. Burns: We tabled new clause 1 because, as we said on Second Reading and in Committee, we believe that there has been an inordinate rush to establish strategic health authorities and primary care trusts. It would be a grave mistake, and the height of folly, to rush through reforms in such as way as to leave them half cocked and half baked, so that the Bill does not achieve the Government's aims.

The changes proposed in clauses 1 and 2 are extremely far reaching. Clause 1 proposes to abolish health authorities in England, of which there are approximately 95, and to replace them with strategic health authorities. There will be far fewer strategic health authorities than there are health authorities, and they will perform the key performance management role across the national health service in England. They will be responsible also for providing a lead in the strategic development of services, and for ensuring that all parts of the NHS work together effectively.

The new primary care trusts will have the critical responsibility of providing and funding health care. About 75 per cent. of NHS funding will be handed to the PCTs to provide health care for our constituents around the country. The concern is that there has been far too much of a rush over starting up a new system that is very complex and wide ranging.

I cannot understand why the Government are in such a rush to engineer the reforms. I question whether the structures to be put in place are ready to work without the whole edifice collapsing in confusion and disaster. The Government's rush to implement the changes reminds me of the adage, "Reform in haste, repent at leisure." The British Medical Association has warned that PCTs, where they exist, are relatively new organisations and that, as a result, the demands placed on them may be beyond their capabilities.

The BMA has highlighted the fact that existing PCTs already experience difficulties in recruiting clinical staff, and warns that those problems will be exacerbated. It is also concerned that the timetable within which PCTs are intended to be and up and running is far too ambitions.

As we heard on Second Reading and again in Committee, the Standing Committee considering the Health Bill in 1999—which became the Act that made possible the establishment of PCTs—was told by the former Minister of State at the Department of Health, who is now Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), that it was important to emphasise that the Government did not

"intend a headlong rush to be made into PCTs".

He added that it was

"not part of the Government's agenda to impose PCTs on the national health service."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 27 April 1999; c. 252-53.]

In another place, the former Health Minister Baroness Hayman made exactly the same point and gave the same assurances that there would be no rush to create PCTs, but the Government have performed a complete U-turn and are now doing precisely what they said they would not do when the 1999 Act went through this House a mere two and a half years ago.

Not only Conservative Members are worried. Severe concerns have been expressed by members of the health professions that the proposals are being rushed through. A recent survey in the *Health Service Journal* showed that 46 per cent. of chief executives in NHS organisations believed that PCTs would be unable to cope with enlarged responsibilities, and that 33 per cent. of them thought that the time scale and scale of the changes were unrealistic and dangerous. One chief executive has called the reforms a recipe for disaster, and another has described them as the most ill conceived and poorly thought out set of changes in decades.

The King's Fund, in collaboration with the National Primary Care Research and Development Centre, has carried out a tracking survey on primary care groups and trusts. It suggests that there are many doubts about the ability of PCTs to absorb the pace of reform. Professor David Wilkin, the project director, said that the pace of change was being dictated by Government timetables rather than by a process of learning and of building on experience. He also pointed out:

"It is not merely a question of resources to sort out this issue . . . What is needed are managers with the right skills and experience coming through the system. Managers from trusts and health authorities can be taken on, but we are dealing with primary care and they don't necessarily have the skills needed".

The survey pointed out that the average number of managerial, financial and administrative staff employed by primary care groups was 6.8, compared with an average number for primary care trusts of 15.8—a serious discrepancy.

Equally worrying is the fact that one in seven PCGs or PCTs still has—or had at the end of last year—no financial director.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I am reluctant to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's measured flow, but he is aware, because he raised the same point in Committee, that primary care groups are sub-committees of health authorities and are under no obligation to employ their own finance director. They use the finance directors employed by health authorities, which is a perfectly sensible arrangement.

Mr. Burns: I appreciate what the Minister says, but PCTs will have to employ finance directors when health authorities are scrapped. It is by no means certain that the finance director of a health authority will become the finance director of a PCT. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says "obviously". I accept his observation, but I argue that it adds to the force of my case. I suspect that many PCTs around the country will have finance directors without direct experience of working in the health service, with all the nuances and differences that those responsibilities cover.

4.45 pm

According to the report, the situation with regard to information management and technology was perhaps of more concern. It states:

"Information to support core functions of PCG/Ts is inadequate and shows little sign of improving. PCG/Ts have made some progress in formulating development plans".

It goes on to say:

"Increasing shortages of skilled staff and resources make it doubtful whether they will achieve key national targets."

Of greater worry to the authors of the report, to the BMA and to many others is whether the changes in the Bill will divert activity and resources from front-line patient care. Three quarters of chief executives questioned believed that the reorganisation would delay delivery of the national plan, and a quarter thought that the delay

[Mr. Burns]

would be severe. That would obviously have a critical impact on the delivery of patient care and the ability to provide the seamless flow of patient care when the changeover occurs.

Our new clause seeks to save the Government from themselves by laying down procedures to ensure that changes to the delivery of health care under clause, 1 and especially clause 2, are introduced smoothly, successfully and without undue haste. We propose that the health service commissioners should investigate the preparedness of PCGs to become PCTs and the preparedness of existing PCTs to fulfil the functions that the Bill places on them.

Under our new clause, where it is found that a PCG is not ready to become a PCT or—possibly more important because of the unseemly rush of PCGs to become PCTs—where it is found that a primary care trust is not ready to carry out its functions, a special report would be laid before both Houses of Parliament. There would then be a period of 12 months when no action was taken, so as to establish a breathing space to allow PCGs and PCTs to prepare themselves adequately to perform their duties and functions. I hope that the House agrees that our suggestion is eminently sensible and that it will avoid the confusion and chaos that will result from fragile new bodies carrying out immense new duties with too little or no experience.

If our Committee debates are anything to go by, Ministers will respond in an ostrich-like way. They will refuse to remove their heads from the sand and will try to reassure us that everything is proceeding satisfactorily, that there is nothing to worry about and that there are no problems. I am sure that they will trot out the same statistics as we heard in Committee at the back end of last year.

Ministers will tell us that by October 2002 PCT coverage in England will be 100 per cent. I was interested to note, when I re-read the Minister's comments, that during the early sittings of the Committee he told us that there would be 100 per cent. coverage by April 2002. During a few sittings of the Committee, that date seemed to slip back to October 2002.

Today, the Minister may be able to update us on the statistics that he gave us in Committee on the current progress of PCGs and PCTs. I suspect that, given the relatively short period that has elapsed since the end of the Committee proceedings, the figures will differ little from those that he gave us on 27 November last year.

The Minister seems rather cheerful, as though there had been a dramatic change in the statistics. I shall read the statistics that he gave us last November, and no doubt he will be able to update us during the debate. While he is doing so he may prove one of the points that I am making about the moral pressure that is being put on PCGs to seek PCT status. They feel under pressure to achieve that status as quickly as possible so as not to miss out, or to cause problems, before October of this year.

Unless the Minister has startling new figures, however, I suspect that we shall hear that 164 PCTs were established by April 2001; that a further 23 were—at the end of last November—likely to be approved shortly; that 23 of the remaining PCGs were approved for establishment from April 2002; and that 20 had been approved but had not yet received their notification of approval. I suspect that notwithstanding the Christmas post they will almost certainly have received that notification by now.

The Minister will tell us that 98 PCGs have submitted proposals for approval and were likely to be approved during December 2001 and January 2002. Of course, it is highly unlikely, given the Government's policy, that a PCG will not receive approval for trust status. He will tell us that a mere 11 PCGs are still consulting.

In the not too distant future the Minister will, no doubt, update the figures. From the look on his face, he may even be able to tell us that he anticipates 100 per cent. approval by April 2002. That remains to be seen. However, behind all those statistics and behind whatever new statistics the Minister may shortly give us, a simple fact remains: there has been undue haste because the Government have changed their policy on PCTs. In effect, they have moved from a policy that was wholly voluntary.

The Minister will say that there is currently no legal power to make any group become a PCT. That is true, but the pressure on PCGs to fall in line with the Government's policy and become PCTs is overwhelming, because they know that once the Bill is on the statute book the voluntary nature of becoming a PCT will be removed. We questioned the Minister on several occasions in Committee. He replied that he would ensure 100 per cent. coverage of PCTs in England by October 2002—if necessary, by using the legislation.

PCGs are now becoming PCTs voluntarily, but that masks the pressure they have been under—that of knowing what the future holds for them. Like all hon. Members in the Chamber, they have seen the Bill and know the Government's intentions. As a result of that pressure, many PCGs that were not in the first wave rushed into securing trust status, which they otherwise probably would not have sought within such a relatively short time scale. A great deal of pressure has been put on PCGs to achieve PCT status, and many of them might not be properly prepared to handle their new, highly complex and difficult responsibilities. For those reasons, tremendous problems could arise in the health care provided to our constituents.

My message to the Government is simple, and it is intended to be helpful: they are under no pressure—or only that caused by their own enthusiasm to put their Bill on the statute book to ensure that their proposals are up and running as soon as possible—and they should hold back for a short period. I suggest not that the proposals on trust status should be kicked into the long grass for a decade and a day never to happen, but that the Government should allow a little more time for the experience and expertise to be built up to ensure that, from day one, PCTs operate in a seamless and workable way and that our constituents encounter no hiatus, no teething problems and no other problem with their health care.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) said in Committee, we do not disapprove of the PCT concept, but we want the Government to ensure that PCTs work properly and that they seamlessly fulfil their functions as soon as possible. If something is rushed, there can be no guarantee that that will be the end result. I warn Ministers now that if the transition is not seamless and it is bungled by the rush, terrible problems will arise. People's health will be directly affected by any hiatus in the supply of care. Ministers do not want that to happen, which is why I cannot fully understand why they seem to be reluctant to take well-meaning advice simply to delay things a little to give the system time.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the rush to create PCTs. I attended a meeting of the PCG in my area last summer and can confirm that pressure has been put on those organisations. Indeed, a PCT has been created in my area despite the fact that the majority of GPs voted against it. However, I am not so sure about the new clause. There should be a delay but, when the health authorities are abolished, who will carry out the responsibilities currently delegated to PCTs?

5 pm

Mr. Burns: The hon. Lady, who represents a Birmingham constituency, alludes to a considerable problem with primary care trust status in her area. There was a great deal of opposition to the proposal. As she knows, there could be serious problems if—God forbid it does not happen—there were to be a hiatus as a result of the change. As she rightly said, the health authorities that handle the funding for the provision of services will be abolished and replaced by smaller strategic health authorities that have a completely different function and role.

Most of the functions that health authorities perform will be transferred to primary care trusts. If they are in turmoil as a result of their lack of experience of running the new system, they will face a serious problem and there will be no way out of it. That is why I am desperately trying to impress on the Minister how sensible it would be to provide a little more time. We should not push the policy into the long grass never to be seen again; we should provide more time to allow expertise to be built up.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I want to support my hon. Friend's argument with a practical example from my constituency. Rochford primary care group, which includes several GP practices from Castle Point, considered whether to apply for PCT status but declined to do so in the first instance for a number of reasons. It had general concerns about the Government's proposals, faced some organisational issues and also faced problems with timing. Some of the GPs who were consulted thought that they were being rushed into the change.

My hon. Friend's point is a real one, as evidenced by experience in my constituency. Leaving aside GPs' anxieties about the overall desirability of the proposals, many are anxious about the pace at which the change is being attempted.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and next-door neighbour for a powerful point that backs up the examples that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire and I have been given from around the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) is absolutely right. He has first-hand experience in his constituency of a problem that is not unique to his area. I am glad that the Minister is here to listen to the very problems that my hon. Friend highlighted.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 7 would also affect PCTs, as strategic health authorities in England and health authorities in Wales would be created only once there had been proper consultations

> "with health professionals, local authorities and the general public"

in the relevant areas in which the authorities are to be established.

I hope that Ministers in a Government who pay lip service to openness will find the amendments appealing. Before establishing a body that is responsible for strategic planning, it would be sensible that those who have to help to implement decisions and those who will be affected by those decisions should be consulted about the setting up of the authorities and about the crucial strategic role that they will play.

I am heartened and pleased that we tabled such timely amendments. I received on my desk at lunchtime the Secretary of State's speech to the New Health Network, which he gave this morning. I am not sure when you entered the Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it was interesting to see the Secretary of State for Health dragged here at half-past 3 to respond to a private notice question from my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). The right hon. Gentleman's interesting and important speech raised a number of issues on which we, through the good offices of Mr. Speaker, had the opportunity to question him, instead of leaving it to journalists.

It was fascinating to see the right hon. Gentleman's reaction. The Benches were much fuller, and we had to look far and wide to find a Labour Back Bencher who was prepared to offer a crumb of support for the contents of his speech. It struck me that if the speech sets out his new philosophy and ethos—the word that he now uses—perhaps his Minister of State will be more amenable to accepting amendments Nos. 6 and 7, which encourage openness and consultation.

In the speech to the New Health Network, the Secretary of State said:

> "All of these reforms"—

although relevant to the health service more generally, they tie in with the amendments—

> "involve government acting on behalf of patients in order to influence how the NHS relates to patients",

as, indeed, the strategic health authorities should relate to patients. He went on:

> "They are all about getting the NHS to put the needs of its patients first. But a service designed around the needs of patients has to hand over more power directly to them. So there are reforms to give patients a greater role and a stronger say in the NHS—patients forums in every trust"—

we will get on to those later because my hon. Friends and one or two Labour Members are not fooled by that—

> "patients electing patients onto trust boards, the results of patient surveys helping to determine the ratings and the resources that trusts receive. And there are reforms too to introduce new procedures for informed consent because while patients have a responsibility to keep healthy, treat professionals respectfully and use services wisely, they have a right to be involved in decisions about their own care."

I welcome the Secretary of State's philosophy on that, but what gives patients a greater opportunity to be involved in decisions about their care than consulting them, with health professionals and local authorities, as part of the local community, before the important strategic

[Mr. Burns]

health authorities are set up? I should have thought that he would be delighted that I am embracing that aspect of his philosophy.

Although the Secretary of State had to concentrate on surviving the questions put by Labour Members this afternoon and possibly has to brace himself for the publicity that he will receive from the national press tomorrow morning and on the airwaves tonight, I hope that he will find a little time to win back some of his lost ground by contacting his Minister of State, whose presence in the Chamber means that he is isolated from him, to explain that the amendments provide a way to involve patients in the process and enable us to do something constructive, which I have been outlining in a high-falutin' way in my important contribution.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I wonder whether my hon. Friend shares my mystification about where in the Bill there is any reference to the plan that the Secretary of State outlined only a short while ago.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend raises a rather confusing point. No doubt he was present for the private notice question, so he distinctly heard the Secretary of State say that he had not been dragged to the House today and that we would have the opportunity, during this evening's debate, to discuss the proposals outlined in his remarks. I am not convinced that the Secretary of State is as well acquainted as you are, Madam Deputy Speaker, with the procedures of the House.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): The Secretary of State has not read the Bill.

Mr. Burns: Certainly not. That is left to the Minister of State.

You, Madam Deputy Speaker, will tell me, rightly, that I cannot discuss the matters on which the Secretary of State was being questioned because they are not in the Bill, but my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) is right to be mystified. The only part of the Secretary of State's remarks today that is relevant and, more importantly, in order—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that he should be addressing his remarks to new clause 1.

Mr. Burns: I am extremely grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, because before you correctly reminded me of that, I was about to say that the only remarks by the Secretary of State that are relevant to the Bill relate to the narrow amendments, Nos. 6 and 7, on the need to consult before setting up strategic health authorities.

I am optimistic that a crumb will fall from the table, as it did in Committee, and the Minister of State will ask, "Why didn't we think of this first?" If the Secretary of State had made his remarks earlier, we could have amended the Bill in Committee. The Minister of State would not have been so hard-nosed in Committee as to oppose our amendments on strategic health authorities. I hope that he will be more relaxed and more amenable to amendments Nos. 6 and 7, which would play an important role in empowering local communities before the establishment of strategic health authorities. They would make communities feel that they were part of the system, and people would be reassured that their opinions, ideas and recommendations were being taken into account.

Amendment No. 8 is straightforward. It looks modest but it is important, concerning as it does any funding and financial liabilities conferred on a new primary care trust under the new system. It may represent a belt-and-braces approach because I believe that the Minister of State said in Committee that, with one exception, health authorities do not have deficits. He may therefore argue, and I will listen carefully, that the amendment is not needed because when the new system is established, no deficits or liabilities will be conferred on the PCTs. However, this is an important issue that needs to be considered because nobody wants to strangle the new system at birth with debts that the PCTs did not incur.

5.15 pm

Finally, amendment No. 9—again, a straightforward amendment—states:

> "In determining the amount to be allotted to a Primary Care Trust, the Secretary of State shall have regard to the health needs of the population served by that Trust."

A modest proposal: I assume that few people in the Chamber would disagree with its sentiments. It is important that the funding of health care is based on the needs of the local population and, of course, there are different needs in different parts of the country and among different populations. Off the top of my head, in my own area of mid-Essex there is a pressing need for even more money than the increase because, as the Minister is all too aware, our hospital waiting lists have not fallen for a single day below the level at which they were when the Government came to power on 1 May 1997. I have said before, and have told the Prime Minister, who does not seem to have an answer, that there is a pressing need to take into account local considerations; for some reason, the Government cannot honour their promise to bring down waiting lists in mid-Essex.

There are other interesting criteria. I am sure that you are an avid reader of *Hansard*, Madam Deputy Speaker. One should look at the figures; I am choosing my words carefully because, I confess, I made a mistake 10 days ago in a written question. I asked the Government for health spending per head of population in Sedgefield, West Chelmsford, South-West Surrey and North-West Hampshire. Their response surprised me although, in another way, it did not. Funnily enough, Sedgefield receives noticeably more funding per head of population than West Chelmsford, South-West Surrey and North-West Hampshire—but not according to the answer, because, to be fair to the Minister of State, I was not specific and asked only for the amount. He gave me the weighted amount; his answer showed that the four areas, give or take £10 or so, each received about the same.

If one asks the question that I should have asked—"What is the actual spend?"—the amounts are significantly different. Sedgefield gets significantly more per head of population than the other constituencies. I do not imagine that that was the case 10 years ago and I imagine that, in a few years' time, it will not be so.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): My understanding is that the weighted capitation allocation formula was introduced by the Conservatives as a change from the one used by the old resource allocation working party. It was amended on the advice of the University of York by this Government or the previous Government. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman will find that it has always been the case that deprivation, because of greater health needs, rightly leads to greater funding.

Mr. Burns: I accept that. I thought that that was what I was saying about the amendment: different circumstances—including social deprivation, but others as well—determine the amount of health spending. We are trying to include that in the Bill; we must have regard to the population's health needs. To be fair, RAWP, for reasons that I shall not go into, was a flawed system, certainly for people in the home counties. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) changed the system to one that depended more on allocation per head of population. Indeed, when the Secretary of State first came to the Department as a Minister in 1997—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will now get back to the main point in his amendment.

Mr. Burns: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

When funding allocations are made to PCTs, it is important that the needs of the population served by that trust are taken into account, for health rather than political reasons. On those grounds, I hope that the Minister will accept the amendment. One lives in hope. It is a new year, and the Minister is a reasonable man.

Finally, I urge the Minister to consider carefully the time scale for the changeover to PCTs. It would be a crying shame if their introduction was marred by the fact that the system did not run smoothly. With the money that will be available, there is potential for PCTs to make a real difference to local people.

Dr. Evan Harris: I shall comment briefly on the amendments in the group and speak to my amendment (a) to Government amendment No. 23, before the Minister moves the amendment. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) knows that I share his concerns about the speed of the change being imposed on the health service and the fact that there is to be yet more structural change. There seems to be no coherent strategy emanating from the Government under the Health Act 1999. As the hon. Gentleman said in Committee and repeated today, the national plan did not envisage that all primary care groups would have to become primary care trusts, no matter what.

As I said on Second Reading and in Committee, part of the motivation for the changes seems to be that the Government want to be seen to be doing something and are therefore substituting activity for action. I expect that the Government will resist the new clause for the same reasons as they have done before.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 7 may well be covered by provisions in the Bill. Government amendment No. 23 deals with consultation issues. There is little enthusiasm for yet more amendments on that subject, such as amendments Nos. 6 and 7, because of the consultation arrangements already included.

I recognise that Government amendment No. 23 is a response to concerns raised in Committee by the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and others.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman should give credit to my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who spoke to the amendment. The hon. Member for Leigh then agreed.

Dr. Harris: I am more than willing to do so. I apologise if the hon. Member for West Chelmsford is deeply offended by not having had due recognition of the fact that he raised concerns about the degree of consultation. We all agree that there should be adequate consultation about strategic health authorities when boundaries and names are changed. I feel so strongly about the matter that I tabled an amendment to Government amendment No. 23, which would specify that the Secretary of State "shall", not simply "may", make regulations. I hope that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will support that.

Under previous arrangements, when there were community health councils, there was a duty on the Secretary of State to consult on such changes. That duty had existed for 23 years, since the National Health Service Act 1977. It seems that the obligation to consult—that is, the Secretary of State's duty to make regulations—has not exactly fettered Governments in reforming names, structures or boundaries since then. We have been inundated with reforms over those 23 years. If the Government choose to resist amendment (a) to Government amendment No. 23, they must explain why they place a lower priority on consultation than in the past, making it a mere optional extra if the whim takes the Secretary of State.

The question is whether the Government will empower local communities by asking them what they think. I had a useful meeting with the Under-Secretary of State which touched on the matter. She kindly responded by letter, and I hope she will not mind if I quote it. She stated:

> "The Government amendment specifies that the Secretary of State may make regulations, rather than shall."

She said that the reason for that was:

> "ensuring that there is scope for flexibility in the future."

The only remaining flexibility relates to the ability not to make regulations on consulting local communities. If the Government want such flexibility, it can only be to water down obligations for which they should be providing. I hope that they will reconsider the wording of Government amendment No. 23. If they resist amendment (a) thereto, we will have to raise the matter in the House of Lords.

As I said in an intervention, I am not entirely sure of the purpose of amendment No. 9, or of what it would produce. I understand that allocations that are part of weighted capitation are sensitive to the health needs of the local community. My concern is that the Government often go too far in seeking to take parts of that cake for central allocation, which inevitably does not ensure that allocation is transparent. The formula is complex, but at least we know what we are dealing with and allocations move slowly towards that formula when there is growth in the system.

I look forward to hearing the Government's response to my concern about Government amendment No. 23.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I should like in particular to address amendment No. 6, which relates to the setting up of strategic health authorities. I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said about primary care trusts, as I believe that they have been established too quickly. We often attack the Government for dragging their feet and not producing the documents that we want. For example, in the north-east, we are waiting for a White Paper on regional government—indeed, we are waiting, waiting and waiting. However, in this case, the speed of the changes has been far too great.

An interesting example is the speed with which local health authorities in the north-east had to operate in order to set up a strategic health authority and carry out the consultation that was involved. The Department of Health launched the initiative on 7 September and it had to be finished by 30 November. That was a very considerable job for four health authorities covering a population of almost 2 million. Indeed, it was an enormous job. The chief executives of the health authorities that cover Northumberland, Newcastle and north Tyneside, Gateshead and south Tyneside and Sunderland joined together and set up a small project team in order to carry out the consultation, and it is worth considering what they achieved in that period. They held 38 meetings with the public, and dished out 6,000 copies of the consultation document and 33,000 copies of the summary leaflet. That was all done within the very tight space of time that I have mentioned. Moreover, 12 public meetings were held—one in each authority area. A proper presentation was given at each meeting, but sadly they were not well attended, as so often happens, especially when so little warning is given.

One of the results of such a rushed operation was that members of the general public did not have an opportunity to register what was going on and attend the meetings. We cannot blame the project board for trying, but given the Government's rushed timetable, it was impossible to interest very many local people. The board helpfully published a summary of the consultation process. As well as mailing all the usual suspects, including local authorities, parish councils and so on, it tried to seek publicity in the media and picked 4,000 people at random from electoral registers in order to write to them. The net result, however, was that the biggest attendance at any of the public meetings was in Gateshead, where 20 people attended. The worst attendance was in Ashington, where only one member of the public turned up.

I regret to say that in my constituency, where many people are extremely interested in what goes on, only six people turned up. I know my constituency well, so I am aware that there is very strong community spirit in Hexham. It seems inconceivable that only six people in Hexham were interested in attending a public meeting relating to a matter as important as the establishment of a new strategic health authority and all the primary care trusts that flow from it. Responsibility for what happened can be laid directly at the door of the rushed consultation process.

5.30 pm

It is worth dwelling on the results of the meetings, which comprised professionals as well as members of the public. The summary states:

> "At most meetings comments were made about the pace of change and the enormity of the proposed changes. This was particularly in terms of the responsibilities for primary care trusts as new or developing organisations."

That was much on people's minds. The major anxiety of those involved in providing health care in the north-east was that great change was being made extremely quickly. My hon. Friends have identified that, and I do not understand why Ministers have to rush all the changes.

The summary also concluded:

> "At most of the meetings there were comments about the potential for public confusion with so many organisational changes taking place within the NHS."

Again, members of the public, those involved in local authorities, health professionals and members of community health councils were worried that the process was being rushed and that more time was needed.

Another lesson is that most people wanted information about the operation of the new systems. They wanted reassurance that the process of change would not create instability in the health service and the health economy. Our amendments are important because it is not necessary to rush matters. I do not understand why the Government should launch a consultation process to set up a strategic health authority that will serve nearly 2 million people on 7 September and expect it to be in place by April 2002, when we are still discussing the measure that relates to it in January.

Mr. Francois: I want to deal with two specific matters: primary care trusts and strategic health authorities. In an earlier intervention, I gave the example of the Rochford primary care trust, which covers part of my constituency and several GP practices in Castle Point. I said that when it was a primary health group, it hesitated before applying for trust status, partly because some GPs were anxious about the pace at which the Government were attempting to push the process forward. I understand that the PCG has now applied for trust status, and that it has recently received formal approval from the Department of Health, or is close to doing so.

In the past few years, GPs have had to cope with a tremendous amount of organisational change, such as the abolition of GP fundholding and its replacement by PCGs. Just as GPs were adjusting to the changes, the Government decided that they wanted them to be organised in PCTs rather than PCGs. More responsibility is associated with the former. Today, the Secretary of State made a speech which, it is worth reiterating, was not delivered in the House. He said that there may be further changes to the organisation and responsibilities of PCTs. I cannot pursue that further now if I am to remain in order. However, it is fair to point out that there will have been three, potentially four, major changes in almost as many years to the organisation by means of which GPs deliver primary care to the public.

As we all know, GPs are busy. They can be expected to accommodate only so much change without its adversely affecting their ability to provide an adequate service to the patients whom they serve.

I shall give a practical example from my constituency. In the town of South Woodham Ferrers, a number of GPs have lists in excess of 2,000 patients long; one has a list in excess of 3,000. It defeats me how people who have to cope with that many patients can also realistically be expected to find the time to cope with yet more organisational change of the type alluded to earlier today.

All the strategic health authorities were originally meant to be going live by 1 April this year. The Government have said repeatedly that they intend to adhere to that deadline, despite being told by many people who work in these areas that it would be practically impossible to do so. We are now some two and a half months away from that deadline, yet the senior appointments have not yet been confirmed in many strategic health authorities. Even in those SHAs whose chairmen and chief executives have been confirmed, the principal directors who will report to them have, in most cases, not been. The senior management teams in a large number of the SHAs are not yet in place, even though they are supposed to go live some two and a half months from today.

There are other major issues to consider as well as the management of the SHAs. The place in which a number of them will be located has not yet been determined. Furthermore, the information technology systems that the SHAs will use has in many cases not been determined, particularly in cases in which perhaps two or three health authorities are being merged into one SHA. Funnily enough, in a number of cases, we find that they are all using slightly different IT systems, which will now require a great deal of work to make them all talk to one another. Alternatively, some of the SHAs might have to go back to square one, abandon the legacy systems that have been inherited and come up with an entirely new IT system.

These are all significant issues that will require a great deal of time and careful thinking. Yet, in theory, all these problems up and down the country will be solved in a matter of a few months. The people working in these areas are putting in tremendous hours to try to make all this happen in the allocated time, but realistically it is not enough. There is only so much that human effort can achieve.

It is worth stressing these points for one fundamental reason. Even leaving aside what has been said this morning and this afternoon, the creation of primary care trusts—and the movement of responsibility and, particularly, funding to those trusts—is a fundamental part of the Government's 10-year plan for the national health service. The creation of strategic health authorities is also an important part of that plan. If these elements are so important to the Government's overall conception, it seems ridiculous to rush them through in such an ill thought out way. If these key building blocks for the scheme are not launched successfully, the whole plan will be in danger of unravelling.

It is not unreasonable to point that out to Ministers, or to ask them, at the eleventh hour, to pause and allocate more time, to give these already overworked people a fighting chance of trying to bring this off.

Dr. Murrison: I am happy to say—and the Minister will be pleased to hear—that in Wiltshire, we are well ahead of the power curve in relation to turning PCGs into PCTs. I am conscious, however, of areas of the country in which that is simply not the case. I support PCTs; the Government have built a cogent way ahead for primary care and I welcome that. My concern is that this fundamentally good plan is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) said, destined to fail in many areas of the country if it is not given sufficient time.

This week, the *Health Service Journal* has told us that delays in publishing guidance on the roles and responsibilities of management boards running strategic health authorities are causing grief for 27 chief executives appointed so far. We naturally assume that those people would feel buoyed up by their appointment to new roles, or indeed relieved to have jobs at all at a time of uncertainty in the health service, yet they appear to be fairly critical and worried about the fact that there are aspects of the job about which they are not certain.

That suggests to me that Ministers have handed down an unrealistic timetable for implementing the changes. Indeed, the second national tracker survey of 71 primary care trusts and primary care groups, which was supported by the Government, says:

> "Progress in commissioning, health improvement and partnership working is slower. Lack of reliability and timely information and insufficient managerial capacity remain".

In other words, the system is creaking under the pressure of changes in the NHS, which is not in a state to accommodate these changes in this time scale.

May I deal with strategic health authorities, because they have caused considerable grief across the country? A principal reason for that is that they have been insufficiently explained to people. Although it is not for me to be an apologist for the Government, I have spent considerable time reassuring those who have written to me that the SHAs and the boundaries that they impose should not impact on clinical networks and people getting health care as they do at the moment. The fact that they are worried and have had to contact me suggests that the changes are being pursued in such a way and according to such a brief time scale that the message is simply not getting across.

We have heard from the British Medical Association how many loose ends remain, particularly in relation to SHAs. It is concerned about academic medicine, which is in a parlous state. We have yet to hear how SHAs will further the agenda for it. Insufficient thought has been given to that, which shows that insufficient time was available for Richmond house to get its head round the complexity of the NHS and how the proposals will melt into it and improve the situation.

We have yet to hear whether tertiary health services will be the responsibility of SHAs, how PCTs will fit in or whether the regions will have a part to play. In other words, there is confusion—we have not been told. Again, that is not so much the fault of Richmond house or of Ministers; it is just that these things take time to work through, but the time scale is far too tight for that. I fully support the creation of PCTs, which is a positive move for primary care that is to be warmly welcomed, but I share the concerns of my hon. Friends that, in their haste, the Government risk the whole thing tumbling down like a pack of cards.

It is ironic that we are discussing the pace of change and, indeed, change of this nature as a Gallup poll published today shows that 40 per cent. of people think

[Dr. Murrison]

that the NHS is getting worse. Admittedly, a cheery and fairly optimistic minority of 13 per cent. reckon that it is getting better, but the balance think that it has remained static. It is difficult to see how the Bill will improve health outcomes—health care to patients—and I have yet to work out how that will happen.

The Government are intent on driving the Bill through, but I urge them to revisit the timetable to which they have committed themselves. In that helpful spirit, I draw their attention to the new clause.

5.45 pm

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): As the Minister is well aware from our deliberations in Committee, I, too, have reservations about the speed at which the reforms are being introduced. I am especially concerned because—if we are to believe the figures—by September 2004 75 per cent. of all spending will be dictated to a large extent by the PCTs. I am also in favour of the concept of localising health care as much as possible to ensure that patient care is given appropriate attention and meets required standards. My concern is that the speed of the reforms will put in jeopardy the foundation stones of the Bill, which in essence I support.

The National Primary Care Research and Development Centre, in collaboration with the King's Fund, has carried out a second national tracker survey of 71 primary care groups and trusts. Professor David Wilkin, the project director of the survey, has commented that

> "there is a real danger the management of the organisational changes is going to divert attention from the core functions of improving care."

He said that the pace of change was being dictated by Government timetables rather than a

> "process of learning and building on experience."

He believes that improvements can be made but that

> "it's important to make sure we are not trying to do everything at once."

The PCTs, where they exist, are relatively new organisations and the demands outlined may be beyond their existing capabilities. The PCTs need time to bed in and to get used to the important roles that they will perform in the new structure of the NHS. PCTs are already experiencing difficulties in recruiting clinical staff and those staff able, willing and competent to participate in the new functions. I have visited PCTs—as, I am sure, have other hon. Members—while they are taking on those new responsibilities, and have heard their concern that they cannot find the required calibre of management to fulfil the functions envisaged in the Bill in such a short time. Whether the deadline is spring 2003 or October 2003—as mentioned in Committee—it is an ambitious timetable given the tasks involved. There are some 120 PCGs, many of which are in the early stages of converting to PCT status.

I have two specific concerns about funding, and I would appreciate it if the Minister would address them. First, will PCTs be saddled with the outstanding deficits of health authorities as part of the devolution process? That would leave the PCTs without the resources to implement their devolved responsibilities, let alone achieve the Government's targets. Arguably, with ever increasing central directives and no additional resources, there will be little opportunity to improve the provision of health care over and above that achieved by the authorities the PCTs are to supplant.

My second concern is that it is unclear whether PCT funds will be protected from the revenue consequences of any major building projects. If PCTs are not protected from those consequences, concerns will arise in areas where boundary changes following the establishment of strategic health authorities mean that PCTs may retrospectively become liable for the revenue consequences of a major building project.

I am sure that the House would appreciate clarification from the Minister on those two issues. We all know that the devil is in the detail with a Bill of this sort, but those two examples give rise to the legitimate concern that the reforms—especially the establishment of PCTs—are being rushed through without due consideration for the consequences. I for one would much appreciate the Minister's clarification on those issues.

Mr. Hutton: I start by referring to Government amendment No. 23 and the Opposition amendments that relate to it. As hon. Members who were members of the Standing Committee will be aware, I agreed in Committee to reflect further on the need for an amendment to provide statutory provisions concerning consultation in respect of the names, boundaries and mergers of strategic health authorities. It is clear that the Bill should now make statutory provision for such consultation and Government amendment No. 23 has been tabled to give effect to that.

I would like to place on record my gratitude to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) for drawing my attention to the issue in Committee. It will come as no surprise to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford that I do not think that amendment. No. 6 is necessary. It would restrict the requirement for consultation to health professionals, local authorities and the public.

Amendment No. 23 allows for much wider consultation than the hon. Gentleman is proposing. I have concluded that, given the level of detail required, it would be best to deal with this issue by means of regulations rather than in the Bill. This is in line with, for example, the provisions for consultation on NHS trusts set out in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990—legislation introduced by the previous Conservative Government.

In part, that addresses some of the arguments that I wanted to deploy against amendment (a), tabled by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), which would put a duty on the Secretary of State to make regulations. We have also already carried out extensive consultation in relation to the first wave of SHAs—the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and others have referred to that—and we do not want to have to re-run that process. That would not be in anyone's best interests.

The vast majority of other regulation-making powers in primary legislation—concerning consultation on, for example, health authority structures and boundaries—do not put a duty on the Secretary of State. We have followed the standard pattern in drafting our amendment, which I hope is acceptable to the House.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon was in some confusion about the Government's intentions. I want to make it clear to him that the Secretary of State will make the regulations about consultation for SHAs. There would be precious little point in tabling the amendment if he were not of a mind to do that.

I also want to make it clear that we certainly do not place a lower importance on consultation in the new NHS. It is very important that we involve and carry with us the public, who will be affected by the direction of reform that is being implemented through the NHS. They have a democratic legitimacy and an entitlement to make their voices and views heard at all levels when change is being proposed to health organisations and structures and to local health services.

Rather than preview some of the arguments that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), will go through later, I shall say that it is clear that the reforms that we are asking the House to support today will strengthen and not weaken the role of public participation and involvement in the NHS.

Dr. Evan Harris: As the Minister has been so clear, it is likely that I will suggest that this matter is not pursued in the House of Lords if the norm in these circumstances is that there should not be a duty to make regulations, but that the Secretary of State "may" do so. Will he reflect, however, on whether the Government—rather than he himself—are very good at consulting? We have heard announcements today about the structure and functioning of NHS trusts, on which there has been very little consultation.

Mr. Hutton: There is an established and democratic procedure for how these things are done. It would be an unusual constitutional innovation for Opposition Members—I know that it is not being proposed today—to impose a statutory duty on a Secretary of State to consult before he was minded to announce any change of policy or to look at a way in which reform might be taken forward. There is a reasonable case for saying that when substantial reform is proposed to the NHS, there should be consultation. That has always been the spirit and practice of the Government; it is one that we intend to take forward. It cannot be argued—in terms of either the Bill or the amendment—that the Government in any way diminish the role of the public, or the voice of the public being heard effectively in the affairs of the NHS; far from it.

Amendment No. 7 would impose a duty to consult before a health authority was established in Wales. However, it is clear that health authorities in Wales will only continue to exist until they are abolished on 31 March 2003. The policy intention in Wales is to create local health boards, as covered in clause 6. The only practical effect of the amendments would be to fetter the devolved powers that the House has already granted to Wales under the Government of Wales Act 1998. While there is no requirement to consult on the establishment of a health authority, the Welsh Assembly has conducted a full and open consultation in relation to the establishment of local health boards in Wales.

The remainder of this group of amendments deal with technical issues to do with the boundaries of primary care trusts. Following the consultation on the new SHA boundaries, it has become clear that a small number of PCTs—perhaps two or three—will cross the new SHA boundaries. Current legislation does not explicitly state that PCTs which cross health authority boundaries must not be established, but there is an underlying assumption in the way in which the Bill has been drafted that all PCTs will, in fact, fall within one health authority. It remains our intention that, in the vast majority of cases, PCTs should not cross the boundaries of SHAs.

There is an argument to be made about the value of consultation and the importance of listening to local voices about where boundaries should be drawn across the NHS. For local flexibility to be maintained, and so that clinical networks—rightly referred to by the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) as important—should not be disrupted, it is important that, in those exceptional cases, it should be possible for PCTs to straddle SHA boundaries, if those boundaries have strong local support and make obvious sense.

The Government amendments make provision for allowing PCTs which straddle SHA boundaries to be established—putting that issue beyond doubt—and provide for each SHA to receive the PCT's annual financial, patients forum and other reports. In essence, this group of amendments will serve to preserve maximum flexibility around PCT boundaries; that supports the principles of local decision making, which is fully consistent with shifting power and responsibility to the front-line. There are a number of points in primary legislation that need to be amended to allow for this, and that is why this group of amendments is relatively large.

Amendment No. 25 makes a number of amendments to schedule 5A of the National Health Service Act 1977: to allow any SHA in whose area the PCT is established to meet preparatory costs; to allow any SHA to make available premises and other facilities during the preparatory period; and to provide for the PCT's annual financial and other reports to be sent to all SHAs in whose area the PCT is established.

Amendment No. 26 provides for any SHA in whose area the PCT is established to give directions to that PCT. Amendments Nos. 35 and 36 make provision for the reports of patients forums to go to all SHAs in whose area the PCT is established. Amendments Nos. 24, 27, 28, 54, 55 and 61 make minor, consequential and technical amendments that are necessary to give full effect to the policy intentions.

The bulk of our time this evening has been spent on new clause 1. I understand fully the concerns expressed by Opposition Members about the pace of change and the way in which the reforms are being handled. However, as was the case when the previous Administration attempted organisational reform of the NHS, there will always be those who say that that should not be done. There will be those who say that it is being done too quickly; some will say that it is the wrong reform.

We have heard all those arguments this afternoon. Of course, when deciding the pace at which change should be made, the Government have to weigh the upheaval and disruption that a change of this scale and magnitude will inevitably cause against the benefits that we envisage that it will bring.

6 pm

The Government have to find the balance between those two competing arguments, and we cannot pretend

[Mr. Hutton]

that they can be spirited away somehow. We therefore must be clear that the reforms, whose potential benefits for the NHS were questioned to some extent by the hon. Member for Westbury, will bring about substantial improvements in the performance, management and delivery of health care services. We are clear about that, and I hope that Labour Members in general are too.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear today, the NHS is a large organisation. It has more than 1.2 million employees and treats more than 20 million patients a year. It operates in all our constituencies, at a number of different levels of intensity. It is inconceivable in this modern age that the sort of care that we want to be available could be delivered by the structures that presently exist, given the pressures on services, the introduction of new technologies and the speed at which things change in the delivery of medical services.

Therefore, the change has to happen. It is necessary, although of course it will be difficult for some. That is always the nature of any substantial and radical reforms. These are radical reforms, but our judgment is that they will benefit patients, and therefore all our constituents.

I was interested to hear Opposition Members say that they supported the reforms in general terms, but that their primary concern was about the speed at which the reforms were being introduced. As I said, I fully understand those concerns, but I think that the Government have got the balance and the judgment right.

I am sure that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford moved new clause 1 with the best of intentions, but I do not believe that he has thought through the new clause's implications. First, it would create a new and I believe rather inappropriate role for the health service commissioner, which would add considerably to his already substantial work load. It would also be beyond the role envisaged for him under the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993.

Also, new clause 1 could disrupt the provision of health care services, as it would create a vacuum while PCTs were being investigated, especially in relation to their new responsibilities for family health services. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for a Birmingham constituency that I cannot call to mind just now—

Dr. Evan Harris: Selly Oak.

Mr. Hutton: I was referring, of course, to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones). It is a very fine part of Birmingham, and I have visited it.

It is not clear from the new clause who would be responsible for commissioning and delivering health care services. Moreover, it assumes that all the functions being allocated to PCTs will be new to them. That thread of misconception underlay most of the arguments presented by Opposition Members, as many of the functions to be directly conferred on PCTs are being exercised by them already, on behalf of their health authorities.

The main difference is that the Bill will mean that PCTs will assume responsibility for all family health services. I accept that that is a substantial change, but many of the arguments about the readiness of PCTs to discharge their new responsibilities overlook the fact that many have already been established successfully, and have been delivering their wider commissioning responsibilities for some time.

In Standing Committee, I made it clear that we anticipated that all primary care groups will have gained PCT status before October 2002. In fact, 86 new PCTs have been approved by Ministers for April 2002, and 58 further applications are still with Ministers for approval. I expect that the vast majority of those will be approved in the very near future. Therefore, given that 164 PCTs are already in operation, it is clear that the majority of the country will be covered by April 2002.

In Committee, I referred to 11 primary care groups that were still consulting on the proposals. Of those, 10 have now applied for PCT status. Their submissions are with Ministers and have been included in the figure of 58 applications that I mentioned earlier. The remaining PCG intends to apply for PCT status, and that application will be considered as soon as possible.

Therefore, to suggest that PCTs lack the capacity to deliver their new responsibilities simply ignores the truth of the matter. Better support is already being given to practices and clinicians, and services are better integrated and more effective. There is better access, and decision making is carried out closer to patients and local communities.

In the debate, an extensive reliance was placed on the tracker survey commissioned out by the national primary care research and development centre at Manchester—another excellent academic centre—in collaboration with the King's Fund. As Opposition Members rightly noted, the survey covered 72 of the 481 primary care groups established in 1999. The survey covered a three-month period between October and December 2000.

I do not dispute the accuracy of the data at the time, but it is historic information. The Opposition rested their entire case for new clause 1 on the results of a tracker survey, and I think that that was a total mistake. Given the information available, and the concerns that have been raised about the performance of PCGs and PCTs, the hon. Member for West Chelmsford would have had a reasonable argument if the Department of Health had done nothing. However, no mention was made of the effort that has been put in since the tracker survey was published to provide better and more effective support to PCGs and PCTs, as they take on their new responsibilities.

Those efforts continue to be made. The new leadership centre proposed in the NHS plan will play an important role. In addition, Barbara Hakin, an outstanding PCT chief executive from Bradford, is leading the management development programme for new PCT senior managers. Her excellent services are beginning to make a significant and positive contribution.

Some people will always say that a reform of this magnitude is wrong, or a source of concern. I do not doubt for a second the legitimacy of such arguments, or the right of people to express them. Of course people who are worried about reform should express their unease, but the view should not be formed that other people—equally eminent and respectable—have not expressed positive and supportive views about the pace and direction of change.

The argument this afternoon has been very one sided, as it was in Standing Committee. It is fine for Opposition Members to express their concern, but they should also acknowledge the positive developments that have taken place and the progress that has been made. If the Conservative party wants to be an effective Opposition who scrutinise legislation properly, Conservative Members must be able to make both sides of the argument, as that would certainly improve the quality of legislative scrutiny.

It would also be wrong to assume that PCTs are not getting the support that they need, as I have tried to make clear. Therefore, I believe that new clause 1 is mistaken, and I am not entirely sure of the motivation that lies behind it. It was designed as an amendment that would help the Government's reform programme, but we must beware of Greeks in that situation.

With respect to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford and to other hon. Members, the arguments in favour of new clause 1 are not persuasive, and I cannot ask Labour Members to support it.

Mr. Francois: Either by accident or design, the Minister has said very little about strategic health authorities. Does he accept that it is integral to the Government plan that the SHAs must succeed? Is not it also a part of the plan that merging other health authorities into SHAs is a deliberate attempt to reduce head counts and thus to free up more money for patient care? Everyone realises that there will be job losses as a result of the mergers. Is not the Minister asking people to work flat out, on an incredibly tight timetable, to get the SHAs up and running, even though those same people have no idea whether they will have a job in the surviving organisation in a few months time? Is not—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Mr. Hutton: The hon. Gentleman has certainly done that, but I was not referring in detail to SHAs, as the amendments are about PCTs. I was trying to explain the Government's thinking about the establishment of PCTs, and about whether that should be delayed. I have mentioned the duty of consultation on SHAs—

Mr. Francois: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This group of amendments comes under the heading "Establishment of Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Hutton: I do not want to delay our proceedings. We are talking about new clause 1; the hon. Gentleman interrupted me when I was talking about new clause 1, which is about primary care trusts and not strategic health authorities. I dealt with the arguments on strategic health authorities when I referred to Government amendment No. 23 and the amendment that has been proposed to it. I am not short-changing the House, nor am I ignoring the arguments that the hon. Gentleman has been trying to deploy.

The hon. Gentleman is right that organisational changes may mean that people lose their jobs as a result. The NHS has a responsibility; we will discharge it to make sure that we act fairly in relation to the employees at all times during the process of change. There are exciting new opportunities presented by the reforms for which we seek the House's support, particularly in relation to the new roles and responsibilities of primary care trusts. The hon. Gentleman, who takes a close interest in these matters, will know that many currently working in health authorities are looking towards employment in the new primary care trusts and will find employment in that area.

The hon. Gentleman's wider point about what should motivate the Government as they consider these reforms is fair. What motivates us is a simple desire to improve the quality of the national health service. We will do that, in this instance, by making the NHS more streamlined, less bureaucratic, more focused on patient care and making sure in the process that we get better value for the record investment in the national health service. That is an entirely appropriate responsibility for the Government and Ministers to discharge, so I shall certainly not apologise to the hon. Gentleman or to anyone else for those considerations.

Amendments Nos. 8 and 9 deal with funding arrangements under the new system. Amendment No. 8 would require the Secretary of State to take into account the assets and liabilities contained in the balance sheet when determining allocations to primary care trusts. This area is inevitably technical and complex, but I will try, as far as possible, to keep the issues simple, not only so that the House can understand them but so that I can.

Usually only those assets and liabilities associated with the functions assumed by the PCTs will transfer to them. The process is that PCTs agree with the relevant health authorities and, where appropriate, NHS trusts the balances that will transfer. These amounts will normally be straightforward and attributable to specific PCTs. However, there may be cases in which that is not appropriate or practicable. That might include any small outstanding health authority running cost charges which cross boundaries—utilities bills, for example—or there may be circumstances in which an under or over-performance on service agreements, such as maternity services, might have arisen. In these circumstances, other equitable methods will be used, such as a simple apportionment.

Turning to the financial consequences of transferring a liability to a PCT, as we would expect in any public or private sector body, there will always be amounts due in income and amounts due to be paid at the year end. In the case of health authorities, most of those sums will be moneys owed to and from other NHS bodies. PCTs will inherit these balances from health authorities. I think that that is fair and reasonable. The overall resources available to PCTs for spending on health care in-year, however, will be unaffected by these inherited balances.

Cash will, of course, be required by the PCT physically to discharge the liability at some point in the future. However, that is largely a question of timing and can be taken into account if necessary when agreeing the cash financing of the PCT. As a strict consequence, the amendment is unnecessary.

The practical effect of amendment No. 9 would be to require the Secretary of State to take into account the health needs of a primary care trust's population when he makes an allocation. We all accept that different parts of the country and different localities have different health care requirements and needs. I agree with the

[Mr. Hutton]

hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon on that. It is partly a reflection of deprivation but may also be a result of geography. The national resource allocation formula that we use to determine fair shares for health authorities and primary care trusts recognises this. It is already used to establish fair share targets for primary care trusts, and while allocations are still made to health authorities, they are required to pass resources on to primary care trusts in accordance with national guidance.

We have asked the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation to review the operation of the formula at primary care trust level. When in future we allocate resources direct to primary care trusts, we will have a national formula that takes into account the health needs of a primary care trust's population. We will have a pace of change policy to bring primary care trusts towards their targets, or fair shares, determined by the formula.

6.15 pm

Allocations to local authorities—probably the most obvious and direct comparison that we could make in this context—are determined on comparable formulae, which also need to take into account many different issues. As with those for health authorities and PCTs, and in order to preserve maximum flexibility in a rapidly changing area, the formulae used by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are not set out in primary legislation. Neither is the formula for allocations to NHS organisations. It has never been the policy of successive Governments to specify part or all of the detail of the formula or the issues that should be taken into account in determining allocations to NHS organisations, whether PCTs, trusts or health authorities. There are powerful and convincing arguments for not doing that.

To some extent, amendments Nos. 8 and 9 are contradictory. Amendment No. 9 wants health care needs to be the basis upon which allocations should be determined to NHS trusts and PCTs, but amendment No. 8 wants the Secretary of State to take into account the financial liabilities of those organisations as well. I do not want to make a meal of this, but the hon. Member for West Chelmsford is to some extent pointing in two different directions on this. Is it a question of need or of a range of financial circumstances? He cannot have it both ways.

One could play devil's advocate and raise the question of surpluses. If one is to take account of liabilities under the hon. Gentleman's formula, why should the Secretary of State not take surpluses into account as well? I think it best to make sure that the allocation formula to trusts is based on health care needs. Meeting the health care needs of local people should be the exclusive determinant. That is precisely how we are addressing those issues.

There is an argument, which the hon. Gentleman raised, about whether his health authority or trust is fairly funded compared with a range of others. Most Labour Members would find it difficult to see the fairness of the comparison between West Chelmsford and Sedgefield and other parts of the country that he was trying to identify. It is on the basis of equity and fairness that the NHS should be funded according to the health care needs of local people. So I cannot accept amendments Nos. 8 and 9.

We have had a fairly full debate about these issues. We have gone over territory which is very familiar to those of us who served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill. Conservative Members have raised a perfectly reasonable set of concerns, but my response to them, and to new clause 1 in particular, is that they have not acknowledged the progress that has been made since the second tracker survey was published. They have not weighed up, as we are required to do, the balance between the necessary changes, the organisational upheaval that they would impose on the service and the benefits to patients and the wider national health service. It is a complicated balancing equation, but our responsibility in government is to act first and foremost in the interests of patients. That is precisely what we are doing and why I do not want the House to accept the new clause.

Dr. Murrison: I am concerned about the Minister's dismissal of the second tracker survey, which is only months old. The work may have been carried out in the latter part of 2000 but it was published some time after that. If the right hon. Gentleman is so dismissive about the survey such a short time after its publication, why did he support it in the first place?

Mr. Hutton: I am not dismissive of the tracker survey. We think that it is a very important piece of work. It has helped us to respond to the concerns and criticisms made at the time. That is why we have put into place a substantial programme of primary care trust development work right across the NHS. I am not dismissing the contribution that the tracker survey has made. I am simply disputing the use that Conservative Members are making of it for the purposes of this argument. That is a very different issue.

In relation to these provisions, as to others, the House has an important decision to make tonight. These reforms are important and I accept that they are radical. However, they are motivated by a clear, simple and transparent principle—to make sure that as much responsibility, power and authority in the national health service is devolved as close to the front line as possible. That will allow the innovation, enterprise and experience of NHS managers to be used to the fullest possible benefit of staff, patients and the public as a whole. That is why the Bill should be supported by the House and the new clause, which has been considered carefully, should be rejected.

Mr. Burns: I listened to the Minister with great care. As a humble Opposition Member, I should like to say how grateful I am that a crumb has fallen from the Government's table and that the Minister has seen the strength of the argument put by my hon. Friends and me in Committee, and that he has in effect accepted amendment No. 6—albeit by substituting it with Government amendment No. 23. I am delighted that he has seen common sense and accepted the wisdom of what we and—to be fair—the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) were trying to do and has drafted an amendment of his own. We have to be grateful for small mercies and this is one of those occasions, so I thank the Minister for that.

The Minister said that amendment No. 8 was horribly technical and that he did not want to go into the minutiae of its detail in case he confused my hon. Friends and me and, indeed, himself. Unusually I shall take the Minister at his word; I shall not press either amendment No. 6 or amendment No. 8 to a vote. I, too, am not qualified to argue on the minutiae of the amendment. Having listened to the Minister, I shall also not press amendments No. 9 and No. 7.

I listened carefully to the Minister's remarks on new clause 1. Although the drafting of the provision might have been flawed and it might indeed have been improved, I am disappointed that the Minister is not minded to accept it. The new clause was a genuine attempt to try to help the Government, as I said earlier. If the House is to change a crucial system that relates to two pillars of the NHS—its funding and its seamless provision of care—one obviously wants to ensure that the service works smoothly during the changeover from one system to another.

From the evidence that my hon. Friends and I have provided, both in Committee and during today's debate, we believe that there could be problems. As many of us pointed out during the debates on the Bill, we are not alone in expressing such concerns: health professionals and respected professional bodies such as the BMA have all expressed concern. However, I accept that the Government have the whip hand.

We have made a genuine attempt to try to help them, but they feel that our help is unnecessary and that things will be all right on the night. The jury is out on that. As a responsible Member of the House I hope that I am wrong. No one wants the system to be fraught with problems and mistakes. No one wants a hiccup in the provision of health care for our constituents, so I hope that I am wrong.

I do not know whether I am wrong; equally, I am not convinced that the Government know that they are right—we shall see. I reiterate that I hope that we are wrong. I hope that the system is seamless and that our constituents do not experience disruption or problems. We have tried our best.

As the Government are not prepared to take the lifeline of help that we are responsibly offering them, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 2

COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS: SCHEME FOR REFORM

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament within 12 months of the date of coming into force of this section regulations setting out a scheme for the reform of the Community Health Councils in England.

(2) The scheme set out by the Secretary of State in regulations under subsection (1) above shall extend to all parts of the health service (including the provision of Part II services under the 1977 Act).

(3) The Secretary of State may make regulations providing for access by members of a Community Health Council to premises from which services under Part II of the 1977 Act are provided.

(4) The scheme set out by the Secretary of State in regulations under subsection (1) shall provide for the proper representation of the population in the area served by a Community Health Council on that council.

(5) Regulations under subsection (1) may not be made unless a draft of the statutory instrument containing the regulations has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Burns: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: new clause 5—*Establishment of Patients' Councils*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall, subject to subsection (2) below, establish a body to be known as a Patients' Council ("Councils") in England in each area for which an overview and scrutiny committee has been established under section 7 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 (c.15); each council shall be appointed from among members of relevant Primary Care Trust Patients' Forums and NHS Trust Patients' Forums operating in that area and representatives from relevant community interest groups.

(2) Where it appears to the Secretary of State that there is a need to establish a Council for an area other than that represented by a local authority with overview and scrutiny functions, he shall, after local consultation, establish a Council for such other area as appears to him will meet the needs of the local community.

(3) The functions of a Council are to represent the interests in the health service of the public in its district and in particular to—

(a) facilitate the co-ordination of the activities of member Patients' Forums including by the provision of staff and services to Patients' Forums,

(b) provide or make arrangements for the provision of services under section 19A of the NHS Act 1977 (independent advocacy services) at the direction of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health.

(c) represent to persons and bodies which exercise functions in its area (including in particular the overview and scrutiny committees and the joint overview and scrutiny committees mentioned in sections 7, 8 and 10 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001) the views of members of the public in its area about matters affecting their health,

(d) advise the bodies mentioned in subsection (4) on involvement of the public in its area in consultations or processes leading (or potentially leading) to decisions by those bodies or the formulation of policies by them, which would or might affect (whether directly or not) the health of those members of the public, monitor the effectiveness of this involvement and co-operate with the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health in carrying out this function.

(4) The bodies referred to in subsection (3)(d) are—

(a) health service bodies,

(b) other public bodies, and

(c) others providing services to the public or a section of the public.

(5) The Secretary of State shall, following consultation with the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, Community Health Councils, patients' and carers' organisations and the wider community, by regulation make provision in relation to Councils as to—

(a) the Patients' Forums and other community interest groups from which members of the Council are to be appointed,

(b) any qualification or disqualification from membership,

(c) terms of appointment,

(d) the proceedings of a Council,

(e) the discharge of any functions of a Council by a committee of the Council or by a joint committee appointed with another Council,

(f) the circumstances in which Councils will co-operate with each other in the exercise of their functions and exercise functions jointly with one or more other Councils,

(g) funding of Councils and the provision of staff, premises and other facilities,

(h) the preparation and publication by a Council of annual accounts,

(i) the provision of information (including descriptions of information which are or are not to be provided) to a Council by an NHS Trust, a Primary Care Trust, a Strategic Health Authority, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, the relevant local authorities or a person providing independent advocacy services (within the meaning given by section 19A of the NHS Act 1977),

(j) the provision of information by a Council to another person,

(k) the preparation and publication of reports by Councils,

(l) the furnishing and publication by NHS trusts, Primary Care Trusts, Strategic Health Authorities and Overview and Scrutiny Committees of comments on reports or recommendations of Councils, and

(m) the referral of matters of a prescribed description to any overview and scrutiny committee, the relevant Strategic Health Authority, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health or the Secretary of State.

(6) The regulations shall include provision applying or corresponding to any provision of Part 5A of the Local Government Act 1970 (c.70) (access to meetings and documents).

(7) In section 21(10) of the Local Government Act 2000 (membership of overview and scrutiny committees) after the words "who are not members of the authority" there shall be inserted ("and shall include a person appointed by the relevant Patients' Council").

(8) In paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Health Authorities Act 1995 as amended by this Act after "(c) a prescribed number of officers of the Health Authority" there shall be inserted—

"(d) persons appointed by the relevant Patients' Councils.".'.

New clause 7—*Duty of Secretary of State and Strategic Health Authorities to consult*—

'In subsection 11(2) of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, paragraph (a) is omitted and the following is inserted—

"(a) the Secretary of State,

(aa) Strategic Health Authorities,".'.

New clause 8—*Functions of overview and scrutiny committees*—

'(1) In subsection 7(1) of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, after "recommendations" the words "and referrals to the Secretary of State" are inserted.

(2) In subsection 7(3) of that Act, after paragraph (a) there is inserted—

"(aa) as to matters relating to the health service in the authority's area which the committee may refer to the Secretary of State,".'.

Amendment No. 1, in clause 15, page 20, line 2, leave out Clause 15.

Government amendments Nos. 33, and amendment (a) thereto, and 34.

Amendment No. 2, in clause 16, page 21, line 4, leave out Clause 16.

Amendment No. 73, line 20, at end insert—

'(but for the purposes of this section "promises" shall not include the private living quarters of any person)'.

Amendment No. 3, in clause 17, page 21, line 31, leave out Clause 17.

Government amendment No. 37.

Amendment No. 4, in clause 18, page 22, line 13, leave out Clause 18.

Amendment No. 70, in page 22, line 27, after "Forums", insert—

'by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health'.

Amendment No. 63, line 27, leave out "other facilities and staff" and insert "and other facilities".

Government amendment No. 38.

Amendment No. 64, line 37, after "by", insert "a Patients" Council,".

Government amendment No. 39.

Amendment No. 65, in page 23, line 1, after "by", insert "a Patients" Council,".

Amendment No. 71, line 2, after "Authorities", insert—

'and overview and scrutiny committees'.

Amendment No. 72, line 3, after "of", insert ", or referrals from,".

Amendment No. 66, line 20, after "Forum", insert ", a Patients" Council".

Amendment No. 67, line 24, after "section 15" insert—

'and a Patients' Council under section [*Establishment of Patients' Councils*]'.

Amendment No. 68, in clause 19, page 23, line 43, after "Forums", insert "and Patients" Councils".

Amendment No. 69, in page 24, leave out lines 5 to 10 and insert—

'(g) coordinating and supporting the activities of Patients' Councils in respect of their activities provided for at subsection (3)(c) of section [*Establishment of Patients' Councils*],'.

Amendment No. 5, in clause 20, page 25, line 23, leave out Clause 20.

Amendment No. 11, in page 26, line 5, at end insert—

'(7A) This section may not be brought into force until the Secretary of State has issued a certificate stating that in his opinion the bodies established under section 15 are fully functional and performing their duties effectively throughout England.'.

Mr. Burns: Even at this late stage, new clause 2 will try to stop the Government making a pernicious and vindictive attempt to stifle any opposition to the abolition of community health councils. As most hon. Members in the Chamber will remember, there is a long history to this sad and sorry affair.

When the Government introduced the Health and Social Care Bill during the last Parliament, they tried to remove CHCs. They were ruthless in their determination to brook no opposition in this place, to have their way and to ensure that the CHCs were removed by what is known in common parlance as a patsy—a lapdog of an apology for a forum for patients who had grievances against the local NHS in their area.

Far too many people saw through that attempt to get rid of a "troublesome priest"—in the words of Henry II. The CHCs were a thorn in the side of the Government because they had the guts and the courage to represent the people they had been created to look after and to speak their mind about failure in the provision of health care locally or about injustice in the health service.

The Opposition and—to their credit—several independently minded Labour Members fought the case vigorously, but the Government steamrollered the measure through the House before the general election.

However, their attempt to abolish CHCs was thwarted by the common sense and experience of another place. The Government had to drop their disgraceful proposal so as to ensure that the remaining contents of the Health and Social Care Bill reached the statute book before Dissolution in May 2001.

At the first opportunity in the new Parliament, the Government shamelessly brought back those proposals in this Bill, but for the life of me I cannot understand why. Community health councils were created as long ago as 1974. They represent and help members of the public within the orbit of the health service. They are independent bodies, which is crucial. They have teeth and power; for example, if a CHC does not agree with a health authority or a trust about a proposed hospital closure and formally objects, the proposal has to go to the Secretary of State for decision. They have built up tremendous expertise and experience in looking after patients, and the Under–Secretary will certainly be aware of that.

I shall come to the Under-Secretary's role a little later, but she will be aware that I believe that CHCs have done more than enough to justify their retention. On average, they assist about 30,000 people a year. A recent poll conducted by *Health Which?* found that 84 per cent. of those who had contacted their CHCs found the advice given to them very or fairly useful, which suggests an extremely high satisfaction rate.

Similarly, a recent report, "Hidden Volunteers", conducted by Community Service Volunteers, estimated that CHC members contributed through their dedicated work about £7.9 million worth of free labour to the NHS. No one in the Chamber would underestimate their work. They have been extremely brave. They have devoted a great deal of their time and effort to fulfilling their role, looking after those people whom it is their job to represent and help.

What do the Government want to do? They want to abolish CHCs. I shall not be convinced by their reasons for wanting to abolish CHCs, whatever the Under-Secretary says, because there is only one reason: they do not like opposition. Those who oppose them and have the temerity to embarrass them, by highlighting failings in their policy or in its implementation, have to be silenced because they are out of kilter. That is an extraordinary reason to get rid of any organisation, and I shall be particularly interested to hear the Under-Secretary's response. I have heard her response once before in Committee, and I suspect that it will be along similar lines today.

The Under-Secretary chaired Salford CHC from 1993 to 1997, so more than any hon. Member in the Chamber tonight she has a working experience and knowledge of how good CHCs are. I suspect that, between 1993 and 1997, she thought with justification—she chaired that CHC and she is an able individual—that Salford CHC was very good indeed at fulfilling its functions. I do not think for a minute that she wanted her CHC, or any other, to be abolished. As I am sure she would have said if the previous Government had proposed to abolish CHCs, they had an important, independent role to play, and they played it extremely well.

6.30 pm

Sadly, times have changed, and the Under-Secretary will stand at the Dispatch Box later tonight to seek to persuade her right hon. and hon. Friends to sign the CHCs' death note, which is a staggering turnabout in four to five years. I do not believe that the quality of the work done by CHCs has deteriorated in four or five years to such an extent that it warrants their abolition. If the Government feel that CHCs have a patchy record or that improvements need to be made in some of them, why do the Government simply not reform them and change the law to improve and strengthen them? Surely that is the right way forward.

If satisfaction among CHCs' client group is high, if the perception is that they do a very good job in their local communities—the Under-Secretary was directly involved with them until relatively recently, and I assume that she thought that her CHC did a very good job, as I am sure it did—and if some of their functions could be performed even better, why not simply introduce legislation to strengthen and improve them?

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Would we not have a very much better idea of why the Government propose to abolish CHCs if we had got round to discussing clause 20 in Committee? It is worth reminding ourselves that it was not discussed because of the ludicrous system of timetabling and programming Bills. We are blind about the Government's real reasons for wanting to abolish CHCs.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that, because of the guillotine, the Committee had no opportunity to discuss what everyone considers the most important clause—clause 20. This, therefore, is the first time that we have been able properly to discuss the issue since Second Reading.

We attempted to discuss CHCs during debates on an earlier clause, but we are never able to discuss any amendment that we might have wished to move in Committee because of the tightness of that guillotine. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, and I hope that the report of his intervention will be read with keen interest, especially in another place, when it has to deal with the Bill later this year.

Dr. Evan Harris: I have not followed the full detail of exactly which amendment the hon. Gentleman is talking about, but he will remember that, despite the guillotine, we had time to have a lengthy debate in Committee on whether CHCs could be reformed, not abolished, and that we voted on that amendment. We both agreed that we got little out of the Under-Secretary in terms of a considered response because she is passionate about her model, but most people prefer the model proposed in the new clause.

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The only disadvantage or sadness about the debates that we managed to have in Committee was that they were related to earlier clauses on the back of the Government's proposals; we were unable to have specific debates on clause 20, solely under which CHCs will be abolished. The debate that we had was better than nothing, but we would have welcomed proper and full debate at the time on the specific clause that deals with the abolition of the CHCs.

The procedure that the Government have adopted to rid themselves of this network of councils throughout the country has been typified by a brazen lack of regard for

[Mr. Burns]

the views of others. No doubt, those who support the Government on this issue will say that a consultation process took place. If they believe that, they will believe in a number of things that it is not wise to believe in.

When the Government sent out their consultation document, the basic assumption in point 1.5, which deals with this issue, was that CHCs would be abolished. The document did not ask whether they should be abolished, or whether they should be reformed and improved. It simply stated that

> "the immediate focus of this document is the Government's intention to legislate at the earliest opportunity to replace CHCs."

That is really wonderful if one wants open, frank, straightforward and meaningful consultation.

Before discussion even began, the Government set down what they would do at the end of the process. If the views expressed in the submissions that they received from members of the public, people who have dedicated their lives to working for CHCs, hon. Members on both sides of the House, other organisations inside and outside the NHS and local authorities did not coincide with the criteria in point 1.5 of the consultation document, they were disregarded. That is what the Government have sought to do ever since they introduced their original legislation on the matter.

My preferred option is for retention, reform and improvement, which is what new clause 2 seeks to provide. It would give the Government a breathing space in which they could make proposals to improve and reform the existing structure. In no way do I support the Government's proposals, because they would not lead to the independent integrity of the complaints procedure and of the organisation for patients remaining intact.

Unfortunately, I am not confident that the Government are prepared to reconsider at this late stage and to abandon what they have been seeking to use their large majority to ram through Parliament. However, I know that some Labour Members will not be bamboozled into supporting such a Government poodle. When we discuss the other new clauses in the group, it will be interesting to hear the comments of other Members to hear precisely what their proposals intend to do.

The Government are making a great mistake and they do themselves no credit by sticking rigidly to their plan to ram clause 20 through the House tonight. I only hope that the other place gives careful consideration to the issue and to the comments of Members on both sides of the House. With its expertise and role as a revising Chamber, I hope that the other place will try to bring some common sense to the Government on this issue.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I wish to speak to new clause 5 and to its consequential amendments. It is worth making the point that all three main parties, as well as the Independent Member, have signed up to the new clause and that a number of outside organisations believe that it is the appropriate way forward. We have backing from the Patients Association, the Consumers Association, Age Concern, the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, the Royal College of Nursing and several other important national bodies.

I shall briefly sum up the purpose of the new clause. I do not wish to speak at length, because the issue has been rehearsed several times in this Parliament, including on Second Reading, and in the last Parliament before the general election.

I have always been concerned that, since the inception of the national health service in 1948, there has been a lack of sense of ownership of the service by its users. It has been a challenge for successive Governments to address that question, and I am not sure that we have yet come up with a coherent solution. I have always been concerned that there has been a consistent lack of democracy in the NHS, particularly at a local level.

I have favoured a role for local government and I have been very conscious that the democratic deficit has been maintained by the concern of certain professionals--particularly in the medical profession—to obstruct what they regard as the political control resulting from politicians and elected people asking questions about the direction of the service at a local level.

Community health councils were advanced in 1974 as the patients' voice. I had the privilege of serving on a CHC from 1974, and was vice-chairman of one for many years before I became a member of the local health authority. It is fair to say that CHCs have had variable success. In some areas, they have done a first-class job in representing the interests of patients but, in others, they have been less effective.

6.45 pm

I do not accept the statement of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) that the Government do not like opposition and that their motivation for removing CHCs is the result of that. I believe that there are sound reasons for re-examining a system that since 1974 has, in some respects, served us quite well but, in others, not as well as it should have done. The time has come for reforms and I support aspects of the direction in which the Government are moving.

The previous Parliament considered the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and I recognise that it contained a number of positive elements. I certainly commended them at the time. I have always believed in an important role for local government, so I was very happy that the Government came up with the idea of having overview and scrutiny committees based in local authorities. They were given the power to object to key changes in policy, such as closures, and have the statutory function that CHCs have traditionally had.

I was always concerned that CHCs, as constituted, did not have a democratic mandate. Local authorities have such a mandate and are accountable to the electorate. Therefore, on issues such as closure and change of use, the local democratic system should play a major part and people should be able to express their views.

I also supported the idea of patient advocacy liaison services—PALS. The revised idea for PALS to be based in trusts to deal with complaints is a good one. I was in my local primary care trust only yesterday and saw the PALS organisation very well signposted. People can go there to seek advice and support, and I welcome that.

I also supported the proposal for patients forums. My concern was that there would be a need to examine the level above those forums in the local health economy, which is why we had an important debate on patients councils when we considered the Health and Social Care Act 2001. In a sense, we return to that debate tonight.

I believe that I had an agreement with the Under-Secretary's predecessors in the Department of Health before the election to include some positive elements of CHCs in the new framework. My slight concern, however, was that, when my amendments were discussed in another place, the Minister in the House of Lords gave a somewhat different version of patients councils than I had proposed in the Commons. Hon. Members who had followed the debate recognised that the emphasis was different in the two Houses, which is why it was difficult to get the proposals through the Lords.

I warmly praise the Under-Secretary's role, because she has gone out of her way to listen to those of us inside the House and elsewhere who have serious concerns. She has worked long and hard to come up with a solution that will come as near as possible to meeting my concerns and those of other hon. Members. It has been a pleasure to work with her, because she has genuinely tried very hard to find a solution. We are inches apart, but those inches are extremely important. Therefore, I wish to expand on the issues on which there is a slight difference between us.

The positive changes in the Bill include the creation of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health. I spoke at length to my hon. Friend about this issue last summer and I recognise that she has a passionate concern to engage in the health service disadvantaged groups and those who never had a say about their local health care. As she knows, I occasionally visit her constituency to watch rugby league and I am aware of the problems that it faces. I know that she wishes to engage in the health service people who were not previously involved in any way.

I welcome the fact that the commission will have an enabling role, will be involved in developing a public voice and will be concerned with those who have no voice. In the last Parliament, I made the point that the main users of the NHS in my area were young women with children, and they have no voice. The main users are not engaged with the health service in any way. I recognise the need to encourage that involvement and to listen to people with first-hand experience of the problems that they face.

I welcome my hon. Friend's proposal for a common badging system—I hope that it is taken a stage further. If we have a symbol that is known nationally and locally, people will know where to go to have their voice heard in the NHS. That idea could extend to advocacy.

I shall briefly list my key concerns about the Government's proposals. I am worried that the system is too complex and that many people will not understand it. I mentioned on Second Reading that I did not fully understand it. Although I now have a better idea of what the Minister is trying to achieve, I still believe that the system is over-complex and that it needs to be simplified.

The fragmentation of the separate patients forums also concerns me. They will focus on the individual work of their trusts and, as I said in a debate in the last Parliament, we need to look beyond that because it is too narrow. I am also worried about the lack of independent back-up and support for patients forums. They may well have to rely on the trusts that they are deemed responsible for monitoring.

In the last Parliament, the Health Committee examined adverse incidents in the NHS and the complaints system. In respect of serious complaints, it thought that independent advocacy, which is a stage beyond the PALS role, should be based within the CHCs. The patients councils that I propose should also have a role in the structure, and the monitoring and scrutiny of forums should be linked to the advocacy function.

New clause 5 and consequential amendments would ensure that patients councils were included in the Bill and that they were made up of forum members so that they offered an overview of local health issues, because that is lacking. I accept that the Minister made it clear that she expects the commission's local networks to do that job, but members of patients councils of individual forums need to be able to get together to look across the local health economy. The Government do not propose that, although I think that my hon. Friend said that it will be encouraged.

I want patients councils to be serviced by the commission's local network. The secretariats would comprise the commission's local networkers so that national standards are linked to the local priorities set by patients councils, which are close to the grass roots and patients' concerns.

Finally, the Health Committee envisaged basing the advocacy function within patients councils, which would give a consistent and easily identifiable base for that work. I hope that the badging system can be applied to that so that people are clear about where they need to go when they have serious problems.

I do not want to say much more because we have rehearsed these arguments several times and most hon. Members are well aware of the issues. I hope that my proposal would provide a unifying structure of lay people at the level of the local health economy, offering an overview of that economy that is lacking in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister implied that she will try to bring that about by regulation. I am afraid that I have been in this place long enough to have heard similar offers by numerous Ministers in different Governments. This is not meant as any disrespect to her, but I want that provision written into the Bill. I hope that even at this late stage the Government will accept my proposal.

Dr. Evan Harris: I agree with what the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said about the Minister's conduct. She has always been available to listen to the multiple objections to her proposals. It is just as well she is a listening Minister, because otherwise we would be even more frustrated.

I also agree with everything else that the hon. Gentleman said, and I shall not cover the same ground except to point out, as I think he would recognise, that we have discussed this before. During the passage of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) stood where I am now and moved a similar amendment or new clause before the Bill went to the House of Lords and the proposal ran out of time. I hope that we do not have to go as far this time and that the Minister will find a way to recognise that the proposal in new clause 5, which has also been tabled by the Liberal Democrats, is a compromise. Some people would have preferred community health councils to be reformed rather than abolished.

[Dr. Evan Harris]

New clause 2 would have an effect similar to a proposal that we debated in Committee which sought to reform community health councils to take account of what the Government describe as the new NHS. We wanted to ensure that they had the functions and membership that Ministers, in many cases correctly, thought would be necessary to interact with the new NHS. The Minister rebutted or objected to our suggestions even more firmly than we argued them. New clause 2 is an attempt to persuade the Government to reform community health councils.

The Liberal Democrat party, which moved a similar amendment in Committee, supports the thrust of new clause 2, but we are also willing to put our names to an amendment that would go further. The advantage of new clause 5 is that it creates a structure for patients forums to interact in. Its functional approach places the roles of co-ordination and advocacy—advocacy in terms of changes to the local health service, not as defined in other parts of the Bill—at the level of overview and scrutiny committees. That will be of mutual benefit to patients forums that want to ensure that they have adequate mechanisms and structures to feed in opinions to the overview and scrutiny committees. It will also be of significant benefit to local authority overview and scrutiny committees to have patients councils that broadly cover the same area. They will be a single, effective and empowering channel—I am surprised to use the word "empowering"; I usually try to avoid it—for the concerns of patients and the public to be brought to the attention of the overview and scrutiny committees.

I join the hon. Member for Wakefield in thanking the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales. I also thank London Health Link. Not only did they provide advice on how our amendments and new clauses should be framed, but they recognised that things have to change. The Minister should at least concede that we are no longer fighting the principle of whether there should be patients forums. To an extent, if one accepts new clause 5, one accepts the abolition of CHCs. Those bodies have shown a willingness to meet the Government more than half way, because all the other structures that the Government propose will be in place. The framework is sensible. It is in tune with what the Government sometimes claim they want for the local networks. It is possible for us to rally around the framework and improve it.

7 pm

I turn now to other new clauses and amendments in my name and those of my hon. Friends. New clause 7 seeks to insert in the Health and Social Care Act 2001 a duty to consult. That duty would fall not only on strategic health authorities, PCTs and trusts but on the Secretary of State, or rather on bodies that function at a higher level than strategic health authorities and to which the Secretary of State could delegate the duty. I am concerned about bodies such as the national strategic commissioning advisory group, or NSCAG, and the regional specialist commissioning groups, which have a significant input into health service policy. They make recommendations and proposals for changes to significant areas of care, such as heart and lung services at a national level and paediatric intensive care at a regional level. If we are to have a complete consultation system, the necessary mechanisms must be in place.

The Government feel that the new clause is not necessary because strategic health authorities have a duty to consult and some of those supra-strategic health authority bodies will be made up of strategic health authorities. One of those may act as the lead authority and will therefore have the duty, the time and the personnel to consult all the patients forums and relevant groups in the area. However, it is questionable whether those circumstances will always pertain. Certainly it is hard to see how there would be a lead authority for consultation on a decision made by NSCAG or even by a regional specialist group. The Minister should state clearly that there will be no gap in the procedure, or she should accept the new clause.

New clause 8 is important because it would close an existing loophole. Those of us who carefully followed the proceedings on this Bill and on the Health and Social Care Bill will know that the important power of referral to the Secretary of State is currently exercised by community health councils, which are to be abolished. That function has not been given to patients forums, so we must ask which body will have the power to refer to the Secretary of State significant issues such as the failure of consultation or concerns about decisions made following consultation.

We have been assured that the function will be performed by the overview and scrutiny committees, but it is unclear whether the committees have that power, and it is important that the position be made clear. New clause 8 would do so—there is no disagreement about that—but I hope that the Minister will advise us as to whether the power exists. If she wants to resist the new clause, it would be nice if that advice were made available in written form. One would have hoped for it to be available before we had to decide whether to press the new clause, but the Bill has other parliamentary stages to come.

I may be able to explain amendment (a) to Government amendment No. 33 in interventions when the Minister is speaking to amendment No. 33. It makes a concession, which we requested in Committee, that patients forums will have the power to refer to the overview and scrutiny committee anything that they feel needs to be considered. Our amendment seeks to make it clear that the overview and scrutiny committee would have a duty to respond to that referral.

The Government say that they are reluctant to impose duties on local councils—indeed, they say that it is their policy not to do so—but that will come as a surprise to councils throughout the country. On such an important issue, where responsibility for consideration, oversight and scrutiny of health service changes is, in a welcome move, being shifted to local authorities, overview and scrutiny committees should have a duty to respond to patients forums. They should not necessarily have to take on all their concerns, but they should at least have to consider the issues. I hope that the Minister will ensure that that occurs.

There are many other amendments in this group, but I hope that the Minister will allow me to intervene to clarify the purpose of some of the Government amendments. In conclusion, I am determined to support the proposals, on which I took the lead in Committee, to reform community health councils because they are a tried and tested model, so I shall support new clause 2.

I am, however, much more optimistic that new clause 5 will secure support from hon. Members on both sides of the House, including the Government. I hope that we will find a way to ensure that the best of the Government's proposals are combined with the best ideas of the community health councils and of hon. Members of all parties to form an effective organisation, an effective structure and, most importantly, an effective function. We must ensure that the NHS is subject to the scrutiny and input of patients and the public.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): I was unable to serve on the Standing Committee as I was a member of another Committee, so I rise to make points that I would have made in Committee if I had been present.

I always listen with great care to my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), but I cannot support new clause 5, which is a compromise. Neither can I support new clause 2. I served on a community health council for four years in the early 1990s, and I was a vice-chair in Manchester, just around the corner from my hon. Friend. It is unfair in the extreme of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) to chide the Minister about the fact that nothing can change. The fact that someone has served on a community health council does not prevent them from seeing it in its true light. As the hon. Gentleman said, community health councils were set up in 1974, and times have changed. If he will forgive me for saying so, new clause 2 is opportunistic and backward-looking. It does not deal with the fact that substantial reform is necessary, as many hon. Members have come to realise.

Mr. Burns: Absolutely: reform is necessary.

Stephen Hesford: Does the hon. Gentleman want to intervene?

Mr. Burns: The whole point of my argument is that reform is necessary. If the system does not seem to be working as well as it should, the Government should reform it, not abolish it.

Stephen Hesford: It is political opportunism to take that backward-looking view. Confusion reigns because, interestingly, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who has put his name to new clause 2, has also put his name to new clause 5. He cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Perhaps I can enlighten the hon. Gentleman as to why my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has signed his name to both new clauses. He made it clear that he supported new clause 2, but as it is unlikely to succeed he supported new clause 5 as a second option. That is perfectly logical.

Stephen Hesford: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I credit him for supporting his absent colleague, but I am afraid that he has not dealt with the illogicality of the position adopted by the hon. Member for Macclesfield.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield that new clause 5 is over-fussy, over-lengthy and shares with new clause 2 the problem of not grasping the nettle that the Government have grasped in introducing the reform of community health councils. Both new clauses seek a delay.

Dr. Evan Harris: The hon. Gentleman described new clause 5 as over-lengthy. To avoid comparisons with a certain king and accusations of having too many notes, perhaps he will say which bits of it are redundant to achieving the purpose sought by the change. Or does he think that there is a limit to the length of new clauses that hon. Members should introduce in principle?

Stephen Hesford: I am afraid that I shall not go down that road—*[Interruption.]* No, no.

The strong support that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield received from Liberal Democrats shows that, in effect, his new clause has not grasped the issue; it is a compromise too far. The Bill is not the same as the one that came before the House in the last Parliament. I commend my hon. Friend's tribute to the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who has indeed clearly listened. The Government have travelled a long way on reform; I urge the House to accept that she and the Government have travelled far enough. Some problems that were rightly identified have now been addressed. The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, for example, is a valuable addition.

I know that other Members want to participate in our debate so, to conclude, I will say only that new clauses 2 and 5 seek delay; they do not get to grips with the problem. The Government were right to introduce their proposals and I urge the House to reject both new clauses.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I, too, pay tribute to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary. As I have said before in the House, she has written that the views of citizens will be valued,

"'listened to and acted upon'".—*[Official Report*, 8 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 468.]

I find myself in a similar position to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)'s. If I had thought there was any chance of new clause 2 being accepted, I would have put my name to it. The compromise in new clause 5 is much more realistic and would allow us to take on and support some of the changes that the Government are making.

Why abolish community health councils? That question has never yet been answered. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) takes a charitable view which, I am sure, is right. CHCs have achieved patchy success, are variable and could certainly be improved. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) takes a more powerful view, which I share; in some instances, CHCs have been a thorn in the side of the Government. I know that only too well; my own CHC, of which I was a member at the time, had the resources to take the local health authority to judicial review. What did civil servants do locally? A high-powered officer of the NHS executive in the west midlands came to visit the little Kidderminster and District CHC, threatening that if it took the local health authority to court, that could cost it £220,000 to £250,000. The local CHC was sufficiently strong-minded not to bow to that threat.

[Dr. Richard Taylor]

I should like to explore a little more what we shall lose when we lose CHCs. At the moment, we have a thoroughly independent voice—an independent citizens' watchdog. I am deeply suspicious of the Secretary of State's attempts to establish independent bodies. To get him out of reviewing and making the final decision on hospital reconfigurations, we now have an "independent" reconfiguration panel. It is too early to know how independent it is. On the other hand, we already have an independent NHS Appointments Commission. This week, the *Health Service Journal* shows that it has appointed the 28 chairs of strategic health authorities, 24 of whom are already trust or authority chairs. Remarkably, 17 of them are health authority chairs who will be out of a job on 1 April. However, 24 of those 28 appointments were previously made by the Secretary of State and have just been rubber-stamped by the independent commission.

7.15 pm

We are also losing a one-stop shop. I should like to illustrate that with an example from Worcestershire. The hon. Member for Wakefield implied that there will be a difficulty. In Worcestershire, we have three CHCs, conveniently situated in the major conurbations. We shall have six forums—I should love to know whether the plural is forums or fora—because we have three primary care trusts, a county-wide acute hospital trust, and an ambulance trust, and we shall have a mental health trust. Because the PCTs are sharing out health authority functions, one can see that a single patient might need to consult or take advice from three, possibly four, patients forums. That is the strongest reason for having a drawing-together body. The patients council, as suggested in new clause 5, appears to be a body that could draw together functions and situations, making it easier for individual citizens to express their concerns.

To conclude, as I have already said, I would much rather that CHCs were reviewed and strengthened, as is the case with Wales and with the equivalent of CHCs in Scotland. However, I have been in the House long enough to begin to realise what is possible and what is not. New clause 5, which would establish patients councils, appears to offer the chance of retaining independence and bringing organisations together within the overall framework of the Bill, so I commend it to the House.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I should like to comment on the context of new clause 5, which seeks to co-ordinate and integrate locally a replacement system for community health councils. I am tempted, but shall not go down the road of trying to summarise what has happened since July 2000, when the abolition of CHCs was first announced in the NHS plan. We have come a long way since then; much time has been spent trying to understand a replacement structure and system that, for too long, was over-complex and unclear.

After last year's general election, and notably in the Government's response to the listening exercise, which was led by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, we got to a point where we recognised that the fragmentation that had characterised previous thinking was unsatisfactory. The essential functions were integration; co-ordination; and informing and supporting patients forums, patient advocacy liaison services and local authority overview and scrutiny committees. The Government agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) who, in an amendment tabled last May, tried to pull all those functions together in patients councils. They all seemed to be accepted, clarified, fully retained and acknowledged in the Government document published last September in response to the listening exercise. The only difference was that the Government did not want to call the new way forward patients councils. That is okay by me. The Government have described what they want to see put in place as patients councils plus. Fine. The intention was clear. Many of us who have considered these matters with some concern were reassured.

However, the Bill does no more than provide a framework. Many of the matters about which there are concerns in the House and outside will not be clarified until regulations are published. That is the problem. I suggested on Second Reading that perhaps draft regulations could be published during the Committee stage, to give people an idea of how the picture would emerge. We need to see how the mechanism might operate. I want it to work, and I know that the Government do as well. My suggestion was not taken up, but that is up to the Government.

I do not know for sure how the integration and support function of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, through its local networks, working with lay reference groups and operating local outreach teams, will work. The intentions are clear, as I have acknowledged, but the mechanism has not yet been clarified sufficiently. We need some examples of how the local networks will work and the sort of geographical area that they will cover. It has been flagged up that they should be at PCT level, but that needs to be confirmed. I know that the Government do not wish to be prescriptive. I understand that, but the danger then is that we are too vague and we cannot see the picture, yet here we are, deciding on legislation tonight. We need to know also about the resourcing of the local networks of the commission, and about the staffing.

Dr. Evan Harris: I am listening closely to the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful contribution. I know that he is asking questions about what the area should be, but whether it is patient councils or local networks coming from on high in the commission, does he accept that there is a strong argument for ensuring that the area is generally the area covered by the relevant overview and scrutiny committee, to enable co-ordination with the scrutiny function?

Mr. Hall: That should be the largest geographical area covered by the replacement co-ordinating body. I have some questions about that, but I shall not take up the time of the House. That proposal would be logical, but in some instances the area covered might be too big. Communities do not necessarily fall entirely into one county council area, for example. It may be necessary to split that into smaller areas. I would certainly argue for that in the case of Bedfordshire, but I did not intend to bring that into the debate, as I do not want to complicate it. The matter has been far too complicated, and for far too long. We need to come to some clear conclusions, preferably today, and not wait for the other place to deal with it.

I understood that the local networks would be established to carry out the local overview, co-ordination, support and integration work that many of us said was missing a few months ago. The Government acknowledged that and brought those functions back in. However, I am now not sure about that. I understand that the Government intend to create a locally based collective voice of patients forums, which could well be another body, in addition to the network—another body that will need to be resourced in order to function. That is the impression that I got from the briefing that was made available. It states that in black and white.

I understand that it is intended that the additional body that will be the collective voice of the patients forums will be underpinned by legislation, forcing patients forums to work together and forcing the networks and the wider commission to listen to the outcome of the deliberations of the patients forums. My questions are intended to be helpful and constructive, and to tease out these matters so that we can be clear and move on. I am not clear about the matter, and I have tried to follow it over recent months. The Government have had plenty of opportunity to remove all doubts, but I still have serious doubts.

New clause 5 has the advantage, at least, of being robust and clear. It provides a simple mechanism, which, last autumn, I thought that the local networks would fulfil. If that is the case, let me be persuaded. If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is to respond to this part of the debate, and if she does not want the House to accept new clause 5, she will have to explain clearly why. She will need to describe how the system will work and give an example of how it will work on the ground somewhere; otherwise these matters will continue to confuse. If we are confused at this stage in the legislative process, that could make matters far worse months and years down the line. We need the plan to work on the ground, with real people. It is time for us to move on to a better system. I urge my hon. Friend to help us to do that.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I am grateful for the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) in our short debate. He has made well a number of important points that have been worrying people, including members of the community health council in my constituency. We are moving into unknown territory, and at this late stage of the Bill, we still do not have answers to those questions. The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) asked the most cogent question—why the Government are proposing such a system. We have had no proper explanation of why we need such a complicated change. I hope that at this late hour we will get an explanation from the Minister.

Rather more years ago than I care to remember, I used to be a member of something called an area health authority. Those were abolished, but seem to be coming back in a slightly different guise, called a strategic health authority. I remember only too well how our hearts sank when members of the community health council rose to speak. They were a thorn in our side. They discharged their job extremely effectively, and after a time we began to respect them for the way that they worked and their dedication to their job.

It is true that not all CHCs are perfect. Some were undoubtedly poor. My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) made our position clear. We are not against change. The hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) seemed to think that we were going backwards and arguing for the status quo. We are not doing that. We argue that we should build on a good foundation, which the community health councils provide. Let us make changes, rather than throwing them all out.

The patients will be left with a confusing plethora of patients forums. In Northumberland we are to have one primary care trust, but in County Durham, for example, there are to be six PCTs, and each one will presumably have a patients forum. We will have an ambulance trust and a mental health trust, and I understand that the county council and the NHS are getting together to provide a community care trust, which will take over the functions of the social services department and merge them into one trust.

Even now it is hard enough to involve patients in the affairs of the NHS. The attitude still prevails that treatment from the health service is some sort of privilege, and that one should be grateful to be seen by a doctor. Increasingly, patients know that if they have a complaint, they can turn to the community health council. Citizens advice bureaux and others will point them in that direction, but patients will have great difficulty in finding their way through the maze to the appropriate patients forum.

Stephen Hesford: Is not one of the strengths of the new system its location in the places that patients use? One of the downsides of the old system—perhaps the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members share my experience in this respect—is that if we were to go into the street now and ask a British citizen whether they had heard of a community health council, they would say no. *[Interruption.]* That is my overwhelming experience. People have not heard of CHCs after almost 30 years.

7.30 pm

Mr. Atkinson: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but I must disagree. There is more chance of people finding community health councils than patients forums. If he thinks that the system would be improved by placing representatives in the major hospitals, ambulance stations or wherever else, the community health councils can consider that proposal. As we are proposing to reform CHCs, the suggestion is certainly worth discussing. I do not rule it out, but I must restate my view that we will lose a great deal by abolishing CHCs, which are independent and can build up a considerable body of expertise over the years. They know the health service in the areas that they serve, but we will lose that expertise, which is a great pity.

Northumberland community health council, which serves my area, has written asking me to support new clause 5 if the Opposition's proposal fails. It points out that it has dealt in the past 12 months with complaints about the health service from 178 patients in the county. That shows how much good work it does. The health service is going through another revolution as a result of the Bill and other legislation, so it is completely daft to abolish the patients organisation when it will probably be most needed and to introduce a new system that is untried and unclear at a vital time for the health service.

I want briefly to speak to amendment No. 73, which stands in my name and relates to patients forums and their power. We had a small debate in Committee about the

[Mr. Atkinson]

matter with which it deals. My concern is that the patients forums are being given extreme power. In particular, they are given the right of entry into premises. All of us need to be guardians of our freedom. In that context, I cannot see any reason why members of a patients forum should have a compulsory right of access to health service premises, including the surgeries of doctors and pharmacists. My constituency has doctors and pharmacists who work as sole practitioners and operate from their homes. The pharmacists live above the shop, so to speak. The powers in the Bill give patients forums a right of entry into such premises. My amendment seeks to specify that the power should not extend to the living quarters of doctors and pharmacists and I hope that the Minister will be reasonably helpful in that regard.

I cannot see any reason why patients forums should have such powers and I would be grateful for some explanation. Can the Minister imagine a doctor saying "In no circumstances can you come into my surgery" to members of patients forums who are seeking an appointment to make a visit? In the rare event of that happening, the Commission for Health Improvement could use its powers of entry. Surely that is sufficient.

Lynne Jones: Surely, patients forums should have access to areas to which patients themselves have access.

Mr. Atkinson: Yes, but they should not have compulsory powers. I am sure that the hon. Lady cannot imagine why they would need the powers. Why do they need a right of entry? It is inconceivable that a hospital or any other health body would say "You can't come in" to a patients forum. Why must we give patients forums draconian powers, giving lay people a right to rummage through the private possessions of a doctor or pharmacist? The hon. Lady shakes her head, but it is true. The powers in clause 16, which deals with entry and inspection of premises, allow the Secretary of State to make regulations giving the right and power of entry. We need to be aware of people's civil liberties. As I said, if entry is refused, the Commission for Health Improvement, which has the appropriate powers, can enter the premises if it is believed that something serious is happening.

I hope that the Minister will consider amendment No. 73, as I think that Parliament has a right to protect the rights of individuals. They have been sorely hammered in recent months, and this is one occasion when we could avoid hammering them even more.

Dr. Murrison: The hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) inadvertently made a very good point in his intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson). He suggested that, in his constituency, if one asked a person in the street about their CHC, they would not know anything about it. In my constituency, people would know about their CHC.

Stephen Hesford: I said that we would get that answer if we were to walk outside now and speak to people in the street. I do not represent Cities of London and Westminster.

Dr. Murrison: I am grateful for that correction, but I think that the meaning was clear. In Westbury, people know all about their CHC. The point is that there are differences in practice throughout the country. There are good CHCs and some that are not quite so good, but the fact that they are good means that they are a good basis on which to build and reform. That is the thrust of the Opposition's argument about CHCs.

Bath and District CHC monitors health care services provided by two health authorities, two ambulance NHS trusts, two acute hospital trusts, a mental health partnership trust, two PCTs and a PCG. When my constituents are poorly, many of them—especially the vulnerable and elderly—end up dealing with local NHS services that are provided by two or more trusts. None the less, however many trusts they use, in their view, they are using the national health service in a fairly seamless fashion. My CHC centres its work on ensuring that patients receive the very best seamless provision of quality health services as they navigate their way around the multiple tiers of the national health service. Seamlessness is one of its strengths, but a strength that the Bill threatens.

The Association of Community Health Councils is, understandably, rather hurt and upset. Indeed, it is bewildered. It said:

> "The proposed alternatives to CHCs as set out in the Bill fall far short of meeting the widespread concerns about the independence of the new bodies and their lack of integration. If the Secretary of State pushes ahead with this bill in its current form patients will lose a respected, effective, independent health Watchdog and in its place they will get a system that is more fragmented, more confusing to the public and less independent."

CHCs are certainly watchdogs, but what we have been offered in their place is poodles, and lots of them: oodles of poodles, in confusing myriad PALS and patients forums. The proposals made by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) in new clause 5 are interesting, but they are second best. They suggest that we should keep our poodles and merely have something that might turn out to be a watchdog.

That brings us to cost. Despite the advice of the Opposition, the Government have set their face against building on the CHC model. My CHC costs £118,664, but its chief officer estimates that it will cost £750,000 to provide PALS alone. Indeed, the current edition of the *Health Service Journal* suggests that it will cost 10 times the amount spent on CHCs to provide the new services outlined in the Bill.

Roy Carr-Hill, professor of medical and social statistics at York said of the new system:

> "We're going to end up spending all the possible savings from Shifting the Balance of Power and it's still unclear how effective this . . . will be."

We should ask not only about the source of the money and the opportunity costs involved, but where the Government suppose that the army of volunteers required for staffing will come from. Those of us who have been heavily involved in the voluntary sector know that it has become increasingly difficult to get people, especially those with the right skills, to commit themselves for nothing. If public enthusiasm for the Bill is anything to go by, it seems unlikely that folk will queue up to lend their services to PALS and patient forums.

I am sure that my CHC's plea for a more integrated approach is echoed throughout the country. Patients, who view the NHS as a whole, not in little bits, would thus have a one-stop shop for their anxieties and representations. Conservative Members believe that reforming CHCs, not abolishing them, is the way ahead. If that is beyond the Government, can we place a duty on trusts to ensure that their poodles in a geographical area at least talk or bark to one another? Surely there is scope for sharing financial and human resources, thus driving down the appalling costs that informed opinion has forecast for the proposals, and making the best use of finite voluntary effort.

Mr. Baron: The Bill would abolish CHCs in England without replacing them with any community-led overview of the local NHS. England would be the only part of the United Kingdom without CHCs or a similar body. The measure proposes a confusing array of new mechanisms, which would make it more difficult for people to understand the system, influence the local NHS or obtain independent help when they needed it.

The proposed new system is difficult to understand because it is so fragmented and complex. The Bill proposes overlapping and separate organisations, which may serve only to confuse patients and the public. Without clarification from the start, there is a danger that much energy will be diverted into sterile competition as different organisations jockey for position in their local communities. That would be a complete waste of resources and energy. Elizabeth Manero, the chair of London Health Link, warned that the proposed system would be "a charter for tokenism". She said that it was "fragmented" and did not comply with recommendations from the Bristol inquiry for fully independent bodies.

Individual patients forums would have a remit for considering only their trust's services, with no formal mechanism for coming together to provide an informed overview of the local NHS from the patients and the public's perspective. Patients forums would be run entirely by volunteers and have no paid staff. I imagine that they would seek support from a separate body of paid staff—the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health—or that they may be forced to rely on help from the trust that they monitor. That would compromise their ability to be an effective and independent watchdog.

People who require independent help with problems with the NHS or complaints would have to approach other organisations, for example, the independent complaints advocacy service. Separate organisations make up ICAS, and it would therefore be more difficult to scrutinise and monitor complaints as they were processed. Staff of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health would be tied up in the bureaucratic exercise of tendering, monitoring and evaluating ICAS.

I have two further anxieties. First, the Bill removes the requirement to consult about changes to functions and boundaries of key NHS organisations, such as strategic health authorities, PCTs and NHS trusts. Community health councils must currently be consulted on such changes. The Bill does not specify the organisation that will take on that function. That is worrying.

7.45 pm

Secondly, the new structures will be much more expensive than CHCs. It is proposed to abolish CHCs without any guarantee that sufficient funding will be made available to ensure that their replacements are properly resourced. Again, that is worrying. Community health councils should be given more time to reform. They have had faults in the past, but, overall, they have championed patients by monitoring the health care in their local communities. They should be given more time to reform and I therefore support new clause 2.

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I support new clauses 2 and 5. The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) is not naive, but I have observed him on the Select Committee on Health, and he is a gentleman in every sense. He asked the Minister why CHCs should be abolished; perhaps I can help him. The Government dislike any criticism, and they are especially upset about criticism from Labour supporters. When Labour Members were in opposition, they loved CHCs because they were critical of the Conservative Government. Now we have a rotten Labour Government, and they cannot abide criticism from CHCs, especially from Labour activists.

The Under-Secretary who will reply to the debate has been a great champion of CHCs. The hon. Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Bedford (Mr. Hall) also have an honourable record in consistently championing the cause of CHCs. However, there is no doubt that what we are being offered as a replacement will not do. The proposals are ill thought out and shambolic.

If CHCs continued to exist, they would champion the cause of one of my constituents, a lady, who was diagnosed with lung cancer eight weeks ago. The cancer is operable, but she has been waiting eight weeks for an operation. The cancer is pressing on the spine but nothing has been done because of delays. Southend community health council will take up the lady's cause. As her Member of Parliament, I am doing everything that I can. I have tried to talk to the bed manager, who was on holiday for a week. No one was in charge during that time. When we spoke to the person today, we were told that further time was needed to examine the matter. Southend community health council is disgusted by the fact that my constituent has had to wait eight weeks. Her family are distraught about the circumstances, and they will not forgive the Government unless something happens.

I have received a letter from Southend community health council, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said, which expresses its anxieties about the Government's plans. Community health councils are enthusiastic about changes that benefit patients and the public. They do not claim that there should be no change. They are certainly not arguing for the status quo.

CHCs have been an effective independent watchdog in the NHS for the past 27 years. In that time, Southend community health council has helped thousands of people. The hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) said that people in his constituency had not heard of CHCs. I am surprised at that. In my area, and those of most other hon. Members, if people had not heard of CHCs before the current campaign, they jolly well have now. People probably took them for granted, but now they are clutching at this precious commodity, and saying that what is being offered in its place will not do.

[Mr. David Amess]

The new proposals threaten to eliminate the only effective, integrated independent watchdog that patients have, without putting forward an adequate replacement. The letter that I received from Southend community health council states:

> "In the wake of recent scandals, such as Shipman, Ledward and the fiddling of waiting lists, this seems particularly ill advised."

It goes on to say that the proposals with which the Minister will probably try to seduce the House shortly are

> "fragmented and confusing . . . without a unifying community-led element at local health economy level."

The Government, when they were in opposition, never turned away from using any briefing from the British Medical Association. For 18 years, the BMA was the Labour party's watchdog. However, since 1997, we never hear the Government say a word of good about the BMA. All hon. Members will have received a briefing from the association, stating how disappointed it is with the proposals.

The Secretary of State for Health put his foot in it in a big way today. Those of us who witnessed what happened during the private notice question and heard not one "Hear hear" from the Government Benches saw his proposals go down like a lead balloon. Today, the Labour Government are privatising the national health service. There can be no doubt about that. It has taken a Labour Government to do so. A number of hon. Members who sit on the Select Committee on Health are present in the Chamber now. When the Secretary of State came before us last week to give evidence on the private health sector, not a word was mentioned about these extraordinary proposals when we questioned him.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was obviously extremely upset about the proposals earlier, and I think that says it all. No doubt we shall hear from the Labour party in the weeks ahead about its plans to charge for all sorts of services that have traditionally been free under the national health service. It is not too late for the Government to admit that they are wrong about abolishing community health councils, to rethink their proposals, and to accept new clauses 2 and 5. If they did that, the hon. Member for Southend, West and the whole of the country would think far more of the Government than they do at the moment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Following the last contribution, I will try to bring us back down to earth, and closer to reality and to the clauses that we are discussing. I want to deal with new clause 2 and the consequential amendments and then new clause 5. Obviously, many of the same issues are involved in both new clauses.

I reject absolutely the idea that this is a vindictive or pernicious attempt to attack community health councils, as has been alleged by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). He knows very well that, in Committee, I put on record on three or four occasions my personal tribute to the excellent work carried out by many community health councils up and down the land. That stems partly from my own experience, and also from my fairly detailed knowledge of the work that has been carried out over many years by staff in CHCs and, crucially, by volunteer members who have given of their time unstintingly to try to improve the health service.

That is not to say that realistic, down-to-earth, grounded people do not recognise the limitations of those organisations. Many such people want actively to embrace change and to consider new ways of working; they have the courage to examine new forms of organisation that can strengthen the patients voice.

Mr. Burns: Will the Minister tell the House how many members of community health councils in England wrote to the Department of Health, following the consultation process, saying that they wanted the CHCs to be abolished?

Ms Blears: I have already spoken in detail to the hon. Gentleman about Wirral CHC. He knows that extremely well.

Dr. Evan Harris: It was Wigan.

Ms Blears: It was not Wigan, it was Wirral. That CHC has welcomed the proposals. Many members of CHCs have been in touch with me, either in writing or in person. Many came to the nine regional listening events that were held up and down the country, and broadly welcomed many of the proposals. Yes, they had concerns, but they were willing—unlike some intransigent, inflexible Conservative Members—to embrace change and to consider new ways of working that could help to strengthen the voice of patients and the public in the system.

Our new system aims to be more accessible, accountable, independent, robust and effective. We are not starting from scratch. We have genuinely tried to build on the best of the existing work being done in public and patient involvement. That involves not only CHCs. We must not forget that a whole range of patient organisations has been involved in this work for many years. There is a tendency to think that public and patient involvement involves only CHCs. The process that we have undertaken over the past few months has enabled many organisations to get more involved and to see how they can make a more effective contribution in future.

The current system of CHCs has been in place for about 27 years. Inevitably, any change will encounter resistance and uncertainty, and people will cleave to what they know because they do not know what the new system will look like. I acknowledge that there has been a need for the Government to try to explain the changes. Certainly, over the past seven months, I have been out and about with other Ministers and officials from the Department, talking to people in local communities to ensure that we get our vision of a more effective, independent, integrated system across to them.

Only last Thursday, I spent three and a half hours meeting representatives of the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales. We agreed at the end of the meeting, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, that we were only inches apart in terms of the things that we wanted to do. We made many changes during the listening exercise and as a response to the listening document. We showed that we had not just listened; we had not just heard what people said, we had acted on it as well. This was not a sham process, an empty attempt at consultation. This was real, engaged activity. We were prepared to listen and to act.

There is broad consensus about the functions of the new system. The functions of the new commission have been broadly welcomed. There is also consensus about the need to involve people who traditionally have not had a say in the health service—people in excluded and marginalised communities who have been ignored for many years when services have been shaped, developed and drawn up. There is a willingness in the field to draw in a wide range of individuals and groups, and to make sure that their voices are right at the centre of shaping services for patients.

The consultation process has been an extremely good one, and that is not just my view. I draw to the attention of hon. Members a letter circulated by the Long-Term Medical Conditions Alliance. The alliance represents the Alzheimer's Association, the British Cardiac Patients Association, the National Schizophrenia Fellowship, all long-standing, respected patients' organisations. They welcome the new proposals, and state, quite realistically, that

> "bearing in mind the impossibility of accommodating everybody's wishes in their entirety, the key concerns raised during"

the consultation

> "have been addressed in the latest set of proposals."

They welcome the initiatives in the Bill, specifically the local networks, which will enable the commission to bring together patients forums to build capacity for involvement in the community. They say:

> "We believe that the proposals contained in the Bill will allow diversity to develop, and that any amendment involving yet more committees (such as the Patients' Councils"

in new clause 5

> "would lead to the strangling of genuine citizen involvement and the promotion of bureaucracy at the expense of the voice of individual users of the NHS."

I want to deal with that point in particular.

8 pm

Lynne Jones: I have read the LMCA letter, but those bodies represent people with long-term medical conditions who are regularly engaged with medical services. Patients forums are therefore much more likely to involve patients who take a long-term interest in them. Those with acute conditions go in and out of the system. With respect, the view of those organisations is not necessarily representative of patients as a whole.

Ms Blears: I would not say that that is the view of all patients, but it is extremely important, given which organisations are members of the alliance, and it shows that widespread support exists.

Dr. Harris: If we are trading organisations, the Minister may be aware of the view of the Patients Association, which has at least as much legitimacy in this respect as the LMCA:

> "The Government has been truly determined to get rid of an effective local voice for patients in the form of Community Health Councils . . . This amendment"—

new clause 5—

> "offers a compromise and an opportunity for patients to have an independent and powerful say in what's happening to their health services locally."

Ms Blears: Organisations take specific views and I shall outline why our proposals encompass all the functions in new clause 5 and will enable us to go even further. I have described them to my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield as patients councils plus, and I genuinely believe that those on the way in which the commission would operate are exactly that.

We have heard the arguments about reform on various occasions. Over the past five years—the period highlighted by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford—the NHS has changed dramatically and it is about to change even more fundamentally still. Therefore, there is a need to put in place a new system of patient and public involvement that properly reflects all the different NHS levels and functions to ensure that, where there needs to be public involvement, it is sited in the most appropriate place in the service so that it can act as a key lever for driving up standards and change. No longer should patients be outside the system, able to react only after the event.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) has gone to his CHC to look after the interests of his constituent, who appears to be in a dire situation, but the CHC has to act after the event and from the outside. The new structures will put the PALS system inside that trust, so it will be on the spot to provide assistance to that constituent where it matters and when he or she needs it. The system will be a powerful force for ensuring that the trust, its consultants and the service that that constituent receives improve. Therefore, I genuinely believe that what we are introducing is much more appropriate for the changed NHS. We are putting patients and the public right at the heart of the system, which is where they need to be and where they can make the most difference.

I want to deal in detail with the concept of patients councils in new clause 5. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) said, it is important that I set out how the commission would work so that people can visualise the way in which the system may be drawn together. All the concerns about fragmentation can be addressed. Many Members have mentioned the need to ensure that the system is integrated and that there is an overview of the whole health community. That is very important.

The concept of patients councils, which was introduced by previous legislation, has helped to inform the arrangements before us. Over the past year, we have developed our proposals in the light of those ideas and many others. This has not been a static process in which the Government have taken a fixed view. We have taken on board the views of many stakeholders in the system and the proposals have been much improved over the past year or so.

The system will take on board all the functions set out in new clause 5, but it will also allow for a more dynamic and much more influential arrangement that is fit for the purpose of empowering all the people whom we want to involve in the NHS. First, we all agree that there must be a mechanism to pull together the informed overview of the patient experience across a specified area. That overview is fundamental. We must ensure that we collect all the data from PALS, the patients forums, the trends and the themes that emerge from independent complaints and advocacy services so that we have in one place all the information we need to know what the NHS is like in a certain community or neighbourhood and what is causing concern regularly, not just as a one-off. Currently,

[Ms Blears]

there is no one place in which all that intelligence can be held, but we shall be able to ensure that there is such a place in future.

The commission will go out locally and engage hard-to-reach groups and people from marginalised communities. It will get not only the views of long-term and acute patients, but, perhaps, those of the homeless, people in the travelling community and people from black and ethnic minority groups—the voice out there that has never shaped the service before. The commission may use that data, that intelligence, those views and those concerns to ensure that reports are prepared not narrowly—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. If the Minister does not address the Chair, it is difficult to hear her.

Ms Blears: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The commission will draw in all that experience across the local area. We all agree that patients do not fit conveniently or snugly into NHS or local government boundaries and that patients' experience often transcends various trusts—they go from one to another. It is important that we are able to draw that experience together. We must ensure that patients forums and ICAS providers are sufficiently supported so that they can develop.

Patients forums in particular are new organisations and they will need to be properly staffed and facilitated to ensure that they can grow. Those organisations must work together to share their outcomes, plan joint work and identify trends and themes. Above all, the whole patient and public involvement system must be geared to hearing the voices of people, not a few representatives who purport to speak for the community. The community must find a way to express itself.

The public will want to know how they can gain access to every part of the public and patient involvement service, where they can get in touch with PALS, how to get in touch with patients forums, what the overview and scrutiny committees will do, what the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement can do for them and where, at every single point, they can get their needs, concerns and grievances addressed. It is absolutely crucial that all those organisations be led by the public and by patients—lay members determining their priorities in the community.

All those provisions are dealt with in the Bill, so new clause 5 is unnecessary, not because the issues are unimportant, but because they are catered for and because such a patients council might prove inhibiting to other important features.

The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health is the fundamental change to our proposals following the introduction of the Health and Social Care Act 2001. It will have core national functions and a range of local functions that have been universally recognised as being pivotal to the system's effective operation. The Bill says that the commission must operate at PCT level in local communities.

Patients forums will have their ear to the ground in respect of the trusts and PCTs to which they relate. They will have a real insight into what patients really think about trust services. We acknowledge that they will be trust focused, so we must ensure that that knowledge and insight is brought together. What does it mean for patients overall? We intend to require patients forums to come together regularly to share their findings and to talk about emerging trends.

As is argued for the patients council, information sharing is critical to ensuring that the patient's journey is truly understood and captured. We shall use the regulation-making powers in clause 15(4) to require patients forums to work together. That will enable best practice to emerge and inform the commission about those areas in which there are stresses and strains and where further work is needed. A strength of CHCs was that they could see such trends emerging. We shall ensure that that strength is not lost in the new system.

We envisage the commission and patients forums forging partnerships across different boundaries. We do not want to tie those boundaries down to specific and restrictive areas, because they will work in many different ways. Many issues span different PCTs and the commission will need to work across those areas and with lay members in partnerships and to have the flexibility to do so.

We think that the concept of a patients council, as expressed in new clause 5, would inevitably result in a limiting of the remit of the public and patient involvement system. It would also require a service organisation to support that organisation. I am keen to maximise the use of our resources in carrying out the consultation work that local people want to happen, instead of in servicing committees, taking minutes and the other aspects of a bureaucratic organisation. There would need to be 150 patients councils established, which would mean another 150 bodies in what hon. Members have already called a complex and complicated system. I do not want us to be tied to servicing such organisations, although the functions of the patients councils are crucial to making the system work.

We have to ensure that the commission will respond to what patients forums tell it are the important issues in their community. We have the flexibility in the Bill to make secondary legislation that will set out the relationship between the commission and patients forums, to ensure that when forums highlight an issue the commission takes it on board. We can ensure that patients forum representatives—the lay members—set the work programme for the commission and ensure that community priorities are at the top of the agenda. We shall use regulation-making powers to require the commission to have specific regard to the recommendations of joint patients forums when planning programmes of work.

By using the two regulation-making powers already in the Bill, we will be able to set up all the functions of the patients councils, as set out in new clause 5, and we can do much more. We will not be rigid or tied to a specific structure. The commission will go out into communities and hear those different voices and draw in those socially excluded groups and marginalised communities. We will be able to move on. It is a matter of having the courage to consider new ways of working. We are all tempted to stick with what we know because it is comfortable and we have seen it in practice, but we must now push forward the boundaries and consider new ways of working to empower the public, too.

Dr. Evan Harris: Nothing in new clause 5 prevents the Secretary of State from making regulations to fine-tune the functions of patients councils, but the Minister described the provision of staff who would enable patients to make their views known to the relevant organisations as creating a bureaucracy. However, when staff are provided to support other organisations, that is called providing appropriate support for effective mechanisms. Simply labelling something a bureaucracy when the Government do not like it is not worthy of the issues involved.

Ms Blears: I assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be staff. The staff of the commission will support the patients forums. The staff will also go out into the communities to find the volunteers mentioned by the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) and give them support, education, training and guidance—which they have never had before—before they are placed on patients forums and other bodies. That will ensure that patients and the public are empowered to challenge professionals. The representatives will be really fit for the purpose of serving on those bodies and will be able to feel that they can make a significant difference and a real contribution.

One of the aims of patients councils will be to make real links with local government. Some of the biggest determinants of good health are the issues that local government is responsible for, such as education, housing, transport and the environment. The commission will not be confined to an NHS model but will be able to make crucial links with local government, which have been championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield on many occasions. I am a little disappointed that my hon. Friend is not able to trust the Government's undertaking to put these measures into law through the use of the regulation-making powers. I have put our intention to ensure that those functions are carried out on the record and I am disappointed that my hon. Friend will not accept that.

8.15 pm

Amendment No. 73, supported by the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), deals with the rights of patients forums to inspect various properties. The matter was raised in Committee and I said that I would consider it. It is not our intention to hand to patients forums a set of draconian powers. We have said that patients forums should be able to inspect everywhere a patient goes, but that does not mean a right of access to private living accommodation. There will be appropriate limitations and restrictions in the regulations that we intend to enact. It will be necessary to spell out the circumstances in which patients forums can inspect various properties, and we will have to be conscious of the right to privacy under the human rights legislation. I therefore reject the amendment, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept my reassurance.

Amendments Nos. 38 and 70 relate to the accounts and funding arrangements for patients forums. Independence for patients forums was a key issue in Committee and it is our intention to reinforce their independence through the legislation. There is a saying that he who pays the piper calls the tune, and concern was expressed in Committee that if trusts were to be responsible for the finances of patients forums, those bodies would not feel able to be critical or independent. Government amendment No. 38 will ensure that it is the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health that will provide the funding and accounts for patients forums as arm's-length independent organisations. That will ensure that patients forums are independent of trusts in every way, including in their financing. I would hope that that will be sufficient for the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) to withdraw his amendment.

I turn to the relationship of patients forums with the rest of the proposed system. Patients forums will be powerful and influential bodies, but we recognise that there will be times when the forums might feel that a significant issue from the patient's perspective has not been properly taken account of by the trusts that they monitor. In such circumstances, the forums might want to alert the overview and scrutiny committees, which will have the legal powers to scrutinise the NHS on that issue. Local OSCs will provide the democratic element, through democratically elected members, and we think it right that forums should refer issues of concern that have not been satisfactorily addressed to the OSC. The amendment has been widely welcomed by ACHCEW and patients' organisations, and I hope that hon. Members will also welcome it.

The democratic rights of local government must be a matter for its determination. We do not want to add to the Bill a requirement for OSCs to respond to referrals from the patients forum, because it is properly a matter for local government to decide what to do with those referrals in the course of the programme of scrutiny. However, it would be good practice to respond and we shall put in guidance our view on how OSCs should perform their functions. We would like to see a close relationship between OSCs and the patients forums. The OSCs should indicate, when they get a referral, what they intend to do—whether they will note the matter or look into it further. Government amendment No. 33 will join up the system between patients forums and OSCs, and I hope that it will be welcomed. Consequential amendments provide the necessary definitions and, on that basis, I would ask the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon to reconsider his amendment.

In Committee, the important matter of the right of overview and scrutiny committees to refer contested reconfigurations to the Secretary of State was raised. At the moment, the way in which community health councils deal with the matter is, as I said in Committee, tortuous, in that they rely on referrals to regulations. These are important matters, and I want the new powers for overview and scrutiny committees to refer contested reconfigurations to the Secretary of State to be no less rigorous than those that community health councils enjoyed.

I also want to clarify the situation about referrals on process and on merit. In relation to new clause 8, I would like to be able to consider further the details that are proposed. The drafting proposed by the new clause may not be sufficient to achieve the objective, and I would want to consider the proposals further.

[Ms Blears]

Finally, new clause 7 seeks to amend section 11 of the Health and Social Care Act, which provides a duty on the NHS to make arrangements to involve and consult the public on decisions that it takes about the provision and delivery of services. It is not necessary to include the Secretary of State in the list of bodies to whom section 11 of the Act applies. The Secretary of State himself delegates all functions in relation to health services—to health authorities, to NHS trusts or to PCTs.

A full list of potential providers of health services is already included in the Health and Social Care Act. Paragraph 34(a) of schedule 8 to the Bill extends the provision to strategic health authorities. On that basis, I would resist the new clause. There is sufficient definition of the bodies that are required to consult under section 11 to fulfil all the scenarios that have been put before us. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon is going down the road of hypothetical situations and the Bill will be sufficiently robust to meet his concerns.

Dr. Evan Harris: What about my point about NSCAG?

Ms Blears: I have made the point that all the health service's functions are delegated by the Secretary of State. The way in which the consultation is carried out—whether by a lead strategic health authority or by a national organisation—is a delegation by the Secretary of State of a function of the health service. I genuinely believe that the Bill is comprehensive enough to cover the scenarios set out by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon.

I hope that, during my speech, I have answered most of the issues that hon. Members have raised. Through the new system, we are genuinely trying to achieve a much more robust, independent and effective system of patient and public involvement. Hon. Members must look forward and have the courage to embrace new ways of working. They must not simply look for the traditional systems that they know and love but which do not provide an effective, independent and vigorous system for patients in our health service. This system will deliver that for the good of the people whom we represent.

Mr. Burns: I listened carefully to the Under-Secretary, and I think that she and the Government are trying to sell us a pup. She gave no credible reason why community health councils should be abolished. She gave no credible explanation of why they could not be reformed and kept in an improved state. For that reason, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to support new clause 2.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 194, Noes 323.

Division No. 130] **[8.22 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter

Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan

Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 3

THE HEALTH INSPECTORATE

'(1) There shall be a body corporate known as the Health Inspectorate, which will take effect from 1st April 2004.

(2) The Health Inspectorate shall assume at that date the functions undertaken prior to that date by—

(i) The National Institute for Clinical Excellence,

(ii) The Commission for Health Improvement,

(iii) The National Care Standards Commission, and

(iv) The Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals.

(3) The Secretary of State may by order make such amendments of the legislation relating to the health service in England and Wales as in his opinion facilitate, or are otherwise desirable in connection with subsections (1) and (2) above.'.—*[Mr. Heald.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Heald: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment (a) to the proposed clause, in line 5, leave out—

'(i) The National Institute for Clinical Excellence.'.

Amendment (b) to the proposed clause, in line 8, leave out—

'(iv) The Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals.'.

New clause 4—*Public health functions of the Commission for Health Improvement*—

'The Commission for Health Improvement shall have such further functions as may be prescribed relating to the management, coordination, provision or quality of public health services for which prescribed NHS bodies, service providers, local authorities or other bodies have responsibility.'.

New clause 10—*The Commission for Health Improvement: amendments to section 20 of the Health Act 1999*—

'(1) Section 20 of the Health Act 1999 is amended as follows:—

(2) After paragraph (1) (e) there is inserted—

"(f) the function of conducting reviews of and making reports on the guidance on priorities for the NHS set out by the Secretary of State, regional directors of the health service, and Strategic Health Authorities"

(3) After subsection (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) in carrying out the functions set out in subsections 20(1)(a) to (e) the Commission shall, where appropriate, review, investigate and report on the guidance on priorities for the NHS set out by the Secretary of State, regional directors of the health service, and Strategic Health Authorities."

(4) Subsections (3) and (4) are repealed'.

Amendment No. 89, in clause 12, page 17, line 15 after "others", insert—

'(including but not limited to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the relevant royal colleges, regional directors of the Health Service, the NHS Executive and the Secretary of State)'.

Amendment No. 88, in page 17, line 29 at end insert—

'(1C) The criteria referred to in subsection (1A)(b) shall be agreed between the Commission, the Secretary of State and the relevant royal colleges, which shall take due account of the adequacy of resources available to meet the performance indicators.'.

Government amendments Nos. 29 to 32, and 57 and 58.

Mr. Heald: In a world of reform by soundbite, where the answer to every issue is to set up a new commission, a new institute, a new agency or a new committee, surely there comes a time—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members who are interested in holding private conversations—*[Interruption.]* Order. That includes the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis). Hon. Members who are not interested in listening to the debate would serve their colleagues better by leaving the Chamber.

Mr. Heald: Surely there comes a time to rationalise, and new clauses 3 and 4 would do just that. New clause 3 would combine the functions of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the Commission for Health Improvement, the National Care Standards Commission and the Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals in one body known as the health inspectorate.

The Government have a piecemeal approach to reform: an issue arises, a committee is set up. That has led to a plethora of commissions, institutes and the like. It has also led to particular issues to do with the National Care Standards Commission and the CHI. The NCSC will monitor and inspect private sector providers. The CHI will inspect the same providers if NHS patients are at their premises. Surely only one body should do that work.

We know that Government policy is changing fast. Only last year the Secretary of State was saying that the national health service was "thankfully" a monopoly provider. The right hon. Gentleman said that

> "by and large, we thankfully have one monopoly provider and that is the NHS. As long as a Labour Government are in power, that will remain the position."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 500.]

When the Bill was being prepared, that was indeed the right hon. Gentleman's view; yet by 7 December 2001—six months later—he was saying:

> "Where we need to get to is a position where the NHS is no longer a monopoly provider of care but it does become a monopoly funder of care."

In other words, in six months, the Secretary of State went from a monopolist to a non-monopolist.

Having given us the NHS plan in 2000 and the Bill in 2001, the right hon. Gentleman has now come up with another big idea to rescue the day. The reason is that, despite his promises and despite his words, he was wrong. There has been no delivery: all talk, no delivery.

Today we have heard about foundation hospitals. As the changes are made, the case for an all-embracing health inspectorate grows. There would be no demarcation disputes between private sector monitoring and public sector monitoring. There would be less red tape and better co-ordination. There would be fewer burdens on busy clinicians, nurses and other staff. Indeed, if some of the comments are to be believed, the Government will embrace a national health service provided by third parties and will simply act as a regulator. In that case, why do we need this plethora of commissions, inspectorates and the like? Surely it makes sense to rationalise the situation.

Under new clause 4, we would extend the role of the CHI to cover the monitoring, inspection, reporting, co-ordination, management and quality of public health. On 10 January, the chief medical officer announced a new committee—the national infection control and health protection agency—which will assess the threat of new and emerging infections and diseases and implement vaccinations. That is necessary simply because of the Government's lamentable failure in public health.

In a report published in February 2000, the National Audit Office exposed huge discrepancies in performance between hospitals. It found that infections caught while in hospital were killing about 5,000 people a year and infecting about 100,000. The very old, the very young, those undergoing invasive standard procedures and those with suppressed immune systems were particularly susceptible. Hospital staff were not practising basic hygiene. The NAO found that infection rates could be reduced by 15 per cent. by better application of existing knowledge and realistic infection control practices.

The NAO also found that there was insufficient funding, that there was no up-to-date information and that hospital infections were costing the health service £1 billion a year. It said that the NHS could save hundreds of millions of pounds if it tackled infection seriously, and that the high number of patients occupying beds and contributing to the problem could be improved.

Against that background of the Government's failure to take public health and infection seriously, exactly what happens when Labour is in power can be shown by referring to certain diseases. The number of tuberculosis cases has risen enormously in recent years. In September 1999, the Department of Health asked the health authorities to suspend routine immunisation in schools for 10 to 14-year-olds because of a shortage of vaccine, yet that programme has still not been fully reinstated.

The number of BCG vaccinations fell from 518,000 in 1997 to 137,000 in 2001—a decrease of almost 400,000—yet the number of TB cases reached a 15-year high. According to the British Thoracic Society, the number of adults and children with the respiratory disease TB was at record levels. The figure rose by a fifth between 1987 and 1988, and London has become the capital for TB.

The rise in sexually transmitted diseases has been remarkable, too. Between 1999 and 2000, the incidence of syphilis increased by 51 per cent.; gonorrhoea increased by 25 per cent.; and chlamydia by 12 per cent. We have seen a similar picture with other diseases. So there is an epidemic of TB and sexually transmitted diseases are increasing.

Dr. Evan Harris: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's topic; it used to be my field, but I am little confused—perhaps I am missing some amendments—about its relevance to new clause 3, about which important issues remain to be discussed. He refers to important issues, but they are not necessarily connected with new clause 3.

Mr. Heald: Perhaps I have been so speedy in my remarks that the hon. Gentleman has not noticed that I have moved on to new clause 4, under which we would require the CHI to take an interest in public health services. The reason why that is important is the Government's neglect of very important issues, such as those diseases, and the hon. Gentleman might make common cause with us about that. Certainly, when the Select Committee report on public health was debated recently in Westminster Hall, he and I agreed that the Government have an appalling public health record.

Although the chief medical officer has belatedly set up yet another committee, the hon. Gentleman may agree—certainly his amendments to new clause 3 suggest it—that it would be better to have one effective body than to have committee upon committee upon committee. On 10 January, the chief medical officer reported that he was setting up the national infection control and health protection agency, but the new clause suggests that the Commission for Health Improvement could deal with such issues as well.

8.45 pm

One hopes that the Commission for Health Improvement will give advice to all the health bodies in the country. If it has the role of providing advice and support, it is surely odd to set up yet another new agency to give advice on public health when we already have a body that meets and liaises with all the other bodies and authorities to deal with the issues. We therefore suggest the rational approach of dealing with the matter through one body.

The Government have recently, belatedly, produced a strategy on sexual health. However, there has been great criticism of it. The response from the George House Trust has been to say that the Government are following the "wrong strategy". It states:

> "Much is made by the Government of the need for the 'joined-up working' . . . but not so on HIV."

[Mr. Heald]

It points out that to achieve

> "the long term aims of a reduction of HIV transmission and the best possible quality of life for people with HIV requires a cross-Government approach."

It criticises the Government for providing something worse than that, adding:

> "The document almost doesn't deserve the name 'national strategy'."

Building on their weakness on this issue, the Government have produced yet another document that is short on the sort of detail that those in the community who have to deal with such illnesses think is necessary.

Mr. Hutton: I understand that the hon. Gentleman's new clauses and amendments deal essentially with the role and responsibilities of the Commission for Health Improvement for what he described as public health areas. He has now moved on to the sexual health strategy and sexual health services, but that is one issue for which the Commission for Health Improvement already has competence and jurisdiction.

Mr. Heald: The point that I am making is that we should join up the functions. If the Minister had attended the debate in Westminster Hall, he would know that public health is a well recognised field. Like the Select Committee on Health, we went through the history of the subject and back to 1850 and the earliest steps taken in public health. We reached the conclusion—and a consensus even with the Minister's colleague who attended the debate—that sexual health was part of public health. It obviously has a medical dimension too.

On haemophilia, the fact that recombinant factor 8 is not available across the whole United Kingdom has been a failure of public health policy. So the public are right to be concerned that the Government do not know what they are doing for public health. The Select Committee on Health has done an important job of highlighting the vital nature of the issue, but I return to my central point. Why do we need yet another new committee? Why not give the Commission for Health Improvement the job of being a combined inspectorate that brings together the four bodies mentioned in new clause 3, while having additional responsibilities for public health?

The British Medical Association has expressed concern that the new arrangements in the Bill may lead to some areas having no public health doctor advising either the PCT or the strategic health authority. Will the Minister address the issue and tell us whether he is satisfied with that? The national tracker survey mentioned in previous debates concluded that

> "most PCGs and PCTs feel they need more public health support".

So why not give the job to the people who advise on all the other matters? Why not give it to a unified body or to the Commission for Health Improvement?

Other new clauses and amendments are before the House, and I shall leave it to other Members to describe them. However, I hope that the Minister will, for once, move away from the Government's gimmicky, soundbite approach that we see so often. Every time there is a problem, they set up a committee. Why can we not rationalise and at least bring all the powers together in one body?

On a non-partisan note, when financial controls and checks were disparate and a plethora of bodies dealt with financial regulation, the Chancellor of the Exchequer considered the problem and decided to bring those bodies together with a strong regulator, the Financial Services Authority, to cover all financial regulation. If that is good enough for financial regulation, why is it not good enough for health regulation? Let us bring the bodies together, give them some teeth and have real expertise. I ask the Minister to look on the new clause with the same affection as he showed for our proposals on consultation.

Dr. Evan Harris: Before addressing the new clause and amendments that the Liberal Democrats have tabled, I want to deal with new clause 3, which would amalgamate the functions of the Commission for Health Improvement, the National Care Standards Commission, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals. I am half with the Conservatives on that. The hon. Gentleman knows that for a long time we have thought that there should be one quality regulator for both the private sector and the NHS. Such an inspectorate would have specialist departments to deal with, for example, the inspection of care homes, on which my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) is an expert. We believe that the nature of the inspectorate should be to consider issues of quality in both sectors, with powers to be discussed and arranged later in our proceedings.

We also believe, however, that NICE and the Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals are separate bodies with separate functions. We have made it clear to the Government that we support their quality initiative, even if it means more acronyms. That is the price we have to pay for the previous lack of machinery to deal with quality assurance in the health service. So we accept that two of the bodies could be combined, which is the purpose of amendments (a) and (b) to new clause 3.

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when the Government thought of having two bodies, they favoured a monopoly supply in the NHS, so there would have been little overlap? Now that they are coming forward with changed proposals, it is far more important that one body should deal with such matters; otherwise, more than one body will survey the same premises.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman is too generous. I do not think that the Government provided a rational reason for the separation, especially with regard to the fact that NHS patients in private hospitals would be subject to Commission for Health Improvement inspection, which means two separate bodies going to similar sectors. It is true that the then Secretary of State took a separatist view of the private sector, but I do not think that that approach was ever rationalised. I do not believe that it can be.

Mr. Hutton: The hon. Gentleman, like the Conservatives, overlooks the implications and consequences of section 9 of the Care Standards Act 2000, which prevents the duplication to which he refers. In the present situation, it offers a sensible way to deal with his reasonable concerns and criticisms.

Dr. Harris: That section might deal with one form of duplication, but it does not address the duplication of structure. I am concerned about the duplication of two bodies that could more easily pool best practice and identify lessons to be learned from each other by being in one inspectorate. I am sure that if we revisited this issue, the Government would accept the establishment of one body, albeit with different specialisations.

New clause 10 is important and touches on matters that we raised in Committee. The Government say that they want the CHI to be more independent. Together with amendments Nos. 88 and 89, the new clause would ensure that they deliver on that and that the body really is independent. Under the cloak of greater independence, the measures would have the commission doing the Government's bidding, because it will be put in charge of measuring hospitals against performance criteria laid down by the Government, but it will have no duty to ensure that those criteria are sensible.

Amendment No. 89 seeks to ensure that those criteria would be discussed and agreed by the commission, the Government and the royal colleges. The commission, rather than simply measuring how well hospitals, trusts and PCTs jump through hoops and how high they jump, should have some input, with the royal colleges, in determining the nature of the hoops.

In the past, there have been ridiculous performance criteria with political objectives. In fact "ridiculous" is a polite description. For example, trusts that put patients ahead of political targets by treating urgent cases quickly, even at the expense of creating a few more long waiters—I accept that in general waiting times are too long—get marked down in performance tables compared with those that deal with long waiters, and have no one waiting over 15 months, by delaying waiting times for urgent operations from one month to three months. Patients come out worse in the second case, but the trust scores higher on the crazy performance criteria.

I accept that there must be some performance monitoring, but let us have sensible criteria. Politicians will do as they do, so it would be sensible to ensure that the commission is able to agree criteria with the Government and the royal colleges. The Government have made efforts to engage the royal colleges in such discussions, but it is clear, as the Minister said in Committee, that the criteria in the Bill will be set by the Government and they will be designed to meet Government targets.

The Government should not be allowed to get away with imposing distortions on the health service unless they are satisfied that they can pass muster with the newly independent commission. New clause 10 would give the commission the power to conduct reviews and draw up reports on the guidance on NHS priorities set out by the Secretary of State and the people to whom he delegates those powers. If priorities and planning guidance emerged that would not inevitably lead to improved quality but merely dealt with subsidiary matters unrelated to patient outcomes, they could be subject to a report by the commission. The Secretary of State could, of course, choose to ignore that report, but at least the information would be out in the open, and the Minister would have subjected the priorities emanating from his Department to the same scrutiny as the conduct of the trusts that seek to meet those criteria will be subjected to.

One amendment seeks to ensure that when setting the criteria some regard would be paid to resources and their effect on the ability of hospitals, trusts and PCTs to meet those criteria. There is nothing more invidious and depressing for trusts than to be named and shamed, as the Government indicate they will do and as they have done through the zero rating, when they fail to meet performance criteria, solely because they do not have the necessary staff or capacity. Delayed discharges, for example, are well beyond the control of even the best public sector or even—dare I say it?—private sector managers. That amendment should not be a threat to the Minister; indeed, he may argue, as I do, that it would be a benefit because it would ensure that trusts get a fair deal. Without performance monitoring that does not have a devastating effect on morale, we will not have the health service that we require.

I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that at the appropriate moment you will allow us to call a vote on new clause 10, if the Government oppose it.

Mr. Hutton: I shall speak to the Government amendments before I turn to those in the names of Opposition Members. Amendments Nos. 29 to 32 are technical amendments that relate to the Commission for Health Improvement. Amendment No. 29 concerns the commission's investigatory role, and the remaining amendments deal with its role under the new system of local health boards to be established in Wales.

9 pm

Amendment No. 29 is designed to ensure that confidential information can be disclosed to the Commission for Health Improvement when it is carrying out investigations in relation to special health authorities or other bodies that may in future be prescribed in regulations under section 20(1)(e) of the Health Act 1999, not only when it carries out investigations in relation to health authorities, PCTs and NHS trusts. Whenever we discuss confidential information and its disclosure, it is important that we address the essential safeguards needed to ensure that there are no abuses. Those safeguards have already been built into the existing legislation.

The Commission for Health Improvement may obtain personally identifiable confidential information only in the circumstances specified in 23(2)(d) of the 1999 Act. Broadly, those circumstances are where it is not practicable to disclose the information in an anonymous form; where there is a serious risk to the health or safety of patients; and where the risk and urgency involved mean that the information needs to be disclosed without consent. Those are stringent and necessary safeguards.

Amendments Nos. 30, 31 and 32 are technical drafting mechanisms to address the fact that local health boards will be set up at a future date in Wales. Amendments Nos. 57 and 58 are also technical amendments, consequential on the creation of local health boards. The practical effect of amendment No. 57 would be to ensure that CHI's functions in relation to local health boards under section 20 of the 1999 Act operate once such boards are established and given responsibility for health care. The practical effect of amendment No. 58 would be to ensure that local health boards are subject to the appropriate provisions of existing legislation.

The principal debate and arguments in relation to this group of amendments has concerned new clauses 3, 4 and 10. New clause 3 seeks to create a new health inspectorate by bringing together a number of current or proposed

[Mr. Hutton]

bodies. In tabling new clauses 3 and 4, the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) has, properly and correctly, raised an important issue with which I have a great deal of sympathy. However, I have serious doubts about the drafting and wider effects of the new clauses, which means that I cannot accept them this evening. Clearly, as the hon. Gentleman said—and I agree—there is a strong case for effective co-ordination between various agencies in the field and for ensuring that the NHS is not subject to unnecessary or bureaucratic regulatory inspections. That is a key objective for the Government, which we need to keep under careful and continuous review.

My overall concerns about the new clauses, especially new clause 3, are to do with the mixture of distinct functions and the disruption that that kind of change would inevitably cause at this moment in time, particularly when the National Care Standards Commission has not even begun to discharge its statutory functions and CHI has not taken on its new and expanded role under the Bill. While there is no doubt at all that the sort of collaboration and co-ordination that the hon. Gentleman and I want must continue and be strengthened, the proposed health inspectorate would create a new body with what might be described as an indigestible and confusing mixture of NHS and wider regulation and inspection roles. As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), we should not lose sight, in our rush to reform, of other ways in which we can facilitate the type of operation that he and I want to see, especially the use of section 9 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

We have already made provision for greater co-ordination between CHI and the Audit Commission in the Bill. Additionally, we have provided powers for the sharing of functions between the National Care Standards Commission and CHI, which has entered into important memorandums of understanding with a range of organisations, such as the royal colleges. We were able to send copies of those memorandums of understanding to members of the Standing Committee; I hope that they found that useful. In the present circumstances, that is the right way to proceed.

I wish to make it clear to the House that we are considering, as part of our response to Professor Kennedy's report on the Bristol royal infirmary inquiry, what further steps might be taken to improve the co-ordination of the activities of those various bodies. As the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire, and, I hope, the House, knows, the Government's response to the report will be published in the near future. While I fully understand his arguments and strongly sympathise with them, I am not in a position to support his particular attempt to resolve those problems. As I said, the difficulties can be addressed in the present circumstances in other ways—less bureaucratic ways than the drastic changes and upheavals proposed. That is particularly true in relation to the National Care Standards Commission, which has not yet started its work.

Amendments (a) and (b) tabled by the Liberal Democrats to new clause 3 would mean that the new health inspectorate would perform the functions of the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Care Standards Commission, but not those of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence or the new Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals. As I have already indicated, the proposal to establish a single health inspectorate as set out in new clause 3 may have some attractions, but it confuses the very different roles of the bodies concerned and ignores the actual and potential collaboration between them. By reducing the number of bodies involved, the amendments inevitably mitigate the confusion, but do not remove it entirely.

I have tried to explain to the hon. Members for North-East Hertfordshire and for Oxford, West and Abingdon that we are examining the issues closely, but there are genuine difficulties with the new clause. The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire may or may not be prepared to accept that, but I assure him and the House that the Government are studying these matters carefully.

New clause 4 would allow CHI to be given new functions in relation to what are described in the new clause as "public health" services. That is not a term defined in the Health Act 1999, which set up the Commission for Health Improvement. The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire was right to draw attention to the chief medical officer's report last week, which announced plans for a new national infection control and health protection agency, which is designed to streamline the services involved in the prevention and control of infectious diseases.

The agency would subsume the functions of a number of the bodies of expertise which currently provide health protection services, including the Public Health Laboratory Service, the National Radiological Protection Board, the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research—CAMAR—and the National Focus for Chemical Incidents.

The establishment of such a new agency would clearly raise important questions about its relationship to the Commission for Health Improvement, to which we are not yet in a position to give a final answer, but which we will consider carefully. I accept that new clause 4 raises an important issue, which requires serious consideration, alongside the issues raised by the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire in relation to new clause 3.

There are undoubted arguments in favour of giving recognition to the importance of public health services, as proposed in new clause 4. However, complex issues are involved in clarifying the range of public health services that might appropriately be brought within CHI's remit, the relationships with both the bodies responsible for those services and those responsible for their inspection or regulation now and in future, and the legislative consequences arising.

I therefore propose that the new clause should not be accepted tonight, but I am happy to give an assurance to its proposers and to other right hon. and hon. Members that we are giving serious consideration to ways in which the issues that it raises might best be taken forward. I intend to keep right hon. and hon. Members fully informed of progress on the matter.

The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire will not be surprised that I take issue with his general description of the Government's record in relation to public health. That traduces the policies that the Government are taking forward and fundamentally misrepresents them. The

Government have a good and strong record in relation to public health issues, which we intend to pursue into the future.

The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire raised a version of new clause 10 in Committee—

Mr. Heald: Does the Minister agree that there is a TB epidemic, vaccinations are down, and the sexual health of the nation is worse than it has been for a good deal of time? There are numerous public health issues—the re-use of surgical equipment is another, and all the diseases in hospitals. The Government's record does not look good. How would he defend it?

Mr. Hutton: The hon. Gentleman gives a highly selective account. He did not mention, for example, the enormous success of the introduction of the meningitis vaccine into the NHS. He did not refer to the flu vaccination policy that we have successfully introduced, and which has made a significant impact on dealing with winter pressures across the NHS. He did not mention the introduction of new public health strategies and policies for young people, including the policy to ensure that children at school have access to fresh fruit.

The hon. Gentleman can pick and choose and describe that record as a failure, but that is not an impressive argument. It overlooks the positive achievements. Of course, there is always more to do in the public health arena, but to say that the Government are doing nothing and that the public health of the nation has deteriorated is a travesty of the facts.

In Committee, we had a revealing discussion with the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon about new clause 10, which would give the Commission for Health Improvement the additional function of reviewing guidance on NHS priorities issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, directors of health and social care regions and strategic health authorities. It would ensure that the commission reviews, investigates and reports on that guidance in carrying out its other functions. There is genuine disagreement between us about the proper and effective role of the commission and of Ministers and the House in holding the specified people to account. This is an important point to thrash out. He might say that I am presenting a travesty of his argument, but I must put it to the House that the new clause is about transferring responsibility for scrutinising the work of Ministers to the Commission for Health Improvement. That is the wrong thing to do.

Dr. Evan Harris: That is a travesty.

Mr. Hutton: None the less, it is what the hon. Gentleman is trying to do and it is a mistake. It is perfectly legitimate and reasonable for Ministers, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to set priorities for the national health service. The hon. Gentleman's election manifesto was full of priorities for the national health service. It dealt with the extra staff that he wanted to recruit and the extra procedures and so on that the Liberal Democrats wanted to introduce in the national health service. It is complete nonsense to suggest that it is inappropriate for Ministers to set priorities for the public services, including national health services, and to be accountable to the House. They should be accountable not to a ministerial or public body set up by the House, but to the House itself. That is the right constitutional balance.

Dr. Evan Harris: I intervene merely to make the same point as I made in Standing Committee. No one is suggesting that these priorities should not be set by Ministers. One can argue about their volume and the frequency with which they are sent out, but the question is whether they will be open to scrutiny in terms of their impact on the quality of patient care. Use of funds is a separate issue.

Mr. Hutton: Again, the hon. Gentleman misunderstands the current arrangements for ensuring the scrutiny that he and others, including me, want. It is not correct to say that the only way of ensuring the scrutiny that he and others want is to give the Commission for Health Improvement the proposed new function. A range of tools and mechanisms is available to aid the process of scrutinising Government policy. We should bear in mind the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission and the role of this place and the Select Committee on Health, which is so ably led by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). A range of effective measures is already in place to ensure that the decisions taken by Ministers are subject to effective scrutiny. It is important that they are subject to such scrutiny. My argument with him is about his choice of the Commission for Health Improvement as the body that should provide additional scrutiny in respect of such decision making. I do not believe that that is the right way forward.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Bill strengthens the powers of the Commission for Health Improvement to do a better job throughout the national health service and to report to the House on what it has found out about the state of the health service. If the Liberal Democrats are looking for more effective ways of scrutinising Ministers and more ammunition in that regard, he should be aware that we are providing him with exactly that sort of ammunition. It is up to them to use it, but it is incorrect to suggest either that the current arrangements are defective and therefore justify new clause 10 or that Ministers are fighting shy of giving the Commission for Health Improvement a range of effective powers to deal with the issues that he and others have raised.

I have tried to set out my arguments clearly. I hope that the House will support the Government amendments and not seek to press the new clause.

Mr. Heald: The Minister's approach to new clauses 3 and 4 was constructive. We do not agree about the Government's record on public health, which we think is lamentable. None the less, he considered the new clauses and explained the complexity of the issues and made some points that I would like to consider further. I am not promising that the issues will not be raised again in the other place, but I shall not press the new clause. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 5

ESTABLISHMENT OF PATIENTS' COUNCILS

'(1) The Secretary of State shall, subject to subsection (2) below, establish a body to be known as a Patients' Council ("Councils") in

England in each area for which an overview and scrutiny committee has been established under section 7 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 (c.15); each council shall be appointed from among members of relevant Primary Care Trust Patients' Forums and NHS Trust Patients' Forums operating in that area and representatives from relevant community interest groups.

(2) Where it appears to the Secretary of State that there is a need to establish a Council for an area other than that represented by a local authority with overview and scrutiny functions, he shall, after local consultation, establish a Council for such other area as appears to him will meet the needs of the local community.

(3) The functions of a Council are to represent the interests in the health service of the public in its district and in particular to—

(a) facilitate the co-ordination of the activities of member Patients' Forums including by the provision of staff and services to Patients' Forums,

(b) provide or make arrangements for the provision of services under section 19A of the NHS Act 1977 (independent advocacy services) at the direction of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health,

(c) represent to persons and bodies which exercise functions in its area (including in particular the overview and scrutiny committees and the joint overview and scrutiny committees mentioned in sections 7, 8 and 10 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001) the views of members of the public in its area about matters affecting their health,

(d) advise the bodies mentioned in subsection (4) on involvement of the public in its area in consultations or processes leading (or potentially leading) to decisions by those bodies or the formulation of policies by them, which would or might affect (whether directly or not) the health of those members of the public, monitor the effectiveness of this involvement and co-operate with the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health in carrying out this function.

(4) The bodies referred to in subsection (3)(d) are—

(a) health service bodies,

(b) other public bodies, and

(c) others providing services to the public or a section of the public.

(5) The Secretary of State shall, following consultation with the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, Community Health Councils, patients' and carers' organisations and the wider community, by regulation make provision in relation to Councils as to—

(a) the Patients' Forums and other community interest groups from which members of the Council are to be appointed,

(b) any qualification or disqualification from membership,

(c) terms of appointment,

(d) the proceedings of a Council,

(e) the discharge of any functions of a Council by a committee of the Council or by a joint committee appointed with another Council,

(f) the circumstances in which Councils will co-operate with each other in the exercise of their functions and exercise functions jointly with one or more other Councils,

(g) funding of Councils and the provision of staff, premises and other facilities,

(h) the preparation and publication by a Council of annual accounts,

(i) the provision of information (including descriptions of information which are or are not to be provided) to a Council by an NHS Trust, a Primary Care Trust, a Strategic Health Authority, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, the relevant local authorities or a person providing independent advocacy services (within the meaning given by section 19A of the NHS Act 1977),

(j) the provision of information by a Council to another person,

(k) the preparation and publication of reports by Councils,

(l) the furnishing and publication by NHS trusts, Primary Care Trusts, Strategic Health Authorities and Overview and Scrutiny Committees of comments on reports or recommendations of Councils, and

(m) the referral of matters of a prescribed description to any overview and scrutiny committee, the relevant Strategic Health Authority, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health or the Secretary of State.

(6) The regulations shall include provision applying or corresponding to any provision of Part 5A of the Local Government Act 1970 (c.70) (access to meetings and documents).

(7) In section 21(10) of the Local Government Act 2000 (membership of overview and scrutiny committees) after the words "who are not members of the authority" there shall be inserted ("and shall include a person appointed by the relevant Patients' Council").

(8) In paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Health Authorities Act 1995 as amended by this Act after "(c) a prescribed number of officers of the Health Authority" there shall be inserted—

"(d) persons appointed by the relevant Patients' Councils.".'.—*[Mr. Hinchliffe.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 222, Noes 296.

Division No. 131] **[9.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Cohen, Harry
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kelvin Hopkins and John McDonnell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baird, Vera
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 10

THE COMMISSION FOR HEALTH IMPROVEMENT: AMENDMENT TO SECTION 20 OF THE HEALTH ACT 1999

'(1) Section 20 of the Health Act 1999 is amended as follows:—

(2) After paragraph (1) (e) there is inserted—

> "(f) the function of conducting reviews of and making reports on the guidance on priorities for the NHS set out by the Secretary of State, regional directors of the health service, and Strategic Health Authorities"

(3) After subsection (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) in carrying out the functions set out in subsections 20(1)(a) to (e) the Commission shall, where appropriate, review, investigate and report on the guidance on priorities for the NHS set out by the Secretary of State, regional directors of the health service, and Strategic Health Authorities."

(4) Subsections (3) and (4) are repealed'.—*[Dr. Evan Harris.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 52, Noes 326.

Division No. 132] **[9.29 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John

Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris

Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian

Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun

Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

ENGLISH HEALTH AUTHORITIES: CHANGE OF NAME

Amendment made: No. 23, in page 2, line 25, at end insert—

'(4A) The Secretary of State may make regulations containing requirements as to consultation which must be complied with before he makes an order under this section which relates to a Strategic Health Authority, and if he does make such regulations he shall not make such an order unless such of those requirements (if any) as are applicable have been complied with.

(4B) Consultation requirements contained in regulations under subsection (4A) are in addition to, and not in substitution for, any other consultation requirements which may apply.'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 2

PRIMARY CARE TRUSTS

Amendments made: No. 24, in page 2, line 41, leave out "is amended as follows" and insert—

'(which provides for the establishment of Primary Care Trusts) is amended as provided in subsections (2) and (3)'.

No. 25, in page 3, line 4, at end insert—

'( ) Schedule 5A to the 1977 Act (which makes further provision about Primary Care Trusts) is amended as follows—

(a) in paragraph 2(3)—
  (i) for "the Health Authority in whose area a Primary Care Trust is established to meet the costs" there is substituted "a Strategic Health Authority whose area includes any part of the area of a Primary Care Trust to meet costs", and
  (ii) in paragraph (b), after "meet" there is inserted "(or to contribute towards its meeting)",
(b) in paragraph 2(4), for "the Health Authority in whose area a Primary Care Trust is established" there is substituted "a Strategic Health Authority whose area includes any part of the area of a Primary Care Trust",
(c) in paragraph 16(1), for "the Health Authority within whose area the trust's area falls" there is substituted "each Strategic Health Authority whose area includes any part of the trust's area", and
(d) in paragraph 16(3), for "the Health Authority within whose area the trust's area falls" there is substituted "any Strategic Health Authority whose area includes any part of the trust's area".'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 3

DIRECTIONS: DISTRIBUTION OF FUNCTIONS

Amendments made: No. 26, in page 3, line 17, after "Trust", insert "any part of".

No. 74, in page 3, line 38, leave out from "under" to end of line 39 and insert—

'preceding provisions), in subsection (1A)—

(a) "or" is inserted after paragraph (a),
(b) paragraph (b) is omitted, and
(c) in paragraph (c), for "16D, 17 or 17A" there is substituted "16D or 17".'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 5

LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEES

Amendments made: No. 27, in page 5, line 24, leave out—

'by the Strategic Health Authority whose area includes the area of the Primary Care Trust'.

No. 28, in page 5, line 31, leave out—

'by the Strategic Health Authority whose area includes the area of the Primary Care Trust'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 6

LOCAL HEALTH BOARDS

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 6, line 37, at end insert "but no more than fourteen.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 21, in page 7, leave out lines 29 to 31 and insert—

'(c) by both of the following: NHS trusts and Local Health Boards.'.

No. 20, in clause 9, page 10, line 30, at end insert—

'and

(c) sums required, on application by Local Health Boards, to deal with major health emergencies.'.

No. 10, in page 10, line 39, at end insert—

'(2A) In determining the amount to be allotted to a Health Board, the National Assembly for Wales shall have regard to the health needs of the population served by that Board'.

Government amendments Nos. 75, 84 and 85.

Mr. Griffiths: I want to devote some time in the Chamber to a brief discussion of the number of health boards that will be needed in Wales to ensure that an effective health service works in co-operation with local government. There is no need to press the amendment to a vote, as the Bill is flexible enough to allow the National Assembly for Wales to decide how many health boards are needed. The maximum number possible is 22, as that is the number of local government units in Wales.

I have no problem with the principle that the units of government for the health service in Wales should be organised in the same way as the units of local government there. Where I differ with the National Assembly is that I believe that we should look at the degree of coterminosity between the health service and local government in Wales from the point of view of the health service, rather than of local government.

Jane Hutt, the Minister for Health and Social Services in Wales, feels that it would be best to have 22 local health boards, which would work alongside the trusts in Wales. I believe that it would be better if the local health boards were to mirror the trusts in Wales, although I accept that in a few places it could be argued that the trusts are too large to have only one local health board.

I am looking for flexibility, and I think that 14 local health boards would be enough to maintain the principle of coterminosity, and to deliver an effective health service in Wales. For example, in my Bridgend constituency, the present plans mean that Bridgend and Neath-Port Talbot will have separate local health boards, both of which will be within the boundaries of the Bro Morgannwg national health service trust.

Under my proposal, there would be one local health board within the Bro Morgannwg NHS trust, and it would contain representatives of the two local government units. If that health board wanted to create separate sub-committees for Bridgend and for Neath-Port Talbot, it would be free to do so. I believe that my proposal would lead to the more efficient delivery of health services and to better co-ordination with local government.

I have spoken to all the trusts in Wales that would be affected by the proposals, and two of them feel that they would have to negotiate with 22 local health boards for the delivery of the health services that they provide. I shall not go into the details, but more than two thirds of the trusts believe that their negotiating procedures with local health boards will be more complex than the same procedures with the existing health authorities. Therefore, my plea to the National Assembly is that it should reconsider whether 22 local health boards are needed, and that it should settle for a maximum of 14, or fewer.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Does not my hon. Friend agree that the advantage of exact coterminosity between health boards and local authorities is that preventive and primary care would be given the highest priority as a result of the authority's involvement with housing, the environment, transport and so on? Those issues are vital to health, and it would be bound to be to the advantage of the health of local people if they were the primary concern of a coterminous local authority.

Mr. Griffiths: I beg to disagree with my hon. Friend on this issue. In the Bro Morgannwg trust that covers my local authority area, there are two local authorities. One health board would have representatives of both local authorities. I believe that they would be able to negotiate better on that basis than if there were two separate local health boards. However, that is a matter of opinion. I believe that 14 would provide sufficient flexibility for one or two larger trusts to have more than one local health board.

I hope that these issues will be considered seriously in Cardiff. As the person who had the honour of having responsibility for the health service in Wales immediately after the 1997 election, I created the local health boards—or groups, as they then were—because I wanted coterminosity between local government and the health service in Wales. In terms of their responsibilities, the local health boards will be mini health authorities. We will have much better local health boards if we have to staff 14 rather than 22.

We do not have time to go into all the other arguments that I would like to make—I will put those privately to the Minister for Health and Social Services in Wales. However, I wanted to flag up this issue because it is important in delivering a more effective and efficient health service while still ensuring strong co-operation between the health service and local government in Wales.

9.45 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I shall be very brief because there is hardly any time left. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) that the number of health boards proposed is excessive. I believe that they are likely to be expensive and too bureaucratic. There is room in the Bill to reduce the number of boards so that we can maintain the coterminosity that my hon. Friend mentioned, while retaining a degree of efficiency and flexibility in the delivery of the health service in Wales.

The majority of those working in the health service in Wales who were consulted and replied to the consultation also agreed that the number of bodies suggested in the new structure would be unwieldy. Unfortunately, the House has never been given proper access to an analysis of that consultation procedure, perhaps because the results would prove to be opposed to the proposals.

There is sufficient flexibility in the Bill, as my hon. Friend has said. I ask the Welsh Assembly to retain coterminosity but to reduce the number of boards so that we can have an efficient system that delivers health care to people in Wales without tying them down to the over-bureaucratic and wasteful system that 22 boards would create.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I should like to comment from a Welsh point of view. I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) and for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) in whose name the amendment stands. They were both responsible for the delivery of health services in the Welsh Office, as it then was, and were very helpful to people in my constituency when we were making representations on health issues.

I was disappointed to see these amendments but rather glad to hear how they were interpreted by the hon. Gentlemen. I felt that the amendments went against the spirit of devolution in trying to tie the Assembly to a specific pattern for the health structure in Wales. That would have been unfortunate.

The coterminosity element is especially important in the delivery of social services. One of the main impediments to that delivery in Wales—as it is in England and Wales—has been the delayed departure of patients from hospital to their homes or to nursing homes. The system will work much better if there is full coterminosity between local health boards and local authorities.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentlemen are not going to press the amendment to a vote because the Assembly will certainly undertake further consultation and will take the results on board. The decisions reached by the Assembly will result in the most appropriate structure for Wales.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are not going to reach amendment No. 12 to clause 21. That clause was never discussed in Committee—nor were clauses 8 and 20—owing to lack of time. The timetable motion was hopelessly unrealistic. Would it be possible for you, Mr. Speaker, to consider whether there is some way in which you could use your offices to ensure that on a Bill of this sort we do not end up in the ludicrous position of being unable to debate three of its most important parts?

Mr. Speaker: By making a point of order the hon. Gentleman is taking time out of the debate. When I chair the proceedings, I take one amendment at a time. The fact that we shall not reach an amendment is not a matter for me to consider: I consider only what is before the House.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I am glad to hear the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) plead for coterminosity. That is an extremely important point. However, the House should bear in mind the points made in an earlier debate by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies). He pointed out that under the current proposals there are likely to be as many as 52 bodies concerned with the delivery of health in Wales, as well as the Welsh Assembly Government—the WAG—and its Committees. That presents the obvious dangers both of complexity and of the lottery in health care.

The proposal made by the hon. Member for Bridgend might, indeed, reduce the number of local health boards and that might be very useful in terms of critical mass—they might be more effective. It might also mean that we avoid some of the dangers that have become apparent since the reorganisation of local government brought in 22 small local authorities. Some of them cover small populations and are thus quite weak in respect of some of their powers and functions. However, the dangers of complexity and of a local lottery in health care would remain.

I support my party's policy on this matter: to establish an all-Wales commissioning body. That is a coherent policy which would avoid complexity and the threat of a health lottery. It is also plain common sense in a nation of only 3 million people.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): In the short time left for the debate, I commend Government amendments Nos. 74, 84 and 85. They are technical amendments that will ensure clarity as regards local health boards.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) and for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) were formerly Health Ministers at the Welsh Office. When Jane Hutt, the Minister for Health and Social Services in the National Assembly, reads our proceedings she will note their comments with great interest. I am sure that they and other Members who have spoken in this brief debate will agree that clause 6 refers to the establishment of local health boards by the National Assembly for Wales. It does not refer to a specific number of health boards. In other words, the principle of setting up local health boards is established by the House of Commons and by Parliament, but the Assembly, through the devolution settlement, agrees on the number.

I know that my hon. Friends agree with that principle because it is the principle of devolution. The hon. Members for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) and for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) also know that the secondary legislation that will implement the setting up of those local health boards has quite properly been devolved.

After lots of consultation and debates in Committee, which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales attended on behalf of the Government, and in the plenary season of the National Assembly for Wales, it was agreed that it would be sensible to ensure that the local health boards coincided with the local authorities that deliver other services, such as social services, and deal with other public health matters. That makes eminent sense, and in this very short debate we have seen the partnership between Parliament and the assembly work to deliver the best possible health service for the people of Wales. There has been a long consultation process on this issue, which is important to Assembly Members because, at the end of the day, we represent the same people in Wales, irrespective of whether we are Members of Parliament or Assembly Members.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I agree with the Secretary of State when he says that the Welsh Assembly should take those final decisions, but will he tell the House whether he has been privy to the results of the consultation that has taken place and whether he can make the analysis of those results available to the House? It is very unsatisfactory to debate a Bill on Report when we still do not know the results of the analysis of the consultation on which that Bill was brought about.

Mr. Murphy: I am advised that that information has been placed in the Library and in the assembly's library. If that is not the case, I shall be happy to discuss the details of the results of that consultation with my hon. Friend and the Minister for Health and Social Services in Wales, but the point that I make is still valid. The way in which the restructuring will occur is the direct result of working with Members of Parliament and Assembly Members.

Of course, the House will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend set up the local health boards when he was Minister with responsibility for health in Wales. So the structure was started some years ago by a Labour Government working under the pre-devolution structures, but the assembly has now decided that this is the way to proceed, and we, in turn, have debated such matters in Committee and on the Floor of the House. That bodes well for the people of Wales, and I commend the Government amendments and hope that my hon. Friend will withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I have already said that I wanted to place on the record my view that Wales could manage perfectly well with 14 local health boards. The Bill will empower the Minister for Health and Social Security and the assembly to create between one and 22 boards, but I hope that they will listen to the suggestion that there should be 14 of them. On that basis, I am happy to beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 9

FUNDING OF LOCAL HEALTH BOARDS

Amendment made: No. 75, in page 11, line 15, leave out "Trust" and insert "Board".—*[Ms Blears.]*

Clause 13

COMMISSION FOR HEALTH IMPROVEMENT: INSPECTIONS AND INVESTIGATIONS

Amendments made: No. 29, in page 18, line 40, after "(db)", insert—

', or any functions equivalent to those under section 20(1)(c) prescribed under section 20(1)(e)'.

No. 30, in page 18, line 45, at end insert—

'( ) premises owned or controlled by a Local Health Board,'.

No. 31, in page 19, line 3, leave out—

'persons mentioned in paragraph (a) or (b) have'

and insert—

'an NHS body, a service provider or a Local Health Board has'.

No. 32, in page 19, line 6, after "20(7)", insert "(disregarding section 20(8)(b))".—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 15

ESTABLISHMENT OF PATIENTS' FORUMS

Amendments made: No. 33, in page 20, line 22, at end insert—

'( ) If, in the course of exercising its functions, a Patients' Forum becomes aware of any matter which in its view should be considered by a relevant overview and scrutiny committee, the Forum may refer that matter to the committee.'.

No. 34, in page 20, line 45, at end insert—

' "relevant overview and scrutiny committee", in relation to a Patients' Forum, means any overview and scrutiny committee in relation to which the Primary Care Trust or NHS trust for which the Forum is established is a local NHS body by virtue of regulations made under section 7(4) of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 (including that provision as read with section 8(5) and as applied by section 10(2) of that Act),'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 17

ANNUAL REPORTS

Amendments made: No. 35, in page 21, line 40, leave out "the" and insert "each".

No. 36, in page 21, line 41, after "(i)", insert "any part of".

No. 37, in page 22, line 1, leave out from "(d)" to end of line 5 and insert—

'any relevant overview and scrutiny committee within the meaning given by section 15.'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 18

SUPPLEMENTARY

Amendments made: No. 38, in page 22, line 34, leave out—

'NHS trust or Primary Care Trust for which it is established'

and insert—

'Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health'.

No. 39, in page 22, line 43, at end insert—

'( ) the referral of matters by a Patients' Forum to a relevant overview and scrutiny committee (within the meaning given by section 15).'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 23

THE COUNCIL FOR THE REGULATION OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

Amendments made: No. 76, in page 28, line 32, leave out "Part of this Act" and insert "group of sections".

No. 77, in page 29, line 19, leave out "In subsection (1),".—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 25

REGULATORY BODIES AND THE COUNCIL

Amendment made: No. 40, in page 31, line 14, after "not)", insert—

'or by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 27

REFERENCE OF DISCIPLINARY CASES BY COUNCIL TO COURT

Amendments made: No. 41, in page 32, line 22, leave out paragraph (b).

No. 42, in page 32, line 43, leave out "22(4)" and insert "22".

No. 43, in page 32, line 44, leave out "of unacceptable professional conduct" and insert—

'referred to the Professional Conduct Committee'.

No. 44, in page 32, line 47, leave out "22(4)" and insert "22".

No. 45, in page 33, line 2, at end insert—

'(k) any corresponding measure taken in relation to a member of a profession regulated by the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960 (c.66) or, after the repeal of that Act by virtue of section 60(3) of the 1999 Act, by any such Order in Council under section 60 of the 1999 Act as is mentioned in section 23(3)(i).'.

No. 46, in page 33, line 8, after "visitor,", insert—

'or to any such person as is mentioned in subsection (1)(k)'.

No. 47, in page 33, line 12, leave out "(j)" and insert "(k)".—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 29

DENTISTS

Amendments made: No. 48, in page 36, line 1, after "is", insert—

'(or if he were registered would be)'.

No. 49, in page 36, line 3, after "is", insert—

'(or if he were registered would be)'.

No. 50, in page 36, line 14, before "substitute", insert—

'(in the case of an appeal against a determination under section 27 above or a direction under section 28 above)'.

No. 51, in page 36, line 19, leave out "or the Health Committee" and insert—

', the Health Committee or the Continuing Professional Development Committee'.

[Mr. Win Griffiths]

No. 52, in page 36, line 21, after "above", insert—

'or Schedule 3A to this Act'.

No. 53, in page 36, line 40, at end insert—

'(5) In section 34A of the Dentists Act 1984 (c.24) (professional training and development requirements), in subsection (7)(b), for "to Her Majesty in Council" there is substituted "under section 29 above to the relevant court".

(6) Subsection (5) has effect—

- (a) upon the coming into force of this section, if that happens after the coming into force of article 8 of the Dentists Act 1984 (Amendment) Order 2001 (S.I. 2001/3926) ("the Dentists Order") so far as that article effects the insertion into the Dentists Act 1984 (c.24) of the new section 34A(7)(b),
- (b) otherwise, immediately after the coming into force to that extent of that article.

(7) If this section comes into force before article 10(3) of the Dentists Order—

- (a) paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of article 10(3) of that Order are revoked upon the coming into force of this section, and
- (b) until the coming into force of the remainder of article 10(3) of that Order, section 29 of the Dentists Act 1984 (c.24) (as amended by this section) is to be read with the modifications set out in subsection (8).

(8) The modifications are that section 29 is to be read as if—

- (a) in each of paragraphs (a) and (b) of subsection (1A), the words "(or if he were registered would be)" were omitted,
- (b) in paragraph (c) of subsection (3), the words "(in the case of an appeal against a determination under section 27 above or a direction under section 28 above)" were omitted, and
- (c) in paragraph (d) of subsection (3)—
  - (i) for the words ", the Health Committee or the Continuing Professional Development Committee" there were substituted "or the Health Committee", and
  - (ii) the words "or Schedule 3A to this Act" were omitted.'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Clause 40

SHORT TITLE, INTERPRETATION, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendments made: No. 78, in page 43, line 31, leave out "and".

No. 79, in page 43, line 33, leave out from beginning to end of line 36 and insert—

' "NHS trust" has the same meaning as in the 1977 Act.'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Schedule 1

ENGLISH HEALTH AUTHORITIES: CHANGE OF NAME

Amendments made: No. 80, in page 46, line 5, leave out "sections 11 to 17" and insert "preceding provisions".

No. 81, in page 47, line 42, leave out "Authority or" and insert "Authority,".—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Amendments made: No. 54, in page 48, line 38, leave out sub-paragraph (2).

No. 55, in page 48, line 42, leave out—

'in paragraph 16 (in both places) and'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

Schedule 2

REALLOCATION OF FUNCTIONS OF HEALTH AUTHORITIES TO PRIMARY CARE TRUSTS

Amendment made: No. 82, in page 58, line 9, leave out "before "Health Authority"" and insert—

'after "Strategic Health Authority," (inserted by paragraph 28(d) of Schedule 1 to this Act)'.—*[Mr. Hutton.]*

It being 10 o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Order [20 November 2001].*

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 324, Noes 201.

Division No. 133] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George

Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam

Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Motion made,

That, following the Order of 20th November 2000, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Frank Cook and Mr. Edward O'Hara be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Houghton Regis

10.15 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to present this petition to the House. It has been signed by 658 of my constituents from the town of Houghton Regis in Bedfordshire, which has a population of some 17,000 people but, at present, does not have a bank. That is particularly injurious to my constituents because transport to the neighbouring towns is difficult and slow; a large number of elderly people in Houghton Regis need access to a bank. Bank premises in the town are vacant and available for use. The British Bankers Association is conducting a pilot study to reintroduce banks to areas but, unfortunately, Houghton Regis does not qualify. The petition states:

> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the British Banking Association to include Houghton Regis in its counter-sharing pilot scheme.
>
> And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

School Places (East Sussex)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I cannot help but feel a certain irony in taking part in this debate, as I spoke in last Friday's debate on pensions and annuities. However, Eastbourne is like that; we have a large elderly population but, as I shall describe, we also have a fast-growing population of young people, which is estimated to continue well into this century. As I am sure you do, Mr. Speaker, I have a personal rule of thumb; if I am not getting angry letters about something, it is probably okay and there is not a problem.

Increasingly, in recent years I have been getting letters from disappointed parents who cannot get their children into the school of their choice. In East Sussex, parents are given three choices—the local education authority prefers to call them preferences, but I think that that is a distinction without any difference. On a number of occasions of which I am aware—no doubt there have been others—parents have not got their children into any of their three choices. I am so concerned about resources and the allocation of school places in my constituency that I have recently announced a programme to revisit all its schools in the coming months to see the problems for myself.

There is a problem in the primary schools. According to the briefing that the LEA kindly provided, in the East Sussex school organisation plan—SOP—for 2002 to 2005–06, the number of primary age pupils, which has grown substantially, will decline in the county as a whole. In Eastbourne, however, the total number of primary age pupils is expected to increase by about 100 in the next two years. There is already a problem in primary schools. I believe that Ocklynge junior school in my constituency is the largest junior school not just in the country, but in Europe. Only the other day, I visited Stafford junior school in my constituency, which is being pressured to take a total of 370 pupils, when it was originally designed to take a maximum of 280. I saw for myself the four mobile classrooms—I hesitate to use the word "temporary" as it is often misused in the circumstances—in its grounds.

The problem is therefore widespread at every level of education in my constituency and in other parts of East Sussex. I have reached the conclusion that in the medium term we need another new school in Eastbourne, or at least a major extension of one or more of the existing schools. The SOP shows a continuing marked increase of some 1,200 in the number of secondary-age pupils across the county over the plan period. However, in Eastbourne it is expected that the total number of secondary-age pupils will increase by more than 600, or almost 12 per cent., during the period of the plan.

A working group chaired by the lead member for education, Councillor Rupert Simmons, concluded that taking into account likely new housing that the Government seek to impose on the area, 700 new places will be required. The group concluded that up to 350 new places will certainly be needed by 2005. A number of options have been identified.

That is not to say that there is no good news. We have the £16 million committed by the county council to the new secondary school, the Causeway school, which will provide up to 950 places. The Church of England-aided school, Bishop Bell, is about to commence a £2 million project to provide 150 additional places. I should mention in passing that Bishop Bell is the most oversubscribed school in the entire county, largely owing to the efforts of its excellent head teacher, Mr. Terry Boatwright.

I am pleased to say that in only a few short months, the new Conservative administration in East Sussex has got a grip under Councillor Simmons's leadership and is looking at priorities, which was not achieved during the previous eight years of Liberal Democrat control. In particular, the previous administration seems to have ignored the view of the district auditor in his report in 1998, which stated that the margin for parental preference in Eastbourne was very small.

The figures are extraordinary. With the exception of the new Causeway school, which is still in the process of filling up, every secondary school in my constituency is well over capacity, with percentages ranging from 8 per cent. up to 19 per cent. In the case of the Eastbourne technology college, formerly Hampden Park school, the LEA and the governors are allowing for the possibility of it being up to 26 per cent. over capacity. That shows an enormous pressure on school places and on staff and pupils.

It is true that there are vacant places in Eastbourne, but it is also true that, without exception, they all exist at Eastbourne technology college. That is interesting for two reasons. First, ETC is already 19 per cent. over capacity. Secondly, for reasons that may not be fair, may be historical and are beyond the scope of this debate, Eastbourne technology college is currently not a popular school, in the sense of attracting as many first preferences as some other secondary schools.

That causes an additional problem. Despite the excellent work of the staff, and particularly the relatively new head teacher, Janet Felkin, there are parents whose children are assigned to Eastbourne technology college although it was not one of their three preferences, and who are not happy about that situation. That is the only school, as confirmed by the director of education, Denise Stokoe, that has spare places. She states in her letter to me:

> "As you can see, there are sufficient places in the town overall. There is a particular problem that all the spare places are at one school."

Councillor Simmons remarked in an e-mail to me on the matter that the council has set out the basis of a development plan, brought together all the six secondary heads involved, and is seeking to devise a plan. He says:

> "Mobile Huts can bail us out of a temporary situation but only for so long. Willingdon"—

that is, Willingdon school—

> "are running with 20 now and all in a poor condition."

He goes on to talk about an extremely limited capital budget. All those issues will be addressed at a meeting of the council's cabinet on 31 January.

An interesting option that emerged only today in a press statement from the LEA is that of moving the existing Cavendish school to what is effectively a greenfield site at Cross Levels way to give the school up-to-date facilities and, perhaps even more important, to increase its size to

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

about 1,200 places. As the statement makes clear, councillors have yet to make decisions about resources for the forward capital programme. It states:

> "At this stage, there can be no guarantee of funding for the plan."

This is a question not merely of numbers, however, but of the real human problems caused by the figures. For example, Mr. Keith Martin, one of my constituents, has fought a tenacious battle to try to get his daughter Claire into the school of his and his wife's choice. That has not been possible and they have been offered a place at Eastbourne technology college. Claire is still being tutored at home at great expense and inconvenience to all concerned. There seems to be a state of impasse at the moment as far as her education is concerned.

The other day, a local teacher sent me an e-mail that stated:

> "Morale has never been so low in all my 31 years of teaching. The paperwork and bureaucracy mean that we are working every evening and weekends to complete so many meaningless documents that are not helping the children one jot."

She went on to write:

> "I urge you to revisit . . . schools in your constituency and find out just how underfunded they all are . . . Oldies like myself are counting the years until we retire . . . Now everything has become prescriptive and the joy has gone out of teachers' lives."

That is a crushing indictment of the current system.

We have a worrying picture of the effect of the current situation on class sizes, the pressures on teachers, the possible prejudice to the education of local children in Eastbourne and elsewhere in East Sussex and the undermining of parental choice. I have three questions for the Minister. First, does she accept the scale of the pressures that I have described and agree that they must be addressed? Secondly, does she accept that, in the short term, the problems of the existing facilities, such as temporary classrooms, must be tackled? Thirdly, does she accept that, in the medium term, my constituents need either another new secondary school or significant extensions to one or more existing schools and that the planning for that development, whichever option is adopted, must start now? I want to be able to go back to my constituents, such as Mr. Martin and many others, and give them reassuring answers to those questions after tonight's debate.

10.28 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on securing this debate. I am delighted to hear that he is undertaking a programme of visiting his local schools. I must admit that I am surprised that that is not a regular part of what he chooses to do. Even speaking as one of us busy Ministers, I can say that I make it a point in my schedule to ensure that I regularly visit schools. Indeed, there is never a time when a school has not seen me within about 18 months.

Mr. Waterson: If the Minister had been listening with her usual care, she would have heard me use the word "revisit".

Margaret Hodge: I heard the word "revisit", but I am none the less surprised because regular visits are a feature of my constituency duties. I hope that all Members of Parliament show such interest in the educational infrastructure of their constituencies.

I welcome the debate because it gives us an opportunity to put on record our approach to ensuring a framework that provides choice and opportunity for children and their families. I understand and sympathise with the anxieties that the hon. Gentleman's constituents have expressed in correspondence. It is proper to raise them in the House, and I am delighted that he has done that.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that many solutions to the problems that he has raised are in the hands of the Conservative-controlled local education authority and local people. We have properly made it their job to plan for and provide the necessary places so that parents and children can enjoy the choice that he wishes them to have. After the debate, I hope that he will go back to his colleagues on the local education authority and encourage them to get on with planning to ensure that proper bids are submitted to the Department so that we can respond to the needs that he has highlighted.

Tonight's debate allows me to explain the national context in which local decisions about the allocation of school places are made. It also gives me the opportunity to outline our proposals in the Education Bill, which is currently being considered in Committee, and to explain how they will reinforce our priorities and ensure choice in local communities.

Since we have been in government, we have made clear our overriding commitment to improving educational standards. We aim to ensure that parents and children have a choice and the best way of doing that is through equally good schools. That is vital to making equality of opportunity and parental choice a reality.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), who is present, is dealing with the Bill in Committee. Its focus is the transformation of our secondary schools, which the hon. Member for Eastbourne mentioned. I want to draw his attention to several proposals in the Bill that will support his aspirations for his local community.

We propose to expand the successful specialist schools programme, which will help to extend diversity, and hence choice, in secondary schools. Schools ready for specialist status will be encouraged to seek it, and we will support those who are working towards it.

Successful schools will be encouraged to excel and innovate. We intend to give the best schools greater freedom—for example, to take new approaches to staffing, or to accelerated learning.

We are establishing a schools innovation unit to work with teachers and heads, and to help stimulate and disseminate new ideas, especially in relation to catering better for pupils' different requirements and aspirations.

We hope that governing bodies in the hon. Gentleman's area will be able to work together to create families of local schools, sharing problems and pooling resources in everyone's best interests. Those proposals will help us to raise standards, which will help to enhance opportunity and create choice.

We are responding to the wishes of many parents who try to ensure that successful and popular schools are able to expand more easily. That is especially relevant to the hon. Gentleman's anxieties. The governing bodies of successful schools will be able to appeal to the adjudicator if their proposals for expansion are turned down by the school organisation committee.

In the Bill, we not only focus on how to encourage and support best schools, but recognise the need to tackle low standards in schools. The hon. Gentleman talked about the lack of popularity of Eastbourne technology college. I hope that some of the measures that we are introducing will support improvements in quality and standards in all schools in his constituency.

Schools that face challenging circumstances will receive a programme of support, with the aim of setting a floor and ensuring that a specific number of pupils at every school obtain five GCSEs at grade A to C by 2006. It is to East Sussex local education authority's credit that only one of its schools fell within the category of challenging schools—that is, those in which 25 per cent. or fewer pupils gained five or more GCSEs at A* to C grade. I am pleased to say that that school improved its performance in 2001, with 30 per cent. of its pupils having achieved 5 GCSEs at grade A* to C.

Local education authorities will invite—or, if necessary, be instructed to invite—external partners to help turn around failing schools. None of our plans to improve standards can come to fruition unless we have sufficient well trained, well motivated teachers in place. The one letter that the hon. Gentleman chose to read to the House does not, in my view, reflect the feeling of most teachers, who recognise that we are investing as best we can to ensure that they can focus on the job that they do best, and for which they are trained, which is teaching. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support our proposals to modernise the teaching profession.

Teacher recruitment and retention is a key issue to us. In the lifetime of this Parliament, we will recruit 10,000 more teachers and the crucial 20,000 more support staff who will support them in their administrative work, much of which is necessary if we are properly to monitor the fact that we are raising standards in schools. We have doubled the money given to East Sussex local education authority last year for recruitment and retention of teachers. In 2002-03, it will receive £703,000. How that is spent will be determined locally, and I hope that it will be spent wisely to improve recruitment and retention.

I now want to respond to the specific local concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman. The law gives parents the right to express a preference for the school at which they wish their child to be educated, but it has never guaranteed every parent a place for their child at the school of their choice. I understand the frustration of parents whose application has been unsuccessful. Indeed, in my time, I have shared that frustration. However, if a school has more applications than places, it cannot admit every applicant. In those circumstances, places have to be allocated among applicants according to a local education authority's published oversubscription criteria. Some schools have always been more popular than others.

LEAs have a duty to provide sufficient school places for their area. We believe that decisions about the organisation of school places are best taken locally by the people who know the area. That is why, through the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, we established a new framework for local decision making. LEAs now have a duty to prepare a school organisation plan covering a five-year period, and that has to be a rolling programme. The plan sets out how the LEA proposes to deal with surpluses and deficits of school provision, and what provision it intends to make for pupils with special educational needs.

Independent school organisation committees have also been established for each LEA area. Their role is to consider the plans and to take decisions about statutory proposals affecting the local organisation of school places. School organisation committees are independent statutory bodies answerable to their local communities. If any LEA is able to demonstrate an overall deficit in school places, it can apply for funding in the annual capital round. I urge the hon. Gentleman to return to his local education authority and tell it to get on with putting in such an application.

Our officials are aware of the pressures on school places in East Sussex, but finding a solution to those pressures is an issue that has to be addressed by the local education authority, and through the local school organisation committee. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that it would be completely wrong of the Government to impose a solution centrally. It must be the responsibility of the local education authority to come forward with its preferred solution. I concur with the figures that the hon. Gentleman put before the House. We have figures showing more than 1,000 surplus primary school places in East Sussex, and a shortfall of around 270 secondary school places.

The LEA has shown in its projections that demand for places will continue to increase over the next three or four years, particularly in the secondary sector. In the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Eastbourne, it also forecasts a continuing increase in demand for primary school places in the next two years, but that will decline.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the growing pressure on secondary schools is a concern, but as he also noted, officers and local head teachers have been working together to analyse the information and consider ways to meet the pressure on them. They estimate that they need about 700 extra secondary school places by 2010, although about half must be available by 2005. I hope that the council will shortly consider the four-year capital programme for the Eastbourne area alone.

I am pleased that the LEA has added capacity through the phased expansion schools, such as the Causeway school, which, as the hon. Gentleman said, has increased its numbers to 600 pupils. It will eventually accommodate 900. We support the LEA's requirement to meet the demand for places through basic need funding.

Throughout the county, including Eastbourne, a large number of new homes are planned or under construction. That is a healthy development in any locality. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Government are not responding to the capital pressures arising from providing additional places in his constituency. This Government, more than any other in my memory, have put more money into capital initiatives and ensured better investment, despite the huge backlog that we inherited. There is no reason to suggest that we have in any way inhibited the necessary expansion of places in East Sussex. The onus lies with the LEA to make appropriate proposals that it can justify in relation to the extra demand.

[Margaret Hodge]

To give an example, we have already committed £10.5 million for an additional 292 primary, 1,273 secondary and 49 post-16 places between the 1999–2000 and 2001–02 financial years. We have just committed a further £10.98 million of basic need funding for 2002–03 to 2004–05, to provide an additional 247 primary and 1,012 secondary places. That allocation fully meets the LEA's bid to us for basic need funding for primary and secondary school places, and it shows our commitment to work constructively with the LEA. However, I again urge the hon. Gentleman to ask his colleagues in the LEA to get on with making appropriate proposals to us.

On the secondary sector, I have mentioned the expansion at the Causeway school; Bishop Bell Church of England school is also being expanded for 2002–03. If the council cabinet agrees to the proposals put to it for further capital programmes, more places should be available from 2003. The LEA and its schools must continue to work in partnership to monitor and plan to meet the need for additional provision.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the need to replace temporary classrooms. I fully agree that schools must have accommodation that is fit for purpose, providing an environment in which schools can work effectively and children can learn. That is why we have greatly increased capital investment in schools since we came to office. In the past four years, we have made £5.3 billion available and a further £8.5 billion is being made available over the next three years. By 2003–04, annual capital investment will be £3.5 billion.

That commitment will allow LEAs and schools to make real progress in modernising schools so that they are fit for the 21st century. That includes replacing temporary facilities that are no longer suitable, but I stress again that the onus lies with the LEA to put sensible, workable propositions to us.

The Government have made a real commitment to investment in schools. We have made real progress in driving up standards in all our schools. We have set out an agenda for change, especially at secondary school level, that will deliver an education through the years of compulsory schooling that is fit for the new millennium. The cumulative effect of those numerous initiatives will be to raise standards so that ultimately the choice that parents will have to make should be between good schools, rather than between good schools and schools that need to improve.

While the Government can facilitate and support progress, establish an appropriate framework and provide proper funding, the onus to deliver properly for local people must rest with local LEAs. We would expect them to respond appropriately to pressures on demand, and to plan and provide enough places for children in their areas.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 16 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Devolution

1. **Rosemary McKenna** (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): If he will make a statement on relations between the UK Government and the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. [25591]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): We are working constructively and in partnership with the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland to enable them to work as effectively as possible in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

Rosemary McKenna: Every decent person from both communities in Northern Ireland was outraged by the despicable murder of the young postman Daniel McColgan—a tragedy for him, his family and the entire community. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such acts of violence deliberately undermine the devolved institutions, which are the bedrock of the peace process? Will he tell the House what the Government, the Northern Ireland Assembly and all the other agencies are doing to protect those public sector workers who have been cruelly threatened?

Dr. Reid: Yes. As I said a few days ago, the vicious sectarian murder of Daniel McColgan is nothing less than a war on all the people of Northern Ireland, including those who are the youngest, schoolchildren, the weakest, old people, and the most exposed and vulnerable, public sector workers who work in the community because of their own dedication and commitment. I believe that part of the aim of those involved in such sectarian murders is indeed to undermine the progress that we have made and the stability, including that of the new devolved institutions, that we have in Northern Ireland as a result of that progress.

I believe that we owe it to Daniel McColgan and all the other victims of sectarian hatred to speak out with one voice across Northern Ireland. Indeed, there is a growing tide of revulsion at the activities of the paramilitaries. That is why I welcome all expressions of solidarity with what we are trying to do to create peace in Northern Ireland, including the trade unions' initiative to hold rallies on Friday lunchtime to express their contempt for the sectarian hatred.

As for my staff, I have made it plain and ensured that the 3,500 civil servants who work with me in the Northern Ireland Office and its agencies will be able to attend those rallies if they wish. These are extraordinary circumstances, and I understand that they call for an extraordinary unity of purpose throughout Northern Ireland. I hope that that will be widely supported and accepted by everyone involved.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): May I associate myself entirely with everything that the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Rosemary McKenna) have said about the murder of Daniel McColgan and, indeed, about our concerns about recent events in Northern Ireland? The Secretary of State is right to say that elements in Northern Ireland—dissident republicans and elements in loyalism—want to undermine the devolved institutions and the progress, precarious though it is at times, that we have made, but does the right hon. agree that one of the hopeful signs about the disturbances in north Belfast in the past week is that the residents of the Upper Ardoyne-Glenbryn area were not willing to reinstate the protest at Holy Cross primary school? Does he agree that the fact that no protests took place is a sign of the progress that we have made and the way in which the devolved institutions, working on the socio-economic issues and with the Secretary of State, who remains responsible for security issues, is paying off?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is crucial in this situation that everyone does what he or she can to support the work of the police in Northern Ireland? We have had very serious reservations about what the Government have done to the police in Northern Ireland, and we feel that that has done a lot to undermine their effectiveness in the present situation, but at the same time, we will do all we can to support the police. In that context, is it not highly regrettable that republicans still withhold support from the police and that republicans appear to—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I realise how sensitive and difficult this matter is, but this is Question Time and I call for short questions and, of course, short replies.

Dr. Reid: In that case, Mr. Speaker, yes, I did note the fact that protests were not staged at Holy Cross last week, and I commend all those who took that decision. It would have been the right decision under normal circumstances; it was even more welcome under last week's extraordinarily tense circumstances. Yes, I agree with the right hon. Gentleman on the need to support the police.

Most people will be bemused when they hear some people in the community in Northern Ireland demanding action from the police and demanding that the police stand up against that form of thuggery and violence, but when the police turn up to do just that, they are attacked from the back with petrol bombs and blast bombs, sometimes from members of the very communities that demand that the police take such action. The only way to stand against such violence is by remaining united and by having one voice and one purpose right across the community. That is the way to ensure that the police can be effective in defeating this violence.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): The Bloody Sunday inquiry, once started, must obviously be allowed to complete its marathon. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that the costs of the inquiry, in particular the huge earnings being taken out of it by the legal profession, are in danger of discrediting the exercise in Northern Ireland? To create a gold mine out of such terrible and tragic events must surely be wrong. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the legal profession should consider the matter and consider making a voluntary reduction in its earnings from the inquiry? If it is unable to do that, will it consider making a hefty contribution to the victims funds in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: We are always mindful as a Government of the costs of any enterprise, including inquiries. So concerned was I by some of the proposed increases in fees for lawyers at inquiries that I have caused the matter to be taken to judicial review. I am somewhat constrained in what I can say about it while the review is proceeding.

It is perfectly reasonable to say that the inquiry was a necessary part of investigating the truth to close a chapter on a very sorry episode in Northern Ireland's troubled history and, at the same time, to agree with the sentiments expressed by my right hon. Friend that we should not allow its substance to be detracted from by the enormous costs that appear to be being incurred. That would also detract from the real purpose of the investigation. Holding both views is entirely compatible.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): Hon. Members on both sides will rightly condemn the atrocious murder of Daniel McColgan. One feature has been the widespread condemnation of that atrocious event and the threats against workers, both Catholic and Protestant, and school children, both Catholic and Protestant, in north Belfast. All such threats, violence and intimidation are to be condemned by all sides.

Does the Secretary of State agree that we have seen an upsurge in violence from elements on the loyalist side and from the republican side as well with the discovery of pipe bombs and the increase in the number of so-called punishment beatings and shootings? Will he therefore provide reassurance to my constituents in north Belfast who have yet to see any of the benefits of the peace process? In view of the murders and violence that we have seen, those people have a right to ask that the police and security are not run down and that the Chief Constable will be given whatever resources are necessary to combat the upsurge in violence. Will the right hon. Gentleman also give serious consideration to the introduction of measures such as closed circuit television in interface and flash-point areas, in an effort to provide immediate reassurance?

Dr. Reid: Unusually, I agree with almost everything that the hon. Gentleman said. Yes, the resources will be made available if necessary; yes, we will see what we can do to address the security problems in north Belfast; and, yes, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and others are engaged in trying to address some of the social problems.

Even in the midst of the troubles that we face now and the terrible deaths, the one part of the hon. Gentleman's contribution that I do not agree with is that neither his constituents nor the people of Northern Ireland have benefited at all from the peace process. That is patently not the case, but I am the first to admit that we have an imperfect peace, as we have an imperfect democracy. We have a long way to go on both.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I join the Secretary of State and the House in condemning the terrible murder of Daniel McColgan and the murder of other people in Northern Ireland.

I say this with some shame, but does the Secretary of State agree that, in recent months, there has been an expression of naked sectarian hatred in certain areas of Northern Ireland that has been battened on to by the paramilitaries for their own political and mercenary ends? Does he further agree that the upsurge in revulsion on both sides of the entire community, right across the political spectrum, is perhaps a glimmer of light—a slight glimmer of hope—that we can start to lay our terrible heritage to rest?

Dr. Reid: I agree with my hon. Friend. In order for such evils to continue, it is necessary only that good people do nothing. That is why I welcome the unity of purpose, the declarations of intent and the practical demonstrations of opposition to both this violence and the sectarianism that is so often at its roots. Sectarianism is an evil that, once spread, will contaminate everyone.

I also agree that very often those sectarian causes that are supposedly espoused by some people on both sides of the community are a cover not so much for purposes of self-glorification but for the lining of their own pockets. We have to be very careful not to forget that paramilitary activity blights Northern Ireland not just with political objectives that it aims to achieve through violence, but with its degeneracy into organised crime, which my hon. Friend mentioned. Both of those will be ruthlessly opposed by the Government and, I hope, everyone in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I want to endorse on behalf of the Opposition every word that the Secretary of State and other right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House said about the hideous cold-blooded murder of Daniel McColgan. I also endorse what has been said in support of Catholic postal workers and teachers in north Belfast, and in support of all the people from both communities in Northern Ireland who, by continuing to go about their jobs and leading a normal life, are not giving in to violence and intimidation.

In the second half of last year, the Government launched on their lamentable course of not insisting on and waiting for the implementation of the Belfast agreement. When they went beyond it by making unilateral and unreciprocated further concessions to Irish republicanism, one of the many obnoxious things that they did was to agree at Weston Park to introduce an amnesty for on-the-run terrorists by the end of 2001. What is the current status of that promise?

Dr. Reid: First, may I welcome both the hon. Gentleman's support for the position that the Government are adopting and his presence in, and attempts to identify with, Northern Ireland during the past 48 hours?

Secondly, however, I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's proposition that we can govern and make advances in Northern Ireland merely by keeping to those arrangements that were specifically agreed in the Belfast agreement. There are many other things to take into account, including combating electoral fraud, and visits to the Province by Her Majesty. We could endlessly debate those because they are not in the Belfast agreement, but they are a natural part of good government.

Thirdly, on the hon. Gentleman's question, we have agreed to resolve the issue that arises from those fugitives who have not benefited under the terms of the early release scheme. When we have practical proposals on that, we will bring them to the House.

Mr. Davies: I take some comfort from the fact that 31 December 2001 has come and gone without the Government making that further concession to republican terrorists. I want to say once again from the Dispatch Box that, if we are to have a successful peace process in Northern Ireland, it is extremely important that two things occur. One is that the Government are rigorous in insisting that all parties fulfil their commitments under the Belfast agreement. No one should get any advantage, let alone new concessions, for failing to fulfil their undertakings. The second is that the Government need to maintain a balance as between the different communities in Northern Ireland, so that it does not seem as if just one party to the Belfast agreement is getting all the concessions.

Finally, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the other day we discussed the difference between a concession and something that is done on its own merits. From his response just now, it seems that he still has not grasped the essential distinction. Of course we will agree with measures that are introduced on their own merits, but surely he cannot say that the amnesty for on-the-run terrorists is being introduced not as a concession but on its own merits.

Dr. Reid: I do not think that the terms of the Belfast agreement were merely a series of concessions to one side or the other. The other night, I pointed out that I regard the acceptance by republicans of the principle of consent not as a concession to Unionists but as a natural and right thing to do. The same is true of many other principles of the Belfast agreement. We resolved and made it public at Weston Park that we would tackle and resolve anomalies arising from the early release scheme; when we have plans that we want to lay before the House, we will do so.

Organised Crime

2. **Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): When the organised crime taskforce last met; and what was discussed. [25592]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): The organised crime taskforce, which I chair, last met on 12 December to discuss how to build on the successes already achieved. Since then, on 10 January, a joint Customs and police operation seized a fuel-laundering plant in South Armagh that was capable of stealing £75,000 per week in unpaid taxes.

Paul Farrelly: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work being done by the taskforce. It is well known that organised crime raises money for terrorism. To what extent are the taskforce's successes stopping money going into the coffers of paramilitary groups, and to what extent is the taskforce contributing to the seizure of arms from paramilitary groups, especially those that are not signed up to the peace process?

Jane Kennedy: At the heart of the Government's approach to tackling organised crime are efforts focused on—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the House allow the Minister to be heard? There is a great deal of noise.

Jane Kennedy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At the heart of the Government's approach and the task force's efforts is our recognition of the impact of organised crime on Northern Ireland's society. Organised crime undermines civic values the world over; the problem is compounded in Northern Ireland, where, unfortunately, paramilitaries have the apparatus and the will to commit crime for profit.

Money laundering is only one of many aspects of the development of organised crime of which we are aware, and the taskforce is assisting the organisations that comprises—public agencies that have come together to tackle organised crime—by utilising the best minds and the best trained financial investigators available. We are aware of the need to crack down on groups involved in organised crime; the debate on the previous question leaves no doubt that it is a factor that must be borne in mind. When faced with the sort of violence that we have witnessed in the past week, we must bear in mind the fact that the paramilitary organisations engaged in that violence are equally capable of turning their hand to organised crime. The role of the taskforce is therefore essential.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Minister will share the revulsion felt by the vast majority of Northern Ireland's people against criminals masquerading as paramilitaries who are involved in drug dealing and driving drugs into our society, especially when their activities are directed towards young people and schoolchildren. She will also be aware of my strongly held belief that the only way to tackle drug dealers and put them out of business is to pass a law that allows phone tap evidence to be admissible in court. Will she put that item on the agenda of the taskforce's next meeting and draw evidence from the success in Italy, where, by using such a law, the Government have had great success against the Mafia and organised crime?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman has, rightly, raised that point before. We keep under constant review all the tools that may become available to the Government, with the assistance of the police and security forces our main focus. We have to continue the fight against organised crime and constantly bear in mind the link between organisations engaged in organised crime and paramilitary associations in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The taskforce has said that, along with money laundering and fraud, fuel smuggling is one of the most serious crimes committed in Northern Ireland, given its social impact. Does the Northern Ireland Office hold discussions with the Treasury to let it know that the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic has a devastating effect because differential duty rates are applied? One of the easiest ways to handle the problem would be tax harmonisation between the two parts of the island of Ireland, which would remove the opportunity for smugglers to be involved in this trade.

Jane Kennedy: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. We have considered this issue, and discussions have taken place on all the factors that affect organised crime in Northern Ireland. Fuel tax evasion is a crime in itself, irrespective of the tax regime, and should be vigorously opposed. I support my hon. Friend in saying that it is important that the whole of Northern Ireland society unites behind the police service and other organisations, including the Inland Revenue, to assist them in their efforts to bring to justice those involved in organised criminality, which includes those crimes that are difficult to tackle. The police can have an effect, and successes will continue so long as society unites to assist them in their efforts.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I agree with the Minister about the scale of the threat posed by organised crime. Would it not be better for the Government to redirect the tens or hundreds of millions of pounds from the scandalous gravy train that the Saville inquiry has become to the police, so that they can fight organised crime more effectively?

Jane Kennedy: The police in Northern Ireland, Customs and Excise officers, the Inland Revenue and the other organisations in the taskforce are doing a superb job in tackling organised crime. The Government are not complacent. We are conscious of the scale of the problem, but the police have the resources, expertise and skill, and they are having successes. On the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I refer him to the answer that my right hon. Friend gave a few moments ago.

Decommissioning

3. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): If he will make a statement about progress on decommissioning. [25593]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): The Government are committed to seeing all illegally held weapons put permanently and verifiably beyond use. As the commission has reported, it will pursue its mandate, which is the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms.

Mr. Baron: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. Given that the Government have shamefully further appeased terrorists by allowing them another five years to decommission, and given that violence continues, will he accept that there needs to be far greater transparency in the decommissioning process to boost morale and confidence in the flagging peace process?

Dr. Reid: It is a bit of a tragedy that the Conservatives are reverting to type on this issue. There may be legitimate questions and arguments on all these issues, but to see every compromise necessary to put an end to the longest running dispute in British history as merely appeasement or a concession is to make cheap political points when we need statesmanship and leadership.

We want to see and will continue to press for the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons, including those of the Irish Republican Army. The hon. Gentleman should not diminish the historic significance of the decommissioning that has already taken place.

On the methodology, it would be better to leave that to the integrity of General John de Chastelain, who operates under the statute, the remit and the modus operandi that were agreed by the House of Commons.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Accepting that the Unionist section of the community in Northern Ireland feels that various concessions, with which I agree, towards republican paramilitaries are a bridge too far, may I ask the Secretary of State what assurance he can give that he will take specific measures to build confidence in the Unionist community? He could, for example, provide an assurance that anybody who is on the run and has yet to be tried will not be given an unconditional amnesty, but will have to face a trial, whether or not they are subsequently released on licence.

Dr. Reid: The best assurance that can be given to any member of the Unionist community, which by definition has as its principal objective the union of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, is the democratic consensus, which is now accepted by everyone, and that the future constitutional status of Northern Ireland will be in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland. That is not a concession to Unionism but a democratic right. On the anomalies arising from the release of paramilitary prisoners, which we have pledged to resolve, when we have concrete proposals on that, we will of course bring them to the House.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [25657] **Mr. Brian Jenkins** (Tamworth): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Jenkins: My right hon. Friend knows that in Staffordshire we have some very good public services provided by dedicated public sector staff, but historically Staffordshire is one of the lowest-funded areas in Britain.

We always appear at the bottom of any funding league table for education, health and the police. Will the Prime Minister give us hope that in future the funding formula will be open and transparent, that it will be fairer and that it will close the gap between areas that receive an average amount of funding and those at the bottom of the table? That will allow dedicated public sector staff to provide even better services for people in Tamworth and the rest of Staffordshire.

The Prime Minister: I can at least assure my hon. Friend that the review of the funding formula is intended to ensure that it is fairer. He will know that in Staffordshire, as elsewhere, additional resources have been going to education, health and the police. That means that education results have gone up, police numbers have gone up, waiting lists have gone up— *[Laughter.]* The number of nurses has gone up and waiting lists have gone down. As a result of that investment, services can improve. That contrasts with the position of the Conservative party, which with its proposal to cut public spending to 35 per cent. of GDP would take £60 billion out of our public services and decimate them.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): When did the 10-year plan for transport begin— in December 1999 when the Deputy Prime Minister announced it, or on Monday when the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced it again?

The Prime Minister: The strategic plan in 1999 set out the overall level of money for investment, and the strategic plan announced on Monday showed how that money will be spent. *[Laughter.]* I am sorry if the Conservatives cannot see the difference between the overall amount of money and how it is to be spent. We are in favour of investment, and that stands in contrast to their proposals to cut investment for transport.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That would make more sense if it were not for the fact that in the past two years the Government have announced the same policy five times and the same money at least four times. During that time, the Prime Minister and his team have both backed privatisation and renationalised the network, and he now wants to go cap in hand to private industry to get extra funding. Yet the figures show that throughout that period the delays on the railways had risen by 61 per cent. even before the strikes. That is 1,300 more delayed trains every single day. Will the Prime Minister tell us how much more it will cost him, as a result of that mismanagement, to get private money into the service?

The Prime Minister: First, let me correct the right hon. Gentleman on delays. Until Hatfield in October 2000, punctuality increased and there were more trains running. After Hatfield, when it became clear that the track infrastructure needed a total renewal, it is true that punctuality went down, as a result of decades of underinvestment. The difference between the Government and the Opposition is simply this; we are putting in some £33.5 billion of public investment in the next few years. Incidentally, £6 billion of private sector investment has already been committed and more will come. We are in favour of that investment going in. Is the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister may well be in favour of that investment going in, but the reality is that he will not get it put in. Private investors are now going to demand danger money for having anything to do with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions after what he has done to Railtrack. A quick glance at the City will show that all those investors have now written investment in the Government down below investment in Mexico. They would not invest in the Government before investing in Mexico. As a result, they will now demand £1 billion extra to cover their risk. Does that not make the Transport Secretary the most expensive Cabinet Minister in history and should not the Prime Minister save the travelling public's money and sack him?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says that no money will come in from the private sector. I have just pointed out to him that £6 billion has already been pledged; the train operating companies have said that they will indeed put money in; and the director general of the CBI has welcomed the plan. The question that the right hon. Gentleman has to answer, but did not, is this: does he support public investment in the railways? It is almost a statement of the obvious to say wh[illegible]we look at the railways today that the problem [illegible] decades of underinvestment. The Government have a proposal to increase investment dramatically so that over the next few years investment at about three times the level will be going in. We are in favour of that investment; the right hon. Gentleman is in favour of taking it out. Whether in education, health or transport, we believe in investment; he does not.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): My right hon. Friend will have seen stories and photographs in the press about the treatment of al-Qaeda prisoners by the United States. Does he share the concerns of many people in this country that the west is in danger of losing the high moral ground as a result of the treatment and possible mode of trial of those prisoners?

The Prime Minister: First, I hope that the whole House realises that there is still a situation of very great danger in Afghanistan for American troops, British troops and others; there are still pockets of resistance from the Taliban and, even as we speak, there are reports today of a fresh of cache arms being found, with a conspiracy to kill American troops, and no doubt British troops if they were in the vicinity. We are dealing with highly dangerous people.

Secondly, of course I totally agree that anybody who is captured by American troops, British troops or anyone else should be treated humanely in accordance with the Geneva convention and proper international norms. For that very reason, a British team will see those people claiming to be British citizens detained in Cuba; we will make sure that they are being properly and humanely treated. I simply say to my hon. Friend that we have been in discussions with the Americans, who assure us that those people are being humanely treated. They are getting fed properly and are being allowed to exercise and shower properly; they are being looked after properly with medical treatment; each is being given individually, should they wish, a copy of the Koran and the time to make their religious observances.

Rather than believing exactly what is reported in the media straight away, it is important that we get to the truth of the matter. The international Red Cross will go and see those individuals; British officials will see the people from Britain. There should be no doubt about two things. First, as I said, we are dealing with very dangerous people. Secondly, however, we are a civilised people and will treat prisoners in a proper and humane way.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Further to the question raised by the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), given what we know already, will the Prime Minister make clear, where British citizens are concerned, his views on their being hooded, shackled, sedated and kept in cages?

The Prime Minister: Let us wait and see exactly how the prisoners have been treated. It is important not to say anything that prejudices their defence to the charges that have been made against them, but nobody should be in any doubt that the members of the al-Qaeda network are highly dangerous people. It would be unsurprising if they were subject to strict security measures, but of course they should be properly and humanely treated—in exactly the way that the Taliban would not treat their prisoners.

Mr. Kennedy: The entire House is united in wishing to see those responsible for the appalling atrocities of 11 September brought to justice, but will the Prime Minister recognise and stress to the Americans that if we are to maintain the global opinion which has been so successful in the fight against terrorism, we must demonstrate that our values remain above those of the people who seek to destroy them?

The Prime Minister: Of course, but with respect, the right hon. Gentleman should listen to what I have been saying over the past few minutes. Of course it is correct that we make sure that people are humanely treated. That is precisely why a British team will visit those who claim to be British citizens. The international Red Cross will see those people. We understand that they are being humanely treated, being given proper medical advice, food and allowances for their religion, and being allowed to shower and to exercise properly and so on. I repeat that it is important for us to get to the facts of how that group of people, 50 in number, is being treated, rather than simply reacting instantaneously to reports in the media.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Following my right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), what exactly is the justification for continued bombing of Afghanistan?

The Prime Minister: The justification is the very reason that I gave a few moments ago. There are still pockets of resistance by the Taliban. The discovery today, which is emerging now, of a conspiracy to kill American troops in and around a particular American camp, and the discovery of a large amount of weapons and ordnance, are an indication that the campaign is not over yet.

I can tell my hon. Friend that when I met the representatives of the new interim Government in Afghanistan, put together by the United Nations, they regarded the actions of American, British and allied troops in Afghanistan as a liberation of the people of Afghanistan. They believe that as a result of the defeat of the Taliban and their removal from government, people in Afghanistan have, for the first time in years, the prospect of a decent future. War is always a bloody and difficult business. We should carry it on until we have squeezed out the last remaining remnants of the Taliban. Then our task is also, as we will show at the Tokyo conference soon, to reconstruct Afghanistan and give it a proper future.

Q2. [25658] **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): In a week when eight-hour trolley waits have become a reality at the three-star Blackpool Victoria hospital, I draw the Prime Minister's attention to the remarks made by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lord Hunt, at a recent conference, when he said that the national health service has two years to win back public confidence, or other forms of funding will be considered. Does the Prime Minister agree with his Under-Secretary on the timing issue? Can he tell the House what are the other forms of funding that are under consideration?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to the national health service, of course it is important that it wins back confidence, which is why the report from the modernisation board last week—which, incidentally, and contrary to what the Conservatives said, included representatives of the royal colleges, such as the Royal College of Nursing, and the British Medical Association—was clear that the NHS is making progress, and that most of the indicators are now moving the right way. Of course there will be big pressures over the winter, but there are more beds now, more nurses and more doctors, and the waiting lists are indeed coming down.

Secondly, in respect of alternative systems of funding, the right hon. Gentleman knows what we believe. We believe that, as is the case in Denmark, where I gather the shadow Health spokesman has been, the health service should be funded out of general taxation. The alternative is the proposal from the right hon. Gentleman's party, which would force people to pay and would cut public spending. Hon. Members can point their fingers as much as they like, but the proposal of the Conservative party is to cut public spending and to force people to pay. That is the difference between a party that believes in the national health service free at the point of use, and a Conservative party that would cut spending and charge people.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): The Government have recognised the problems that British seaside resorts face owing to the decline of the domestic tourism industry, and the urgent need for regeneration. Can the Prime Minister therefore tell me what funding will be made available to regional development agencies so that they can implement the coastal strategies that they are currently drawing up to help to regenerate seaside resorts such as Morecambe?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give my hon. Friend off-hand the exact level of funding for Morecambe or indeed coastal resorts generally. She is right to say that the regional development agencies now have a specific remit to encourage economic development. In areas such as hers, that means the coastal resorts. Of course, additional finance is being put into tourism at the moment. I think that my hon. Friend will agree that it is necessary to ensure co-ordination on a regional basis and that it would be very unfortunate if we adopted the Opposition's proposals and abolished the regional development agencies.

Q3. [25659] **Mr. Richard Spring** (West Suffolk): Is the Prime Minister aware that band D council tax payers in Suffolk will shortly be receiving bills of about £1,000—a staggering 60 per cent. increase since he took office? As my constituents reflect on the quality of services provided by the Labour-Liberal Democrat county council, may I ask him how he can reconcile his clear commitment not to raise taxation with this huge stealth tax increase for the people of Suffolk, which over five years has averaged no less than six times the rate of inflation?

The Prime Minister: In actual fact, we have put more money into the local authority settlements than the Government the hon. Gentleman supported ever did. Of course, that money is delivering better education for his constituents—he did not mention that—and better social care and services. It is precisely for that reason that we believe that it is important that this money carries on going into our public services. Of course, the hon. Gentleman believes in taking it out.

Q4. [25660] **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): Following this morning's highly successful launch of the anti-hunting campaign "Countdown to the Ban", will the Prime Minister confirm that the Government's pledge to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue still stands? Will he advise the House as to when we can expect a vote on a ban on hunting with dogs?

The Prime Minister: The commitment in our manifesto does indeed stand. We promised a free vote in the Queen's Speech. There has been no decision yet on the timing of the vote, but the Government will make an announcement at the appropriate time.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): When the Health Secretary told NHS executives that he would

"come down like a ton of bricks on anyone who has anything to do with the private sector",

what did he mean by that?

The Prime Minister: The Health Secretary has announced a whole series of partnerships with the private sector. I should have thought that it is very sensible that where it is important to use the private sector, we do so, but nobody should be in any doubt that of course the purpose of that is to provide a better service within the national health service. That is quite different from what the right hon. Gentleman wants to do, which is force people to pay for their health treatment and privatise the national health service.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Yesterday, the Prime Minister and his Health Secretary apparently hated the private sector. Now it is clear that today they are turning to it in desperation. Who knows what they are going to do tomorrow? Almost anything, it seems. The Prime Minister should pay attention, because the Health Secretary told the House six months ago that there should be "one monopoly provider" of health care. He says now that the NHS should

"no longer be a monopoly provider of care".

Which is the correct statement of Government policy?

The Prime Minister: The statement is set out very clearly in the national health service plan: where we can work with the private sector, we will do so. The reform programme in the health service is delivering more beds and more nurses—some 27,000 more nurses. It is delivering real improvements both in waiting times and in waiting lists, which are down on those under the previous Government. It is also, for example, delivering changes in the way in which cancer patients are seen; more than 90 per cent. of them are now seen within two weeks. Cardiac waiting times are also improving. These are changes that are being delivered by a Government who believe in reform and investment. When I asked the right hon. Gentleman whether he supported the investment in the railways, he gave us no answer. Now let him get to his feet and tell us—it is very simple—so that we can have a proper debate: does he support the additional investment going into the health service or not? If he does, how does that lie with his commitment to reduce spending to 35 per cent. of GDP?

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is no good the Prime Minister asking me what I support when he does not know what his Government support. On health, as on everything else, they do not have a clue. The right hon. Gentleman forced school bullies to be kept in school, but now he wants them kicked out; he dispersed asylum seekers, but now he wants them all to be kept in the same place; he wanted a democratic House of Lords, but now he wants a House of cronies; he said that he wanted to renationalise the railways, but now he is begging for private money. Is this not a case of power without purpose, politics without principle and a Government without direction?

The Prime Minister: I suppose that, for the right hon. Gentleman, that passes for stinging rhetoric. He said that we did not know what we support for the health service. With respect, we do. We support the extra investment, which has reduced waiting lists and given us more nurses, doctors and beds. Those who work in the health service said last week that they were turning the corner and that it was getting better. We know the difference between the two political parties: we support investment and reform because both are important; the right hon. Gentleman does not support the extra investment. He wants to run down the health service so that he can say that everyone gets hopeless care on the NHS and he and his supporters can justify privatising it.

The difference is the same as it always has been. We created the health service—the Conservatives opposed it. We invest in the health service—they cut the investment. We want a health service that is free at the point of use—they would make people pay for it.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): After the examples of Equitable Life, Railtrack and even Johnson Matthey, why should we hand over chunks of the health service to private sector managers? How will the whizzkids from the private sector transform the health service, especially when, as the Prime Minister rightly said, it is getting better under Labour?

The Prime Minister: Two groups of people will oppose our plans. My hon. Friend says that he opposes using the private sector, but I disagree with him. On the borders of my constituency, a new hospital has been built under the private finance initiative. That also applies to other facilities in my constituency. The PFI is improving health care within the NHS. The reform programme in the health service will continue because it is right; it will deliver better health care.

The other source of opposition is on the Conservative Benches. Conservative Members may be in favour of reform, but they are against investment. The new Labour Government have adopted the right position: yes to investment, and yes to reform because both will deliver a better national health service, not an old-fashioned health service, or a privatised system, which Conservative Members want.

Q5. [25661] **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): The Prime Minister is aware of my total support for the Unionist cause in Northern Ireland and for the role of our armed services in the campaign against terrorism worldwide. Will he therefore tell the House the cost of the Saville inquiry, not least because the Parachute Regiment which is currently engaged in operations in Afghanistan is involved? I understand that the cost exceeds £60 million. Can that figure be justified?

The Prime Minister: The cost of the inquiry is £52 million. The reason for the inquiry is that it was important to lay to rest some of the claims that have been made over many years. Public inquiries cost a lot of money; the BSE inquiry cost around £30 million. However, it was important in the context of the peace process in Northern Ireland that we made progress and held such an inquiry.

The hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members have criticised the peace process, and I heard the attacks on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland this afternoon. I hope that they also realise how much money and how many lives have been saved by the Northern Ireland peace process. Conservative Members may currently oppose it, but hundreds if not thousands of people are alive today who otherwise would not have been; there is investment in Northern Ireland that would never have been made and there are jobs that would never have existed without the peace process. Hope and prosperity are at least available to people in Northern Ireland. If we went back to the old days of the Conservative Government, both would be missing. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before we proceed, I must ask the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) to be calm—very calm indeed.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I welcome the review of student finance that was announced recently. If there is to be any delay in making changes, will consideration be given to finding extra finance for students from poorer backgrounds, who are finding things very difficult at the moment?

The Prime Minister: It is important that we get the right balance of contributions from the individual and the state, and that is precisely what we are looking at at the moment. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that, contrary to some of the things that were said a few years ago, the number of people going to university is up, not down. We must focus in particular on those people from poorer social backgrounds who perhaps do not get the chances that they need. I know that my hon. Friend would want me to point out that 50 per cent. of those who go to university do not pay tuition fees, as a result of the Government's changes.

Waste Refrigeration Equipment

Q6. [25662] **Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire): What action he has taken to co-ordinate the work of Government Departments in connection with the *(a)* disposal, *(b)* recycling and *(c)* re-use of refrigerators.

The Prime Minister: A number of Departments, including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Cabinet Office and the Treasury, have been working closely together to devise the most efficient means of recycling old refrigerators, with the overall aim of reducing damage to the environment.

Mr. Sayeed: About time too. In 1998, the Government signed up to a directive about the disposal of fridges without understanding the implications of that directive. It was a further two years before they understood what they had agreed to. They then faffed around for some 18 months and failed to request a delay in implementing the directive. Will the Prime Minister tell me why we are in the ludicrous position of having 3 million fridges to dispose of, without having a single plant in the United Kingdom capable of doing the job? Who is going to pay for this fiasco? If ministerial responsibility is to mean anything—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: It is not correct to say that no preparations have been made. Indeed, we have recently announced some £6 million worth of extra funding—as the hon. Gentleman may know—precisely to help with the issue of recycling that he raises.

Engagements

Q7. [25663] **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): Is the Prime Minister aware that many people—I would say the majority of the British people—believe that his efforts and those of his Government on foreign and defence policy since 11 September are exemplary? May I seek an assurance from him that he and his Government will not lose sight of the fact that the treatment of the Palestinian people by Israel is perceived to lie at the heart of the problems of the Islamic world? Will he do everything in his power to ensure a peaceful and equitable solution to the problems in the middle east, based on United Nations resolutions?

The Prime Minister: We will certainly do what we can to assist the parties to make progress in the middle east. As I have said many times before, that must be based on two very secure principles. The first is a 100 per cent. effort by the Palestinian Authority to crack down on the violence and terrorism that are causing such destruction and misery in Israel, and—in my view—a guarantee from the Arab world about the security of the state of Israel. The second is a proper, viable Palestinian state in which Palestinians and Israelis can live side by side in justice together. We will certainly do all that we can to make progress on this issue.

Q8. [25664] **Mr. Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon): Many hundreds of my constituents working at Huntingdon Life Sciences, its shareholders and funders are being subjected to a massive campaign of intimidation from animal rights terrorists. Like other terrorists, they organise internationally and use extreme violence to further their views. Does the worldwide international fight against terrorism extend to Huntingdon and what does the Prime Minister intend to do to stop the violence against my constituents?

The Prime Minister: First, let me say to the hon. Gentleman that the violence against his constituents and against Huntingdon Life Sciences is totally and utterly beyond the pale. It is totally wrong. Those are criminal acts. For that very reason, we are tightening the law to ensure that we deal with these people in a more satisfactory and quicker way. Through the hon. Gentleman, I want to say to his constituents and to Huntingdon Life Sciences that one of the proud traditions of this country is that of scientific inquiry. People are perfectly entitled to their strong views on animal welfare, but it would be deeply regrettable if we lost any part of scientific endeavour in this country. The hon. Gentleman's constituents and that company will have our full support in making sure that the actions of these people do not succeed.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister has just told the House that the cost of the Saville inquiry is £52 million. As he ought to know—the House has already been furnished with written answers—that is only the cost to the Northern Ireland Office. The cost is already more than £14.5 million to the Ministry of Defence and the estimate of costs to the Northern Ireland Office is £100 million. That does not include costs to other Departments such as that which pays Lord Saville's salary. What opportunity is there for the Prime Minister to return to the House to correct the record?

Mr. Speaker: Why does not the hon. Gentleman try next Wednesday?

Travel Concessions (Young Persons)

3.32 pm

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to permit local authorities to include persons at or under the age of 25 in travel concession schemes.

The city that I represent, Milton Keynes, has a young population and the highest number of under-25s per 1,000 people of any city in Europe. The figures for 2000 show that 75,000 of the 209,000 population are under 25 and that there are 24,000 young people aged between 17 and 24. Whenever I speak to them about what affects their lives, the issue that is always top of their list is transport, and more specifically, the cost of public transport and how that reduces their access to training, employment, leisure and other services.

Young people rely on public transport. A recent survey by Milton Keynes Community Foundation shows that whereas an average of only 43 per cent. of city residents use public transport, the figure increases to 57 per cent. for 16 to 24-year-olds. The national travel survey shows that 17 to 20-year-olds use buses twice as much as the rest of the population. They make 13 per cent. of all journeys by bus compared with only 6 per cent. for all ages. That reflects the absence of alternatives for most young people. Only 41 per cent. of 17 to 20-year-olds hold a driving licence compared with 71 per cent. of adults.

In relying on public transport, young people are very similar to the over-65s and, like pensioners, they tend to have lower incomes than other adults. Unlike pensioners, however, they are not offered travel concessions unless they fall into certain restricted groups.

The Transport Act 1985, which applies to local authorities in England outside London and to Scotland and Wales, allows councils to provide travel concessions for elderly people, the blind and the disabled, and children under 16 or those between 16 and 18 in full-time education. My Bill would amend the Transport Act to permit local authorities to provide concessions for under-25s so that all young people were covered, whether in full-time education or not. Similar changes would be required to the Greater London Authority Act 1999 to give the same powers to London boroughs.

My experiences talking to my young constituents in Milton Keynes have highlighted to me the barrier that is placed before them by the current cost of public transport. Of course there are some young people who are employed in well paid jobs, but I suspect that most of them will own a car and will be among the minority of young people who do not use public transport at all.

The majority of young people are on low incomes. The national minimum wage levels for 18 to 21-year-olds is only £3.50 an hour. Young people under 25 receive lower levels of housing benefit, income support and jobseeker's allowance. Wage levels in general are often lower for young people, reflecting their lack of experience. Students at further education colleges get little or no financial support, although I am pleased that this Government have begun to recognise the needs of this previously neglected group of students. Unemployed young people are in an even worse position. For all these young people, the cost of public transport is a major problem.

I am indebted to the YMCA, which works with young people across the country, for evidence that shows that the problems identified by my young constituents in Milton Keynes are shared by young people throughout the country. In 2001, the YMCA responded to the consultation by the social exclusion unit on "Transport and Social Exclusion". Questionnaires were sent out to all 160 local YMCAs, working in 230 communities. The responses from young people and youth workers showed the ways in which lack of affordable public transport affects the ability of young people to make the most of the opportunities available to them.

In Nottingham, a YMCA resident—a trained joiner and cabinet maker on jobseeker's allowance—is faced with fares of nearly £4 return to travel to job interviews in nearby Ilkeston. The YMCA had to lend him the money, but the youth workers have commented that they do not publicise the YMCA fund because demand would then exceed supply. Chester YMCA echoes the point that

"transport problems are the most common problem, from getting to youth projects through to inhibiting job seeking and studying."

In Romford, the YMCA often has to make up the shortfall in people's travel costs; otherwise they cannot travel to job interviews or training further afield.

A worker at Bishop's Stortford YMCA highlighted the additional problem of the penalty in fare costs of changing from one bus to another:

"If young people have to take several buses to sign on, or to get to an interview, that begins to get expensive."

Mendip YMCA in Wells drew attention to the problems in more rural areas where support services are widely based. Young people from Wells have to travel to Glastonbury or Frome—over an hour's bus journey—or even to Yeovil to obtain a crisis loan. In urban areas, the probation service, the benefit office and the Employment Service may all be on different bus routes.

If young people find employment, particularly if they are on the youth rate of national minimum wage, the added costs of travel can often more than cancel out the financial benefit of working. Romford YMCA often has to fund travelcards for young people on the new deal when they first start work, or they would be unable to afford transport to work. The lower rate of housing benefit for those under 25 means that they often cannot afford to live in the more expensive areas near their work or training, thus adding to transport costs.

A resident of Milton Keynes YMCA signed off benefits to work for the Post Office over Christmas but could not afford to pay transport costs before his wages were due at the end of December. He had to stop work and go back on benefits. Colchester YMCA highlighted the further education students who face costs of up to £15 a week to get to courses.

The examples collected by the YMCA mostly concern relatively disadvantaged groups of young people, but although the majority of young people may not face severe problems in transport to their education or training, most still find the cost of transport limits their access to sporting and leisure facilities. This has two worrying side effects. The first is that young people may be tempted to accept lifts from people they do not know, or to walk home alone late at night because they cannot pay the transport costs. The second is that young people, unable to afford the transport to city centre activities, tend to congregate aimlessly around suburban shopping centres, drifting into vandalism through boredom.

It has long been accepted that local councils should have the powers to offer travel concessions to pensioners, because access to affordable public transport is seen as crucial to allowing pensioners to lead full lives. Indeed the Transport Act 2000 gave elderly people an entitlement to a half-fare concession on local bus travel. As I pointed out earlier, young people are similar to pensioners in being very reliant on public transport, having low access to private cars and being on lower than average incomes. My Bill recognises that young people, too, need access to affordable public transport to lead full lives. By encouraging young people to use public transport we may also be helping the environment in which we all live, by building a habit that carries through into later life—the habit of using public transport more and the private car less.

I would ask hon. Members to think of the experiences of young people in their constituencies, and to listen to the views collected by the YMCA and echoed by young people all over the country. I ask hon. Members to support my Bill and help our young people to gain a greater freedom of movement and ability to lead fuller lives through access to affordable transport.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Dr. Phyllis Starkey, Charlotte Atkins, Richard Burden, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Vernon Coaker, Phil Hope, Helen Jackson, Mr. David Lammy, Margaret Moran, Mr. Martin Salter and Ms Claire Ward.

TRAVEL CONCESSIONS (YOUNG PERSONS)

Dr. Phyllis Starkey accordingly presented a Bill to permit local authorities to include persons at or under the age of 25 in travel concession schemes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 April, and to be printed [Bill 82].

Opposition Day

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Railways

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.42 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I beg to move,

That this House notes the failure of the Government to tackle adequately the growing crisis on British railways; and believes that the salary of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions should be reduced by 1.8 per cent. and that payment of a further 22 per cent. be withheld until 31st March 2003.

I shall begin by agreeing with the Secretary of State that the state of British railways is, as he said, "unacceptable". With some justification, right hon. and hon. Members can point to the failure of past Governments to invest adequately in our railways as a possible cause. No doubt that was even true of past Liberal Governments. Past investment has, at times, been lamentable. With justification, many right hon. and hon. Members will also point to the problems of fragmentation caused by aspects of rail privatisation. Criticism may also be levelled, as it was by the head of the Strategic Rail Authority on Tuesday, at some of the management of our railways system—notwithstanding the excellent work done by many railway staff.

The Liberal Democrats accept that past underinvestment, privatisation and some poor management have all undoubtedly played a part in the current rail crisis. However, we have had a Labour Government for nearly five years and it is reasonable to question what they have done in that time to seek to rectify the problems of our railways. Have the Labour Government improved the situation or has it got worse? Public opinion is clear. The YouGov poll in *The Mail on Sunday* last weekend showed that 70 per cent. of people believe that the situation on our railways has got worse since Labour were elected in 1997.

I acknowledge that not all is bad; for example, there has been an increase in passenger numbers and in private investment in the railways, and the Strategic Rail Authority has been established. However, we also note that between 2000 and 2001 train delays increased by 70 per cent., meaning that, collectively, passengers wasted at least 4,600 years last year waiting for delayed trains. Cancellations increased by 45 per cent. in the same period. There is massive overcrowding—39 per cent. of rail journeys are overcrowded; as I pointed out yesterday, it is somewhat bizarre that the Government have introduced legislation to tackle the overcrowding of chickens but have taken no action to reduce the overcrowding of humans on trains.

The Government have said that they want our stations to be safer. They are right. Train use will not be encouraged if people have to wait in unlit, unstaffed stations at night, if information is inadequate, or if car parks are insecure. However, although the Government announced a secure station initiative in 1998, nothing was done. As a result, only about 120 of the 2,500 railway stations have so far achieved accreditation. At that rate, it will take a staggering 76 years before all stations are deemed safe.

[Mr. Don Foster]

What about affordability? Britain's railways are the most expensive in Europe—almost the most expensive in the world. In this country, passengers can travel, on average, 55 miles for £10. That compares with 128 miles in France and 806 miles in the Czech Republic for the same amount. Under the ridiculously complex fares structure through which passengers must wade, many of our fares are excessive; yet the Government have made no serious attempt to tackle that problem.

We need a safe, reliable and affordable railway system but we do not have one.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to get a grip because the problem affects our reputation abroad? It affects investment in this country and the perceptions of foreign business and our trading partners when they see a railway system that does not deliver. Does my hon. Friend agree that the sooner there is a safe and correct decision on the London underground and the sooner there is investment, commitment and action as regards the rail network, the sooner the City, the business community—the chambers of commerce and the CBI—will feel that they can go back to selling Britain abroad, as they want to do and as I hope the whole House wants them to do?

Mr. Foster: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Despite our criticisms of the current state of the railways, I hope that all hon. Members want our railways to succeed for the very reasons given by my hon. Friend. I certainly agree that not only must we have a quick decision from the Secretary of State on the London underground but it must be the right decision. I very much welcome the suggestion made today by the right hon. Gentleman that he may be more prepared than heretofore to consider alternative proposals—including the one first made by the Liberal Democrats—for a bond issue arrangement for the London underground.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I am sure all hon. Members in the Chamber want the railways to succeed, but would that be helped if passengers took the advice of the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten)? On Meridian television, on Sunday at lunchtime, the hon. Gentleman advised people to break the law by refusing to show their tickets to railway staff. Is it right to incite passengers to break the law and to take out their frustration on the hard-working staff of the railways?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the legal requirement is to have a valid ticket for travel. He will also be aware that many rail passengers are extremely fed up with the current state of our railways and the Government's failure to tackle it. I suspect that on 1 March many of them will find some way—whether through the suggestion of my hon. Friend or in some other way—to make known their concern about the current crisis and to put pressure on the Government. I note with interest and some pleasure that later today the Secretary of State is to meet some representatives of the passengers who are so deeply worried about the situation on the railways.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Foster: I will a little later, but I want to make some progress.

As the Secretary of State said just two days ago in the House, we do not have a railway system that is fit for the 21st century. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's candour then, and the candour that he showed earlier today when he was asked why Lord Birt had been brought in to advise on the railways. The right hon. Gentleman's succinct reply—that it keeps him occupied—betrays a great deal.

Even more forthright than the Secretary of State was the Minister for Europe, who told *The Spectator* magazine that we had the worst railways in Europe. Rail passengers are only too well aware of the problems of delays, cancellations, overcrowding and excessive fares. No wonder they are lobbying the Secretary of State later today.

Sadly, however, some information about the state of our railways is being denied to passengers. The Government seem unwilling to provide some very important facts. Just before Christmas, I submitted some 200 parliamentary questions about the state of the railways. The House may be interested in some of the replies.

I asked, for example, about collisions involving mark 1 rolling stock—the slam-door carriages. The Department answered by suggesting that the information was not available, yet I assure the Secretary of State that it can be found on page 94 of the Health and Safety Executive's annual safety report. The data show that, of the 106 train collisions that occurred in 2000–01, 58 were due to trains colliding with the open door on a slam-door carriage.

I also asked for a regional breakdown of speed restrictions, but the Department again felt unable to oblige. However, discussions with the train operating companies, and the data that they have supplied, mean that we know that the information is available.

I asked also for details of the proportion of track that does not meet minimum required standards. I was told that the information was not available to that level of detail. That was an odd response, as the information can be found in Railtrack's network management statement.

Many of my questions referred to safety improvements. I am sure the Secretary of State would agree that restoring confidence in the safety of our railways is crucial. Safety recommendations must be implemented swiftly and the public must be kept informed of progress on implementation.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does the hon. Gentleman share the concern of many people in south Wales about the reports that emerged over Christmas and the new year regarding the condition of the track bed on the line between London, Swansea and Cardiff, which is subsiding? Does he share my concern, with regard to safety, that the Strategic Rail Authority's plan, published this week, makes no mention of any work being done on the line in the next 10 years? We will have to wait half a century before that line is upgraded.

Mr. Foster: I agree, and the same applies in the south-west of England. Cornwall has been given objective 1 status by the Department, yet it does not enjoy a similar status when it comes to improvements in rail facilities.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): With regard to safety, last week I met Chris Gibb, chief executive of Wales and West Passenger Trains. The meeting had been planned before Christmas, and we discussed the line that runs from Manchester, through Shropshire and Herefordshire, and down to Cardiff. He told me that when he lays on extra trains for rugby international matches at the Millennium stadium in Cardiff, he has to borrow coaches from a museum, as he has so little in the way of resources or infrastructure. Does my hon. Friend think that that is a safe way for passengers to travel to a rugby match?

Mr. Foster: I suspect that my hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear that I do not believe that that is the right way to go forward. I am sure the Secretary of State will have heard what my hon. Friend said, and I hope that he will respond later.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No; I want to make progress because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

The point is that safety recommendations need to be implemented swiftly. Following the dreadful Paddington crash, Lord Cullen made very many safety recommendations, 41 of which were due to be implemented before Christmas, by 19 December. When Lord Cullen published his report on 19 June, he recommended that a review of compliance with his recommendations should be conducted on behalf of the Health and Safety Commission within six months of his report, and that those reports should be published.

On the same day, the Secretary of State said that he wanted a report on implementation by 19 December. Despite asking questions about those 41 Cullen recommendations, we still do not know whether they have been implemented, yet I have received a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), that states:

> "The review of compliance has been completed."

It goes on to say that checks on "areas of uncertainty" are being made and that the report will be published next March. That is simply not good enough; any accurate information on this crucial issue should be published immediately.

Yesterday, I incorrectly stated that the information was on the Secretary of State's desk. He has assured me that it is not, so I unreservedly apologise to him, but that raises a fascinating question: given that he wanted that report by 19 December and that the review of compliance has been completed, why is it not on the Secretary of State's desk? Why does he not demand that it be put on his desk immediately? Why does he not agree to publish the accurate information that it contains straight away?

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): For the simple reason that, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the Health and Safety Executive is an independent body. At the moment, it is clarifying some of the reports that it received from the industry with regard to compliance by 19 December. It will report to the Health and Safety Commission in February, and I will receive a report after that. That is the sequence of events, and I am afraid that it is the price we pay for having an independent HSE that is not dictated to by party politicians.

Mr. Foster: If the HSE is not dictated to by party politicians, it is slightly odd that the Secretary of State said in his press release on 19 June that he wanted that report by 19 December, and I hope that he will take that up with the HSE.

I hope that the Secretary of State will be prepared to intervene one more time. One of Lord Cullen's key recommendations was that signal improvements in the Paddington area should take place by 19 December. Does the Secretary of State know whether those improvements have taken place? Clearly, he has nothing to say. The travelling public will note that he could have obtained that information and asked for an answer to that specific question, yet it appears that he has failed to do so. That is typical of so much of what has happened under this Labour Government. The Minister for Europe also said in that article in *The Spectator*:

> "We started transport investment far too late . . . We should have been more radical earlier."

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that investment is key and that people judge politicians not on what they say, but on what they do. Will he remind the House of how much additional money, above and beyond the Government's public expenditure plans, was included in the Liberal Democrat's alternative budget last year?

Mr. Foster: Yes, I certainly can, and I shall come to that very point—*[Interruption.]* The answer is £250,000—*[Interruption.]* A figure of £250 million was included in the Liberal Democrats' alternative budget, but given that the hon. Gentleman is interested—

Mr. Rammell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No, I will not give way; I am still answering the hon. Gentleman's first question. As the hon. Gentleman is interested in government investment in the railways, I hope that he will do me the courtesy of waiting a couple of minutes before I tell him precisely what the Labour Government have invested in the railways.

Mr. Rammell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that an additional £250 million in the context of an additional £33 billion is technically called "peanuts"?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is not comparing like with like. First, he has multiplied his Government's figure by 10 and compared it with a single year's figure. Secondly, in his comparison, he is referring not only to Government money but to expected and anticipated private sector money. If the chaos on the railways

[Mr. Foster]

continues at its current level, there is fat chance that the Government will get the private sector investment that they expect.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) *rose—*

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Foster: Although I wish to make progress, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

David Taylor: With an interesting statistic earlier, the hon. Gentleman spoke about the travelling public's aggregate waiting time for trains. With the aid of a ballpoint pen and the Order Paper, I have worked out that, since 1 May 1997, the electorate of the United Kingdom have waited an aggregate of 200 million years for a clear exposition of how the Liberal Democrats will finance their transport policies, and of where the taxes will fall.

Mr. Foster: If the hon. Gentleman wants clear exposition, I will be more than happy to provide him with a copy not only of the Liberal Democrat manifesto—which was the only manifesto to contain full costings—but of the very detailed alternative Budget that we set out. It contains all those details. He need wait no longer; they will shortly be coming his way.

Caroline Flint *rose—*

Mr. Foster: I shall not give way, as I wish to make progress.

The real question is whether the Labour Government have made progress in solving the problem on our railways. I suggest that one reason why they have not made progress is that they have schizophrenia about the whole issue of privatisation. The House will be well aware that, when the Labour party was in opposition, it opposed rail privatisation. However, within two years of coming into power, it published the fascinating document "Releasing the Power of Rail", which offered a rather different view of privatisation.

I have referred to the document before, but it certainly deserves a second outing because it contains what a Labour Government said about railway privatisation. It states:

> "Railways are back . . . Trains are cleaner, safer and often a good deal faster . . . There is, as a result of privatisation, new energy and enthusiasm in the industry."

Despite what the Government now say about fragmentation, the document even boasted:

> "There are now 25 operating companies, instead of just one."

It concluded with this wonderful sentence:

> "The arrival of competition has produced a surge of talent and innovation."

With such confidence in the system, it is hardly surprising that so little action was taken to get to grips with the problem.

The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) raised the issue of money. On Monday, I asked the Secretary of State whether it was true that the Government will have spent less on the railways in their first five years than the Conservative Government spent in their last five years. He gave me a perfectly correct figure about total investment—public and private combined—over a 10-year period and, as I said earlier, I accept that there has been increased private sector finance. However, he failed to answer my question.

I will therefore answer the question for the Secretary of State from figures provided by the Library of the House of Commons. In the first five years of the Labour Government, total Government spending on the railways will have been £8.2 billion. In the last five years of the Conservative Government, total Government spending on railways was £13.3 billion. On the crucial issue of investment in the railways, the disparity is even more marked. In their first five years, the Labour Government will have spent £0.7 billion on investment whereas, in their last five years, the Conservatives spent not £0.7 billion but £5.7 billion. Little has been done. Despite the high-level meetings that the Deputy Prime Minister had when he was in charge of the railways, he did little and achieved little.

Then we had a new Secretary of State. Was he going to do anything? Initially, his departmental press release of 18 June, headed "Government Pledges Certainty to allow the Industry to tackle the tough job ahead on our railways", quotes him as saying:

> "So I am not going to embark on big structural changes. What the industry needs now is a period of stability and certainty".

That was before his famous U-turn when he took action on Railtrack. We agree with the direction that the right hon. Gentleman wants to take on that. After all, it was a Liberal Democrat proposal of many months earlier. The point is, however, that the way the right hon. Gentleman handled that process has led to further confusion in our railways and worsened the situation.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Has the hon. Gentleman also noticed that as recently as this week the SRA—the creature of the Secretary of State—praised privatisation for the 34 per cent. increase in passenger numbers and the 40 per cent. increase in freight achieved since privatisation? Even the Secretary of State is muddled over whether it is a good or bad thing.

Mr. Foster: I think that many right hon. and hon. Members are confused about the Labour Government's view of privatisation. On Monday, the Secretary of State said that the third way is fraying at the edges and that the private sector was not necessarily the best way forward. The next day he supported the SRA, advocating the continuation of privatisation through the use of private sector money. We also heard the Secretary of State for Health talk about the privatisation of the national health service. I am as confused as the right hon. Gentleman about the Government's approach to privatisation.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No, I want to make a bit more progress.

We have also seen the SRA's strategic rail plan, to which the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) referred. I welcome it, although I would argue strongly that it has come far too late. Unfortunately, it contains much that is not new. Plans to introduce train protection warning systems have already been announced, as was the decision to buy new rolling stock to replace slam-door carriages.

The plan has little detail on reducing fragmentation, excessive fares or overcrowding. Indeed, in the light of the earlier 10-year plan, the Government seem to be rowing back on some of their aspirations. On excessive fares, the 10-year plan says:

> "Punctuality, reliability, affordability and comfort are what most passengers want from their trains. We will seek real reductions in the cost of rail travel".

The SRA plan simply says:

> "We must focus on performance and reliability, the key issues that passengers say time and time again. The SRA will be carrying out a review of fares policy."

I hope that affordability does not drop off the agenda and that a wider range of fares will be regulated.

Mr. Streeter: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the many defects in the 10-year plan released this week is that it has little to say about journey times and rail services in the far south-west? In particular, will he and his hon. Friends get behind the excellent campaign, now spearheaded by the Plymouth *Evening Herald*, to reduce the average journey times of trains to Plymouth to three hours? Does he agree that in the 21st century it is a disgrace that journey times from London to Plymouth are consistently around the four-hour mark? Will he back a three-hour campaign?

Mr. Foster: I am delighted to give the hon. Gentleman the opportunity to guarantee him coverage in the next edition of his local newspaper. He has heard me say that rail transportation from Paddington to the south-west and to south Wales is totally inadequate. Unfortunately, it seems to be slipping further and further down the Government's list of aspirations with regard to the things they want improved.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No—no more.

Under the Labour Government, we have had far too many false dawns. What are the successes of the national punctuality taskforce that was set up at the insistence of the Deputy Prime Minister in February 1999? What has happened to the train reliability action groups that the Government set up? How many different dates have we been given for getting back to normal? What happened to that fresh start for the railways promised by the Deputy Prime Minister in April last year?

Now the Secretary of State expects us to draw a line in the sand, but before doing so and moving forward to what we all hope will be a better and brighter future for our railways, let us not forget the five wasted years of Labour Government. The right hon. Gentleman wants to be held to account by the next election, but he must also be held to account for his and his Government's inaction to date. The Government are keen on performance-related pay, so with 22 per cent. of trains delayed, we should delay paying that proportion of the right hon. Gentleman's ministerial salary; with 1.8 per cent. of trains cancelled, we should cancel that proportion of his salary. Unless there are significant improvements on our railways before long, the Secretary of State's mother may defend him, but no one else will, and nor should they.

4.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> "believes that the railway infrastructure was badly damaged by decades of underinvestment and a flawed privatisation; recognises that the Government made tough decisions in the first two years of the last Parliament to deliver the economic stability that means it can put record levels of investment into the railways; notes that annual average total investment in rail over the 10 year plan will be £4.3 billion, compared to £1.4 billion for the period 1989/90–1996/97; congratulates the Government on its decisive action over Railtrack, so undoing a failed Conservative privatisation; welcomes the SRA's Strategic Plan that sets out an effective agenda for the railways; calls for the resolution of the present industrial disputes through negotiation not strike action; and believes that the steps taken have laid the groundwork for a railway system that will be fit for the 21st century.".

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on introducing this timely debate on the state of our railways. I agree with him—in part because he was quoting me—that we do not have a railway system fit for the 21st century. That is despite the fact that many dedicated, highly motivated people work in the railway system. They are frustrated that they are not working in an organisation that is delivering for the travelling public. It is important that we acknowledge the good work being done by many people in the industry.

As I said in Monday's statement on the strategic plan, there are two principal reasons why we do not have a railway system fit for the 21st century. First, for decades now there has been chronic underinvestment in the railway system. The grand schemes of the 1950s and 1960s of modernisation being achieved through British Rail led us to the 1970s and 1980s when, to be frank, there was political disinterest in the railways. No real priority was given to the subject by Governments, both Labour and Conservative, during that period. In the 1990s, the railways were used to push forward privatisation, first with the train operating companies and then, later in the 1990s, with the privatisation of Railtrack.

Geraint Davies: I have British Rail's 1980 annual report in which the then chairman, Sir Peter Parker, said:

> "Planned limits on railway investment have remained virtually unchanged for nearly 10 years . . . If a rising profile of investment is not agreed, and desperately soon, much improvement in service quality . . . will be long delayed."

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the current calls for long-term investment should have been considered in 1980, when the Tories had the opportunity to invest?

Mr. Byers: The record will show that I made it clear that both Labour and Conservative Governments did not invest during the 1970s and 1980s. At the time, many of us in the Labour party argued against the public expenditure cuts that were being made—that takes me back a few years. None the less, my hon. Friend makes an important point about the need to invest in public services.

The 10-year plan launched by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out for the first time a framework in which not only railways but transport overall could

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develop and expand in future. We now need to respond to the extra demand within the system. More passengers are being carried and freight has increased significantly in recent years, but the system has not been able to cope with that increased demand. We must now ensure that we can meet the demand that has been created, and that we can achieve the increase that we want to see, which is one of our key targets in the 10-year plan.

Mr. Redwood: We were meant to have a plan at the end of 1999. A plan was launched in the summer of 2000, and another was launched on Monday, which was thin gruel with a few spin doctors' scraps in it. That so-called plan says:

> "We need one plan"

and achieving that

> "is a key target for 2002".

Even the plan is delayed. When will we get the real plan?

Mr. Byers: When the right hon. Gentleman has studied the plan, I hope that he will agree with me that it provides a comprehensive statement of exactly what benefits and improvements the travelling public can expect. Some people are critical because they do not think that the timetable is quick enough, and others ask questions about priorities. People may criticise, but for the first time the stall has been set out and people will be able to judge delivery.

The important point made in the plan is that this is not the end—it is not just the plan and that is it—it is a beginning, and there will be another plan next year, because it will need to be revised and reviewed in the light of experience. That is how it must be. It would be a terrible mistake if we thought that the plan was set in concrete and could not be changed in the future. The strategic plan was clear about what needs to be done.

The first reason for the under-performance in the railways is the chronic underinvestment over many years.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The Secretary of State has outlined past experience in the railways and the problems created by the chronic underinvestment, and I think that everyone agrees with him on that. Will he now put his mind to the chronic underinvestment in Wales in the next 10 years under this plan? Does he accept the figures produced by the Wales Transport Research Centre at the University of Glamorgan under Professor Stuart Cole, which show that the plan has only 17 per cent. of what the railways in Wales need for the next 10 years?

Is not the Secretary of State concerned that he could be storing up problems for the future in Wales by continuing the underinvestment under this plan, and that he could have the same problems as the Government had with the health service, when they addressed the problem of numbers on the waiting lists? They should be addressing the crucial infrastructure issue, rather than the number of passengers travelling in and out of London. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the huge underinvestment in his plan for Wales?

Mr. Byers: No, I do not accept that there is an underinvestment in Wales. The strategic plan shows that, for the first time, the Strategic Rail Authority, working with the United Kingdom Government and the Welsh Assembly, is identifying what needs to be done with regard to rail provision in Wales. We will open up the Vale of Glamorgan line for passenger traffic between Barry and Bridgend, which is a real improvement. Early next year, we will have a new franchise for Wales and the borders, which will significantly drive up and improve standards in Wales, and overcome some of the difficulties that we have heard about from Opposition Members. That is a significant move forward. I welcome the close working relationship that has already developed between the Strategic Rail Authority and the Welsh Assembly. Engaging in a proper and effective dialogue is the best way to address the concerns of the people of Wales.

Mr. Streeter *rose—*

Caroline Flint *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint).

Caroline Flint: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government have a role in driving the pace of change through the franchising process? I am sure that, like me, he welcomes the agreed two-year extension to the Great North Eastern Railway east coast main line franchise, which has resulted in 11 extra services running from Leeds to London. GNER will refurbish every train in the fleet and rebuild every locomotive. Is not that good news for the travelling public and for those of us who are taking action on the franchising process to make the private operators put in the required investment?

Mr. Byers: When hon. Members have the opportunity to see the details of today's two-year franchise extension for GNER, they will realise that it will have real benefits for the travelling public. Most importantly, they will understand why there was a need to introduce a two-year extension at this time.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: I want first to make the point about GNER because it is of concern to many Members. The extension is for two years because the detailed work to upgrade the east coast main line was not carried out by Railtrack. That work can now be done. When we come to re-let the franchise after the two-year extension, we will be able to consider awarding a five, 10 or 15-year extension for the franchise on that line. The nature of the upgrade will mean that the franchise lends itself to such a lengthy extension.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I have a wonderful trio of Members to choose from. I will stick with Wales and the borders for the time being and give way to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik).

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I acknowledge that there is significant investment for parts of Wales, but will the Secretary of State make a commitment to reconsider the plans for the more rural parts of Wales, particularly mid-Wales, which have not received the degree of attention that he implies they should have done?

Mr. Byers: I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to the attention of the Strategic Rail Authority, as I know that it is considering how it can respond to the needs of particular communities.

Pete Wishart: Does not the extension to the GNER franchise mean that the Secretary of State has reneged on the commitment that he made in July to replace the existing rolling stock on the east coast main line? Is not that another indication that the 10-year plan is really a solution for London and the south-east? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a growing perception that it offers very little for Scotland?

Mr. Byers: The agreement announced today offers real benefits to people in Scotland. For example, there will be an extra carriage on each of the high-speed trains. My announcement last summer was basically a negotiating position aimed at finding out what the Strategic Rail Authority could secure from GNER. We never believed that all those objectives would be achieved. People will recognise the benefits that the changes will bring to passengers on the east coast main line and travellers to Scotland.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: Hon. Members are trying to divert me to Scotland. I shall visit the south-west in due course, but I shall go via Hereford.

Mr. Keetch: The Secretary of State knows that he will be very welcome in Hereford whenever he wants to visit. Returning to Wales and the borders, the current owners of the franchise there told me that because they will not know for another 12 or 15 months whether they will be successful in retaining the franchise, they will not make any significant investment at all, which is understandable. Is there not a need for longer franchises to give a period of stability so that companies can invest as they should be doing?

Mr. Byers: When the hon. Gentleman has the opportunity to read the new franchising statement from the Strategic Rail Authority he will see that it is considering a 15-year franchise, broken into three parts so that it is reviewed after five years. To be frank, I am concerned about what the position would be if, after five years of an extended franchise of 15 or 20 years, the company was clearly under-performing on its contract. It is important that we have break clauses in such franchises, and that is the direction in which the Strategic Rail Authority wants to go.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose—*

Mr. Streeter *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I shall make a quick visit to Scotland and then I shall go to the south-west.

Malcolm Bruce: Does the Secretary of State accept that his need to pursue private finance means that there is a danger that the money will go where the people are, as those are the areas in which private investors will be interested? Surely with a not-for-profit Railtrack he has a responsibility to invest in the infrastructure in areas such as the north of Scotland to ensure that businesses and people have choice and access to markets. Those areas should not be entirely dependent on their ability to attract private finance. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that people on the Aberdeen to Inverness line are saying that they will no longer travel by train, not because the trains are not frequent enough but because they are so overcrowded that passengers cannot get on?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. There will be parts of the rail network where the private sector is keen to be involved, but we should never forget that the network is for the whole country and there is public service provision in the railways. Some lines are not economic, but it will be a disaster for the network if we close them down to save money in the short term, because in the long term that will deny passengers to the main lines. We must not make that mistake. We know from the way in which the rail network has been misused over the years that easy decisions can be made, but in the end some lines will not be cost-effective and they will need a public subsidy. The 10-year plan contains scope for the public sector to make provision to secure those routes.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before my right hon. Friend leaves Scotland, there is a special problem which is something of a nightmare—the key Forth rail bridge, the greatest monument to 19th century engineering, with which there are expensive maintenance problems. I am not asking my right hon. Friend for an answer off the top of his head, but could he get his officials to look at where the boundary for responsibility lies between the Scottish Executive in Edinburgh and his Department? There are urgent matters and it may be a question of a stitch in time saving nine.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Yesterday I had a meeting with the Scottish Minister for Transport and we looked at a range of issues to do with rail in Scotland. I am acutely aware of the need to make sure that the bridge is maintained safely and securely. Probably the best thing would be for me to do some detailed work and write to my hon. Friend so that he is fully aware of exactly what is being done.

Mr. Streeter: I am impressed by the Secretary of State's detailed knowledge of rail services in Wales, Scotland and all round the country, which is very much to his credit. However, will he turn his attention to the people living west of Exeter in the far south-west? Does he understand the dismay that there is literally nothing in the 10-year plan to encourage anyone living in Devon, Plymouth or Cornwall that unacceptable journey times will be speeded up during the next 10 years? Will he give hope to regular rail users and business people in the far south-west that during the course of the 10-year plan something will be done to speed up the time that it takes to travel west from Exeter so that we can have a three-hour journey from London to Plymouth and down into Cornwall? The situation is serious.

Mr. Byers: In an effort to join the hon. Gentleman on the front page of his local newspaper, I had the

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opportunity to speak with the editor of the Plymouth *Evening Herald* at a reception at No. 10 Downing street last week. He pointed out the importance of the rail link between Plymouth and Paddington, so I am acutely aware of the problem. Improved frequencies are mentioned in the strategic plan, but I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that journey times are important; I am sure that the SRA will want to consider that.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: I want to make progress, but Cornwall is in the right direction.

Mr. Tyler: To enable the *Evening Herald* to represent the views of the three parties, I point out that the Secretary of State has just touched on one of the major issues that we face in the south-west. He referred to the journey time to Plymouth, but there is a world beyond Plymouth; people do not realise just how far Penzance is beyond Plymouth. It is extremely important to recognise that we have a national railway system, to which he referred in the context of Scotland. If he does not represent the public interests of the more peripheral parts of the United Kingdom, nobody else will. The private investor never will.

Mr. Byers: When I was appointed Secretary of State, there was criticism of the fact that a non-driver had been appointed. However, when we have a debate such as this, it is useful to have a non-driver at the Dispatch Box. I have taken the train on most of those routes and I am aware that there are many miles the other side of Plymouth. There is a great need to make sure that Cornwall and many other counties in the south-west are effectively served by rail. The point is well made. I re-emphasise the fact that we are talking about a railway network. Of course, 70 per cent. of passenger journeys are in London and the south-east and there needs to be a concentration of resources to solve problems there, but not at the expense of other parts of the United Kingdom. The important thing is that the additional money that we have secured means that there will be funds to make improvements in those areas and ensure that we can discharge our responsibilities in London and the south-east where the bulk of passenger journeys takes place.

I was explaining that there were two principal reasons why the railway system was failing; the first was underinvestment and the second related to the failure of Railtrack. The House has debated that on many occasions, so I shall not go into great detail now. I just want to say something about the money that we are committing, as that was raised by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). In the next 10 years, £33.5 billion of public money will go into the railways. I gave evidence to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions and know that there is concern. I was told that it was good to have that money going in, but I was asked whether I could ensure that there was not large-scale underspending in the Department, which would prevent money from being spent on transport and railways.

As the Select Committee heard this morning, at the end of March 2001 there was an underspend on capital of £350 million for that financial year—an underspend which is unacceptably high. As Secretary of State, I have tried to make sure that our capital programme is forecast correctly and spent on schedule. We are taking significant steps to achieve that. It was to make sure that we do not have a large underspend at the end of the present financial year, that on 28 November I wrote to all budget holders of capital spending in the Department and in our agencies. I shall quote from the letter, as it shows how seriously I as Secretary of State take the issue of making sure that we spend the money that has been allocated.

The letter stated:

> "As a Department, we are responsible for a large proportion of the Government's capital investment programme. . . I am therefore concerned to ensure that we should be doing all we can to keep underspending to a minimum, consistent with value for money. I am, of course, aware that there is always a risk of slippage, particularly for large and complex capital programmes, and that there are other constraints relating to capital programmes. However, I attach great importance to ensuring that, with good management and forecasting, slippage should be kept to an absolute minimum. Where investment in one project is slipping, to compensate you should consider advancing spend on other committed projects."

That is necessary to make sure that money that is allocated is spent when it is needed. The measures that we have introduced in the Department will make sure that we overcome a large degree of underspending, while still achieving value for money.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): One of the areas where the underspend was greatest was on the channel tunnel. Can the Secretary of State give me an assurance that the problems that freight trains have had getting through the tunnel because of asylum seekers will be ended, and that the underspend will not occur again?

Mr. Byers: The underspend on the channel tunnel did not arise for that reason, but because there was no slippage. Delivery came in below the amount of money that had been allocated. That was good management. The project is going extremely well. It is on budget and on time.

The entire House agrees that we cannot allow people to enter our country illegally through the channel tunnel. We take a robust position on that. We have a good relationship and we have reached a satisfactory conclusion with the French in respect of Eurostar. We have effectively closed that route. We are putting great pressure on the French to adopt robust physical measures, such as fencing and proper lighting, and to ensure a police presence to deal with the problems of freight. Those issues must be addressed in a way that does not disadvantage the British freight business. We are urging the French to move. The Government are aware of the seriousness of the problem, and we will do all that we can to overcome it.

The hon. Member for Bath mentioned the spend under the previous Labour Government from 1997 onwards. We must acknowledge that in the first two years of that period, public spending was restricted to the programme laid down by the Conservative Government. It was not an easy decision to take. I was Chief Secretary to the Treasury for part of that time, so I bear some of the responsibility. I shall explain to the House why we adopted that approach.

When we came into office in 1997, the national debt stood at £350 billion. That was 44 per cent. of our gross domestic product and was costing £25 billion a year in debt repayments. National debt was not falling, but going up. In 2001–02, because of the measures that we introduced and the tough spending round for those first two years, debt will fall to about 31 per cent. of GDP, costing £18 billion a year to service, so already we have £7 billion a year extra for essential services—money which is not being spent on servicing the debt because the national debt has been reduced.

That was not an easy decision to take in those first two years, but the tough regime that we introduced ensured that, at a time when we were getting the economy right and it was growing, we could use the money to start to repay the national debt. As I said, the regime ensured that £7 billion a year extra is now available for investment in transport, health, education and so on. In addition, we reduced not only the national debt, but unemployment. The number of people in work has increased by 1 million since April 1997. As a result, we are now spending £4 billion a year less on unemployment.

So, those tough decisions that were taken early on have provided us with about £11 billion a year extra that we can spend on essential services, and we obviously have the benefits of the growing economy as well. Those are the reasons why we took those decisions. The Liberal Democrats can criticise us for that and complain about the spending levels that resulted, but because of the steps that we have taken we can deliver through the 10-year plan long-term, sustained investment in the railway network. The railways, perhaps more than any other area, need not merely the odd one or two years of investment, but a long period, and 10 years will make a marked difference to the railway infrastructure.

Mr. Don Foster: I note with interest that the Secretary of State has not denied the proposition that I put to him on spending. I said that the Labour Government had spent less in real terms on the railways in their first five years in office than had been spent in the previous five years, during which a Conservative Government were in power. The right hon. Gentleman is now seeking to give the House the impression that there is to be a huge bonanza in additional Government money for the railways. Will he confirm whether my figures are correct, not least in view of the merriment about the additional £250 million a year proposed by the Liberal Democrats? Will he confirm the Library figures? On a 1999–2000 price base, they show that, in the last eight years under the Conservative Government, the total annual Government spend on the railways was £2.4 billion a year, while the figures in the 10-year plan suggest that that will rise to a staggering £2.5 billion—an increase of only £100 million a year.

Mr. Byers: The figures are clearly set out in the plan. The important point is that somebody travelling on the train will not be bothered too much about whether public or private money has been used to buy, for example, the rolling stock. People will want to know only that the train is in decent condition, that it will get to the destination on time and that it is safe. Such a division does not make sense in the real world. Surely, the key issue is the total investment that is being made in the railways, not whether it is public or private. A big increase is occurring in terms of public investment and I am confident that we will secure the private investment that will be necessary to support the railway network.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I have a great choice. I give way first to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles).

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I am most grateful to the Secretary of State. We generally agree that it does not matter where the money comes from, but may I remind him that, although he has just spent about five minutes explaining why he could not put any money in and telling us that happy times were here again, he has not only failed to deliver a single penny piece extra of public money for the railways, but has put private money in jeopardy by making his ill-considered attack on Railtrack?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman returns to his refrain about the private sector not wanting to invest in the railways because of the action that the Government have taken on Railtrack and says that private companies will walk away. Interestingly, when we discussed the matter on 15 October last year, he said:

> "Where is the £34 billion of private investment to come from? The best we can hope for is a 12-month delay in investment in such vital services as the west coast and east coast main lines".—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 957.]

[Interruption.] It is said that that is exactly what happened. Well, today, GNER has announced £100 million of private sector investment in the east coast line. That happened this morning.

Mr. Pickles: It is for rolling stock.

Mr. Byers: It is private sector investment; it is new money. Last year, the hon. Gentleman said that there would be a 12-month delay in private investment in the east coast main line, yet today GNER is making a contribution of £100 million. Let us consider how the money will be used. There is a contribution to the infrastructure upgrade—that is the track, not rolling stock; £10 million for stations and integrated transport; money for rolling stock reliability and static converters, and for improvements to rolling stock and extra coaches. Every pound and every penny of the £100 million constitutes private sector investment. So much for the hon. Gentleman and the 12-month delay in private sector investment.

Mr. Pickles: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: No, I have given way to the hon. Gentleman, and it was a bit embarrassing. *[Interruption.]* Oh, go on then.

Mr. Pickles: Let us be clear. Does the Secretary of State claim that the upgrade to the east coast and west coast main lines can be covered by such relatively small sums of money? Is that why he is trying to get out of phase 2 of the west coast upgrade? Is that why he is trying to negotiate to ensure that we do not get trains that travel at 140 mph? In the world that he occupies, are such little gifts regarded as major triumphs?

Mr. Byers: We have 25 franchises, many of them for much longer than two years. A two-year extension secures £100 million of private investment. Conservative

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Members like to claim that the private sector is walking away from investing in the railways; it is not. When it perceives a good investment and a good return, as GNER and the rolling stock companies did with the east coast main line, it will make the investment.

The transport plan and the 10-year plan is clear and precise about the way in which the money will be spent. There will be a public sector contribution, much of which will be invested in the infrastructure, and private sector investment, partly through special purpose vehicles and partly through the new franchising arrangements.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the last Conservative Chancellor gave only £500 million to upgrade the whole west coast main line? When Railtrack went into administration, the predicted cost for upgrading that line was £10 billion. It would have been cheaper to build a brand new line.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend has followed the vagaries of the west coast main line in considerable detail. He knows that the project was dogged first by a failure of political commitment by the Conservative party. We have tried to drive it through. As time goes by, the new management of Railtrack is beginning to realise the state of the project, and greater difficulties are becoming apparent.

However, it is important to acknowledge the significant contribution and investment that Virgin has made in the new rolling stock that it has earmarked for the line. That is another good example of private sector investment; the new trains are impressive. We must recognise Virgin's commitment. We have to work with Railtrack and the SRA to make sure that we conclude an agreement that will deliver on the west coast main line and make a genuine difference to the travelling public.

Mr. Wiggin: In the Select Committee meeting this morning, the Minister said that he favoured fewer train operating companies, perhaps because so many operate at a loss. Will GNER be one of the train operating companies that is likely to disappear?

Mr. Byers: The fact that GNER has made a commitment of £100 million suggests that it will be around for the long term. I am confident that it will be involved in the refranchise when it happens because it offers a good service on the east coast main line. However, it is right to go through the franchise process to ensure that we make a genuine difference.

Conservative Members have often made points about private finance in the current circumstances. Much has been written in the *Financial Times* and other newspapers about the clear distinction that the City makes between the financial state of a private company such as Railtrack, and the sort of public-private partnerships and special purpose vehicles that we envisage for investment in the railways in the future. That is how it should be, and I think that there is a recognition that that is the case. GNER has clearly demonstrated this morning, with its £100 million investment, the way in which the private sector wants to continue to be involved.

I shall conclude with a few points about the SRA's plan, which was published on Monday. The short-term priorities identified in the plan reflect the need to tackle problem areas such as poor performance, to develop a new industry structure following the Railtrack administration, and to implement much needed improvements throughout the country. For the medium term, the Government have set three core targets for the railway industry through our 10-year plan, all of them to be met by 2010. Those targets are passenger and freight growth of 50 and 80 per cent. respectively, and a reduction in overcrowding in the London area. The 10-year plan also sets out a broader range of objectives for the railways, including improvements in safety, performance and quality.

Mr. Don Foster: The Secretary of State has raised the issue of safety. Does he know whether Lord Cullen's recommendations on improvements in signalling in the Paddington area were implemented by 19 December last year, as they were expected to be?

Mr. Byers: I understand that the train protection warning system was introduced fully in Paddington during the autumn of last year. The hon. Gentleman is right to pick me up on Cullen, because he raised the issue earlier and I must address it. Cullen asked for an investigation into whether compliance had been achieved by 19 December. That work has been concluded, and certain issues are now being clarified. As I said in my earlier intervention, the conclusions will be published in March. However, the delay that has been incurred has exposed a weakness in the Health and Safety Executive.

The delay came about because the HSE was not properly staffed to deal with that level of work in the time in which we all agree it needed to be done. I have made sure that it is to be staffed at a proper level. In 1999, there were just 56 railway inspectors at the HSE. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is a vital area, and the work was not being done quickly enough so far as I was concerned. As a result of the action that we have taken, there will be 196 railway inspectors at the HSE by March this year. The sort of delay that we have seen will not be repeated, and we can treat safety issues as a priority in the way in which the hon. Gentleman wishes us to do, in relation not only to Cullen but to the whole range of safety issues in the industry.

The broader range of objectives for the railways includes safety, performance and quality. Although the strategic plan focuses on the short and medium term, the longer term is not neglected. I have no doubt that the condition of the railways in the United Kingdom is not one of which anyone can be proud. I say that as Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I took the decision that we were not going to tinker around at the edges of the problem, or muddle through; rather, we would take the necessary decisive action.

I have come in for a great deal of political criticism from Opposition Members for the actions that I have taken. I do not regret the decisions that we have taken, because decisive action was necessary if we were to create a railway system fit for the 21st century, and the one that the fourth largest economy in the world deserves. We have not got that yet, but I am confident that, because of the decisive action that we have taken over time—there are no quick fixes so far as railways are concerned—the travelling public will be able to see real improvements by 2005. By 2010, at the end of the 10-year plan, we shall have had the significant sustained investment that the railways need, which will change dramatically the quality of experience so far as the travelling public is concerned.

Priority will be given to railways; that is my commitment as Secretary of State. It is a commitment on which I intend to deliver for the Government and for the travelling public. On that basis, I ask the House to support the amendment.

4.49 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I refer the House to the declaration that I made on Monday 14 January, which can be found in *Hansard* at column 33.

There can be no doubt that the state of the transport system in this country, and of the railways in particular, is a matter of prime concern to everyone. Central to that is the performance of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. He has repeated this afternoon what he said to *The Guardian* on Monday 14 January:

> "There can be no more excuses. It's now our responsibility . . . I am taking responsibility."

So said the Secretary of State. Of course, his responsibility is at the heart of today's debate, because the motion is about whether we think that he is doing a good job on the railways.

It will surprise no Member of the House to hear that I think the Secretary of State is doing a pretty bad job. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!] I realise that that is a revelation to every Labour Back Bencher, but nobody who has read the press or listened to commuters in recent weeks can be in any doubt that that view is widely held outside the House. Indeed, if the silence on the Labour Benches on Monday when the Secretary of State made his statement on the Strategic Rail Authority's 10-year plan is anything to go by, he can take little comfort in thinking that his colleagues have a better opinion of his performance.

It so happens that Newcastle's *The Journal* recently asked the Secretary of State about his performance:

> "Are you confident you're up to the job?"

He replied:

> "I've got no doubt. People will not take my word for it. They'll look to see what we deliver in practice. That's the acid test."

He is delivering in practice a 45 per cent. increase in train delays and what the Minister for Europe tells us is the worst railway in Europe.

We know that the Secretary of State has been undermined by the Prime Minister's appointment of Lord Birt to consider transport policy, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) for his reference to the fact that the Secretary of State thinks the Prime Minister has appointed Lord Birt in order to keep him occupied. The Secretary of State has been undermined elsewhere. He told readers of *The Guardian* that he might perform a U-turn on the London Underground public-private partnership, but the Prime Minister told us that the tube PPP is definitely going ahead.

The Secretary of State cannot now rely on the other blue-eyed boy of new Labour, the Secretary of State for Health. On Monday, the Secretary of State told us in his interview with *The Guardian:*

> "There is not a love affair with the private sector."

However, the Prime Minister reminded us this afternoon that the Government's health service strategy is all about private sector partnerships for the future of the NHS.

In fact, the Secretary of State cannot even rely on himself. I wonder whether he remembers telling *The Guardian:*

> "I do believe in the Third Way".

On Monday, he told us that he is backtracking from the third way because it is becoming "flaky". All that would be an amusing farce were it not for the fact that underlying it is something that matters to the quality of life of everybody in this country—the state of the railways. Passengers' quality of life is not the only issue, because the impact on the economy of having a decent railway system, or one that is not working properly, is also involved. The problem is not just the state of the railways today, but their state in the future.

Geraint Davies: Dragging us back to the point, how much more would the hon. Lady like to be invested above and beyond the 10-year plan? Would she re-privatise the railways?

Mrs. May: I find the hon. Gentleman's second question a little surprising, because the train operating companies are still in the private sector. I apologise, because I cannot remember whether he was one of those who applauded the Secretary of State when he put Railtrack into administration.

Geraint Davies: I was.

Mrs. May: Excellent, but the hon. Gentleman may think twice about the Secretary of State's actions when he discovers that the company to replace Railtrack will be a private sector company. Far from changing the structure of the railways, which the Labour party has always said has so many problems, the Secretary of State is keeping the structure between Railtrack, the replacement Railtrack and the train operating companies exactly as it was under privatisation. The hon. Gentleman needs to find out more about his party's policy before intervening.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend might refer to the Secretary of State's very own SRA plan, which says that

> "almost all new projects will be financed by Public Private Partnerships"

and not through capital support from public funds. He is hiding behind a private sector strategy in the document.

Mrs. May: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. Now that this has been pointed out to Labour Members, I hope that they will start to understand a little more about what the Secretary of State's promises actually mean.

I would like to refer to investment, and I shall do so briefly. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bath for placing on the record the Library figures that compared the investment record of the last five years of the last Conservative Government with that of the first five years of this Government. The facts are clear. Investment in the railways during the last five years of the Conservative Government was higher than in the first five years of this Labour Government. The figures quoted by the Secretary of State on Monday are repeated in the Government

[Mrs. May]

amendment today, namely the investment in rail of £4.3 billion for the 10-year plan, compared to £1.4 billion for the five years up to 1996–97.

I have discovered how the Department came across these figures. I understand that it took the £49 billion of total public and private investment from 2000 to 2010, divided it by 10 and adjusted it for cash-expected prices. The Department then looked at the SRA national rail trend statistics on the SRA website—there are two different sources for the statistics—referring to Government support only, and averaged only public sector investment over the last five years of the last Conservative Government. The Secretary of State says that actually what people care about is the total amount of investment and not where it comes from, but they also care about the Government giving the facts correctly and not trying to spin fantasy figures to tell a political story that is not true. I hope that the Secretary of State will in future quote the right figures when he talks about investment.

Mr. Don Foster: Is the hon. Lady aware that if one takes the much-vaunted £180 billion of investment for the 10-year transport plan overall and, instead of adding accumulatively the various amounts, studies it on a constant price basis, it comes to only £157 billion? By the time one takes out all of the money that is regularly spent each year, the hon. Lady will agree that it amounts—to use a phrase coined by a Labour Member—to not much more than a string of beans.

Mrs. May: That point about the Government's fantasy figures was taken up in the leader column of the *Financial Times* yesterday, which concluded:

> "There can be only three conclusions. The promised enhancements will not happen; much greater public subsidy will be required; or the amount of double counting in the government's £180 billion 10-year transport plan is much greater than was previously clear."

We know that the Government double and triple count, and they have done that in terms of the railways and transport investment, but people know the reality because they know what they experience every day when their trains are not running on time or are cancelled.

Investment is a key issue in looking ahead to improving the railways for the future. There is a black hole at the heart of the Secretary of State's plans. He prays in aid the *Financial Times* in terms of looking at private sector investment for the future and says that the private sector will come forward with all of the investment, but yesterday the *Financial Times* posed a very important question to the Government:

> "In its 10-year plan for transport, the government estimated that it could persuade the private sector to invest £34 billion in the railways over the period . . . The question is: where will the revenue come from to finance this new private investment?"

Even if money comes forward, it will do so at an increased cost; the price to the taxpayer or to the passenger, through fares, will be higher. We have had estimates that it could be as much as an extra £1.5 billion over two years. Again, I am grateful to the *Financial Times*, which said:

> "If fares raise £3.4 billion, this achieves a maximum of £1.7 billion extra a year at the end of the plan. Not nearly enough to provide a commercial return on £34 billion of new private investment."

If the Secretary of State gets his money, it will be at a higher price to the taxpayer or the fare payer.

When the Minister for Transport sums up, perhaps he will tell the House what the Government estimate will be the extra cost of obtaining that £34 billion from the private sector, as a direct result of the Government's actions with regard to Railtrack, which have so damaged private sector confidence. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for Transport is laughing at that question so perhaps he would like to answer another one. How much of the private sector investment that is forecast in the 10-year plan from the SRA will he guarantee will have been put in to the railways by the time of the next general election?

The Government have created a problem for themselves through the way in which they handled Railtrack and put it into administration. That problem is accepted by the SRA which says in its plan that one of the milestones that needs to be passed on the way to delivering the strategic plan is the resolution of the Railtrack administration and the implementation of any financial and structural reforms that are needed as a result. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for Transport yawns when I mention the 10-year plan, but I thought it was the plan to end all plans and would give us all the answers on the railways. He is the same Minister for Transport who informed us that while the Secretary of State was on holiday in India he had not been in touch with the Department: it was not necessary, the Minister for Transport told us, because he was in charge so everything would be all right. He now seems to be bored by the issue.

Perhaps the Minister would explain to us when he thinks Railtrack will come out of administration and the costs will be closed down. The administrators have told me—it has been confirmed in written answers—that the cost up to March will be £2.9 billion. That is what they have asked the Government for. If Railtrack stays in administration for as long as is now predicted by commentators—until the middle of next year—an extra £7.5 billion will be needed to pay the costs of administration. The problem with that is the impact that it is having on the railways that the travelling public use. Delays have increased and people are suffering cancellations, but the 10-year plan gives no hope that they will see the increased capacity in the system that is needed if overcrowding is to be reduced and the quality of journeys improved.

The issue is not only about individual passengers, but about the impact on the economy. As the British Chambers of Commerce has pointed out to me:

> "A coherent and comprehensive transport strategy is essential to UK business competitiveness . . . the Government has missed a once in a generation opportunity to plan ahead sensibly for the long term sustainable development of the UK rail infrastructure."

The problem is that the Government have not put that new capacity in place.

Other aspects of the plan should worry rail passengers. It suggests a reduction in the number of train operating companies and the merger of some franchises, but the SRA has also stated its aim of giving priority to express services, and that could lead to a worrying situation. I shall give an example from my constituency. Maidenhead and Twyford stations are served by Thames Trains. First Great Western goes from Paddington through to Reading without stopping at Maidenhead or Twyford. The SRA proposes that First Great Western and Thames Trains should merge. When they do and if express services are given priority, how many services that currently stop at Maidenhead and Twyford will be cut as a result of the Government's plan? Will the names of Byers and Bowker go down in the annals of rail history alongside that of Beeching? How many local services and stations will be at risk?

The Secretary of State says that he is responsible for the state of the railways. He promised us a 10-year plan that would give us a railway fit for the 21st century, but the real problem for passengers is that the 10-year plan does not deliver the increase in capacity that is necessary to improve services. The real problem is that the right hon. Gentleman does not know whether he can deliver a 10-year plan because he has no guarantee of future private sector investment or even of the public sector investment that he proposes. He is not delivering capacity, he is not improving services, and he gives passengers no hope.

Recently, in an interview, the Secretary of State said that his decision on Railtrack was high politics. It is time that he stopped playing high politics and started delivering the railways that passengers want and the economy needs.

5.5 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I speak in favour of the amendment and against the motion. In fact, the motion would have been better if it had included the words "When the Secretary of State is successful he will receive a huge bonus." I am convinced that my right hon. Friend would indeed receive that bonus.

I congratulate the Secretary of State on the good work that he is doing. I was delighted when he said that he wanted to stay in the job for many years. When we consider the history of transport in this country, we realise that one of the problems is that Transport Ministers do not stay in post for very long. I notice that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young)—a former Transport Minister—is in his place. Under the Conservatives, there were about a dozen Transport Ministers during 18 years, and under the Labour Government there have been four. That has added to some of the problems.

I hope that the Secretary of State and his team stay in their jobs. There is one reservation, however: we need a Secretary of State who has responsibility only for transport and nothing else. We should remove all other responsibilities. That was a problem under the previous Government. We should focus on transport, as it is important for the people of Britain and has an essential role for our future. It is wrong to add further responsibilities to the role of the Secretary of State. The role of a Secretary of State for Transport would be every bit as important to the daily lives of people in this country as that of the Foreign Secretary or the Secretary of State for International Development. I want the restoration of a Ministry of Transport.

Recently, the Secretary of State has been criticised unfairly—not least for his decision to ask that Railtrack be put into administration. There is no doubt why that criticism was made. Many wealthy and influential people lost a large amount of money. There was no cry from the Labour Back Benches or the general public to the effect that my right hon. Friend's decision was wrong—we think it was the right decision. However, some of the wealthy people who lost money are extremely influential—especially in the Conservative party.

Mrs. May: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that more than 90 per cent. of Railtrack employees, some of whom lost their life savings as a result of the Secretary of State's action, are all wealthy?

Mr. Martlew: I am suggesting that I represent hundreds if not thousands of railway workers, but I have received only two letters from railway workers who actually lost shares. The rest of them accepted that Railtrack was not working, that the Conservatives had made a mess of things and that the only way to put things right was to put the company into administration and then into a not-for-profit trust.

Mr. Hopkins: My information from friends in the rail industry is that they want secure jobs in an industry that will be secure in the future. They have written off their shares in Railtrack—they largely blame that on the Tories.

Mr. Martlew: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. If people want a job with a secure future, those jobs will be on the railways. I come from three generations of railway workers, but when I left school in the 1960s my father told me not to look to the railways for work because there were no jobs in the industry. The situation has changed and the industry now offers a secure future. Indeed, there are now too few skills in the industry—too few people know how to run a railway—and we need more skilled people.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): Is my hon. Friend aware that sickness rates among Railtrack staff plummeted after the Secretary of State's announcement that he was putting the company into administration? Is not the fact that the Government are taking an active hand a measure of the confidence of the staff?

Mr. Martlew: I think that the high sickness rates were a measure of the lack of confidence in the people running the railways. The trouble with Railtrack was that it was run by accountants and not by railwaymen. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) wishes to declare an interest.

Back-Bench Labour Members support the decision to place Railtrack into administration, as does the vast majority of the general public. The decision came as a surprise, and it was a welcome reversal of Government policy. I remember asking my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister two years ago whether he would consider reversing the decision on rail privatisation. He told me that that was not necessary and that the SRA and extra investment would sort out the problems. Only recently has my right hon. Friend agreed that that strategy had failed.

On 23 March last year, I introduced a private Member's Bill. If it had been passed, it would have earned a rather grand title—the Railways Act 2001. The proposal was simply that we should look at how the rail infrastructure was being managed and controlled, and that a report should be prepared containing alternative options. I proposed six options, which included nationalisation, regionalisation and the establishment of a not-for-profit

[Mr. Martlew]

trust. Safety would have been the main priority of such a trust, with any surpluses being ploughed back into the infrastructure.

I am sad to say that the Government opposed my Bill very strongly. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), was the relevant Minister at the time. He spoke against the proposals with some conviction and passion, and anyone who reads column 639 of the *Hansard* record of 23 March 2001 will see the reasons for the Government's position at that time.

I am conscious of the fact that the present Secretary of State was not involved in the debate on my Bill. I was delighted when he took the decision about Railtrack—it sent the message that this country's rail system could never work under a privatised Railtrack. I would not disagree completely if the Government were to argue that they had given Railtrack an opportunity and that it had become obvious that the company was going to fail. I am pleased that we are where we are today, and I am sure that we can go on to better things.

I deal now with the west coast main line. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport would not expect me to make a speech on the railways without talking about that line, which has been in a terrible state for many years and which is still crumbling. I formed the all-party west coast main line group 10 years ago this month. The group is very active, and we had the pleasure of the company of my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister yesterday. A total of 50 people, from both the Commons and Lords, attended the meeting.

When she was Prime Minister, the then Mrs. Thatcher cancelled the advanced passenger train, also known as the tilting train. The Swedes and Italians subsequently pinched the technology for such trains, which are now being imported back to Britain for the west coast main line. That Conservative Government made no investment in the line, even though it is the country's main rail artery. Hon. Members from Scotland and Wales complained earlier about the lack of investment, but they must realise that an upgraded west coast main line is essential for improved services to north Wales and to Scotland.

The west coast main line has been allowed to decay to a terrible extent. I mentioned earlier that the last Conservative Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), suggested that the difficulties could be put right by the application of £500 million of Government money. The latest estimate is that continuation of the plans for the line proposed by the privatised Railtrack would cost £10 billion, and that it would be cheaper to build a brand new line.

I accept that the SRA is right to look at the project again, but it is a misconception to believe that work has not started on upgrading the line. A lot of work has already been done, and the first stage of the project should be complete by 2003. By the summer of this year, the first Virgin tilting train should be running, taking guests and competitors from London to the Commonwealth games in Manchester.

Within a year, 53 new train sets should be running on the west coast main line, giving us a good new service. I understand that the old rolling stock is to be scrapped, as it deserves to be, but decisions remain to be made. The first is whether to accept the proposal that trains on the west coast main line should be allowed to travel at a maximum speed of 140 mph. The first stage of the project will allow tilting trains to travel at 125 mph, but the trains are designed to do 140 mph, so the matter needs to be debated and discussed.

A second matter for discussion is the mix of services on the line. The hon. Member for Maidenhead mentioned her constituency, and it is clear that we must think about local traffic, cross-country traffic and freight traffic as well as express services. The SRA must come up with the mix that is best for the railways.

I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was able to tell the all-party group that by the end of February the SRA will have produced a definite blueprint for the west coast main line.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman will have read the SRA's document fairly carefully. It does not give any commitment as to when PUG2—passenger upgrade 2—will be completed. Was his all-party group able to obtain any commitment on that matter from either the Secretary of State or the Minister for Transport? Or does he think that the new Pendelino trains will run at 125 mph for the rest of their life?

Mr. Martlew: I was in the chair at yesterday's meeting, which meant that I had the advantage of being able to put the first question to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport. That was the question that I asked, and his reply was that the matter would be decided by the SRA before the end of February. I believe that in some areas of the country it will be relatively cheap to allow trains to run at 140 mph, but that it will be very expensive in other areas.

A decision therefore has to be made, but there is no doubt that the original costings that caused Sir Richard Branson and Virgin to buy trains that could travel at 140 mph were sadly flawed. Those costings put the total amount of money involved at around £2 billion or £3 billion, not £10 billion. I believe that the train companies using the west coast main line will come to a sensible agreement on the matter.

Finally, I turn to that part of the SRA report that deals with the need for a National Rail Academy. I am pleased that it has finally been accepted that there is a massive skills shortage on the railways. I asked my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State about that two years ago, and he replied that serious problems existed. The SRA clearly accepts that.

Earlier in 2000, I had discussions with the then Minister for Lifelong Learning, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks). He came to Carlisle and we gave him a good demonstration of how the National Rail Academy could work. We showed how it could be funded, where it should be based and how quickly we could get the project off the ground.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport will not be surprised when I tell him that all the available data pointed to the fact that the academy should be based in my constituency. However, if the SRA is serious about reducing the skills shortage quickly, a quick decision on the National Rail Academy is needed. Carlisle is one of the options for its location. If we do not get the skills, we will not complete the 10-year plan. It is simple as that, and it will not matter how much money is spent or whether it comes from the private or the public sector—if we have not got the skills, the plan will not work.

In conclusion, the Secretary of State has my full confidence. He has taken some hard decisions and a lot of criticism—he seems to be able to take a lot of criticism, and I applaud that as well—but he has to change the Government's policy on the railways and Railtrack, and the decision that he has taken will bear fruit in the future.

5.20 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Whatever disagreement the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) may have had with the last Conservative Government, we did at least have his support on one issue—the fact that there was a separate Department of Transport for the whole period from 1979 to 1997, whereas Labour put transport back into a much larger Department. I clutch at that straw from his speech as a sign of support of the Conservative party's transport policy.

When I saw the Liberal Democrat motion on the Order Paper, my first feeling was one of sympathy for my successor but one at the Department of Transport—it is a difficult portfolio and a subject on which every citizen has a view and the press can be pretty merciless—but when I saw the Government amendment that feeling of sympathy soon passed.

In the weeks since Railtrack's collapse, the Government have sought to defend what they did by saying that privatising the railways was wrong, that it was a privatisation too far, that the structure was too fragmented and unsustainable and that there was therefore something of the inevitability of a Greek tragedy about what has happened in recent months. As one of those who was directly involved, I should like to put the opposite case, not just to explain why we did what we did, but, more important, because we will get the wrong solution if the wrong analysis is made of the current crisis. Simply parroting the words "botched privatisation" or "fatally flawed" gets everyone nowhere.

There was one overpowering argument for privatising the railways: privatisation would unlock the capital needed to modernise the rolling stock, the permanent way, the signalling and the stations and to build new links such as Thameslink 2000. Decades of underinvestment had to be confronted. That investment was, in turn, the key to a balanced and sustainable transport policy, reducing dependence on the car and the lorry by developing attractive alternatives and seeking to contain the never-ending demand for more roads. But there were other reasons as well.

Geraint Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: This speech will not stop at many stations, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

British Rail was inefficient, monolithic and hidebound by tradition. The skeleton of the advanced passenger train at Crewe is a monument to the problems that the public sector had in introducing new technology. British Rail's culture stifled the good management potential that was locked inside.

Privatisation was going to transform an industry that looked inwards to the Department of Transport for support into one that looked outwards to its market for custom. It was going to bring into a rather introspective and protected industry successful operators of other transport modes. It was going to reduce the subsidy for running trains, by removing some of the cosy practices that had grown up unchallenged for decades and freeing up the money for other public services. So the policy was not some mad ideological transfer—John Major was a pragmatist with a deep suspicion of ideology. We both wanted a better railway, and privatisation of transport was part of an approach to improving public services that had worked successfully elsewhere.

That starting point was underlined by my experience of getting money for transport when the railways were in the public sector. I would appear before EDX, or whatever Cabinet Sub-Committee was adjudicating on public expenditure, usually chaired by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). My colleagues would declare their pleasure at seeing me, saying how imaginative my view on the future of the railways was and how well presented was the associated bid for funds, but they would say, "But, George, you have to understand that our priorities are health, education and law and order. Colleagues in other spending departments have put forward equally interesting proposals, more central to our manifesto. We are sure you will understand if your bid is cut back, and your presentational skills will enable you to defend the settlement."

Although much has changed since 1997, that feature has not. In Labour's first term, only one section of the transport industry was starved of the capital that it needed—the only section still in the public sector: London Underground. Passengers faced fare rises higher than those on the railways, and the backlog of investment got worse.

As the Secretary of State said on Monday, passengers do not mind where the money comes from, and when the industry was moved from the public sector to the private sector, which is where I believe it should be, the dead hand of the Treasury was lifted. The constraint on expenditure was no longer how much I could get out of the Chancellor, but how fast the train operators, the train manufacturers and Railtrack could sensibly invest.

People might accept the strategic decision on privatisation, but have doubts about the structure—the so-called fragmentation. That is a highly complex issue on which I wish to make two brief points. The first point is simply that industry today is more disaggregated than it was 40 years ago. People make less themselves and buy more in from others. There is more specialisation, more subcontracting and greater flexibility in the market. Car manufacturing is a good example, with the manufacturers basically assembling bits made by other people. That specialisation and subcontracting is not just a feature of industry; it happens in medicine, education, the sciences and services. So the British Rail monolith was no longer the best model.

There is a second, more specific, point, however: the safest and most successful transport industry in this country is the most fragmented—civil aviation. That industry is subdivided into far more component parts than the railways. The stations—the airports—are in multiple ownership. Some of them are owned by the British Airports Authority, some by local authorities and others

[Sir George Young]

by bus companies. Signalling—air traffic control—is totally separate from the airports and the airlines. There are tens of different train operators—the airlines—and if a new airline puts on a new service from Luton to Glasgow, we do not say that it is an unwelcome fragmentation of the industry; we welcome the new service. The airlines do not own the aircraft; they lease them, and they are maintained and serviced by others. Someone else does the baggage handling and other companies do the catering. Civil aviation is a disaggregated, specialised industry, linked by contracts. Critics might call it fragmented, but it is safe, successful and popular.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: I will briefly stop at Surbiton—an important suburban station.

Mr. Davey: Does the right hon. Gentleman have no regrets about the structure of the railways that he chose? For example, Japan went for a privatised railway that was regionalised but vertically integrated, and its railway has been terribly successful—unlike the model that he chose.

Sir George Young: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. We looked quite hard at that model. It is very inflexible, and it is difficult to get in a succession of train operators if they also own the infrastructure. We set up a basic structure of unified network ownership: Railtrack; train operating companies, which run the services on franchises; and the so-called ROSCOs—the rolling stock companies—which own the rolling stock and lease it to the train operating companies.

Geraint Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: No. I must make progress.

There is also a transparent and independent system of regulation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) said from the Front Bench, that core structure has rightly been virtually untouched by the Government.

However, another factor was at work before 1997, and it was every bit as important as the structure. We all know of some very odd structures that work well because people want to make them work. Before 1997, all the players were determined to work together to build a better and safer railway.

After privatisation, Ministers, Railtrack, the train operating companies, the franchising director, the regulator and all the new people who we attracted in from the other transport industries, such as shipping, aviation and buses, worked together with the excellent managers who joined from British Rail. We all believed that that was a new chapter in the history of the railways, in which we could access the funds we could never get from the Treasury, reverse decades of decline and play a key role in a more balanced transport policy. It may be an old-fashioned word, but there was trust between the key players.

Initially, things went well, and the number of passengers started to rise. Indeed, more people now travel on the trains than at any time since 1945. More train services were put on. Indeed, there are now 25 per cent. more trains. Freight was attracted back off the roads. Safety and punctuality continued to improve, and key fare increases were pegged to protect commuters. The subsidy paid to the franchise operators was less than the subsidy paid to British Rail to run the network, and the planned investment in new rolling stock and stations increased substantially. Railtrack began ambitious plans to build new links between the lines north of London and those to the south of it and, as we have just heard, to modernise the west coast main line. Those who were running the system genuinely believed that there had been a renaissance in our railways and that, after decades of underinvestment, a new future was opening up.

Then we lost the 1997 election. It would be naive to blame everything that has gone wrong on the change of Government in 1997. I am not politicising the problem, and nor would I wish to. One of the difficulties that I faced was the absence of a consensus on how the railways should be run. Had we been re-elected in 1997, I am sure that we would have wanted to make modifications in the light of experience—as we had done with other privatisations—but I am convinced that we would have avoided the debacle of last October.

The key factor that I have just mentioned—the determination to make the new system a success, with everyone working as a team—began to be eroded after June 1997. The new Government had opposed privatisation, but they had neither the funds to renationalise the railways nor the political will to make privatisation work. Ministers started to settle old scores, sniping at some of the new train operators and at Railtrack. The team spirit gave way to the blame culture. The regulator was sacked, and a new and at times aggressive rail regulator began to make it difficult for Railtrack to raise the capital it needed. A new Strategic Rail Authority was set up between the Government and the industry, making things more complicated rather than simpler. The letting of new franchises was suspended, with short-term renewals instead of long-term contracts, and personality conflicts got in the way of the industry's needs.

Crucially, there were management failures at Railtrack and elsewhere. I was interested to read page 15 of the strategic plan, which states:

> "Whilst it is true that some structures can be more unwieldy than others, it remains fundamentally the case that neither contracts nor regulation manage companies: people do. It is the failure of the management process in the railway industry that is at the heart of what needs most to be corrected."

I agree. Management failures, principally at Railtrack, began the process of erosion of public confidence. After Hatfield, Railtrack lost its nerve. Then Gerald Corbett resigned and it lost the confidence of politicians and the City.

Without being party to the negotiations with Railtrack last summer, it is difficult for an outsider to comment on what went wrong. However, something clearly went wrong in the management of the dialogue between Railtrack and the Government. It may be that a key ingredient was missing—the will to find a way through the problem. The Secretary of State may never have wanted a deal, or the Treasury may have made it clear that it would not fund one at any price.

If that is the case, Railtrack should have spotted what was going on and not overplayed its hand. If Railtrack's dividend policy was a problem, it should have put that issue on the table for discussion with the Government. If its policy on executive pay was a problem, that should also have been put on the table for discussion. If the Government had doubts about the competence of management, those doubts should have been talked through.

What actually happened, however, was that the Secretary of State was leaning over the patient discussing a cure at the same time as he had his foot on the oxygen pipe. Not surprisingly, the patient expired. Eventually, we will find out what went wrong, but the breakdown of that dialogue was a disaster. I have no doubt that the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee will want to inquire into the actions of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. They rightly did that for the privatisation process and I have no doubt that they will do it with equal vigour for the de-privatisation process. I hope that they ask whether the Government costed the alternative when they pulled the rug from under Railtrack.

If the Secretary of State thought that he had a new, inexpensive and popular solution, he was wrong. His action has raised more questions than it has answered. The railways now face a period of uncertainty, with a question mark over investment and a field day for the lawyers. There will be more disruption, more delay, more discontinuity, more short-term franchises and an exodus of talent. I have no doubt whatever that the taxpayer and the passenger will pay more than they would have done if a sensible deal with Railtrack had been arrived at and that improvements will take longer.

The private money that was going to be invested by Railtrack in modernising the railways—£34 billion—is no longer available on the same terms, if at all. The Government will have to find more money themselves, and the history of the railways shows that Governments do not put up the money that is necessary. The action that the Government have taken to put Railtrack into receivership will have repercussions way beyond the railways. They will reverberate throughout the growing dialogue between the public and private sectors on joint ventures, and make the City and international investors ultra-cautious about investing in projects in partnership with the Government.

I note in passing that the Government's policy for the railways sits uneasily with their policy for London Underground. With the underground, the Government want to keep the operation of the trains in the public sector but use the private sector to modernise the infrastructure. However, with the railways, the Government are leaving the running of the trains in the private sector while the public sector assumes responsibility for the infrastructure. It is difficult to see a coherent approach in their transport policy.

What happens next? Let us look to the areas of agreement across the Floor. I accept, as do the Government, that there should be unified ownership of the railway network—the bits that do not move—and that the company that owns it, the son of Railtrack, should look to the private sector for the capital that is needed to modernise it. That should be off the Government's balance sheet. I have no difficulty with special-purpose vehicles, which are a new form of financial rolling stock.

We agree that the trains should be run by companies in the private sector on franchises that are competitively bid for. Those companies can be sacked if they underperform. We could never sack British Rail, so we have created something that we never had before—a competitive train operating industry. We agree that the companies should lease their trains from others if they want to. We also agree that there should be transparent and independent regulation of the industry to ensure fair play. So there is a quite a lot of common ground.

What is fragmented is the Government's response, with the Secretary of State and his Department being second-guessed and shadowed by Lord Birt and others in a number of unaccountable bodies at No. 10. It must be up to the Transport Secretary, who is accountable to Cabinet and answerable to this House, to come up with the strategy.

We have to sort out Railtrack quickly because that lies at the heart of the system. Without Railtrack or its successor functioning properly—instead of being run by receivers—there is nothing on which to build. If there is a way through the litigation and the various bids, it must be pursued. New long-term franchises must be let before blight descends, and we must stem the exodus of skills from the industry.

Finally, it is vital to restore the confidence of the private investor, as the Treasury will never fill the funding gap. That can be done if the will is there and if trust can be rebuilt. However, I do not believe that the current Secretary of State—admirable qualities though he may have—is the right person for that task. Having drawn his line in the sand, he is on the wrong side of it. The Prime Minister should ask someone else to begin the process of rebuilding.

5.38 pm

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I shall use my time in the debate to be somewhat parochial and to consider what the strategic plan means for Wales and Welsh railway services.

I have been here since the start of the debate and listened to the arguments of Conservative Members. I am stunned that, in every contribution that they have made, there has been no whisper of an apology for the fact that rail services are in their current state as the result of what has happened, not overnight, but over 20 or 30 years. I shall cite some examples from [illegible] area that show that it is a travesty that the Opposition have not had the courtesy to apologise for the fact that this debate has had to be called today. The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) referred to the Secretary of State taking responsibility. However, from a Back Bencher's and rail user's point of view, that is a refreshing and welcome change. Opposition Members have never taken responsibility.

I welcome the Strategic Rail Authority's plan and what it means for my area. I welcome the investment but, perhaps more than just the money, I welcome the overall co-ordination of rail services. I hope that we can stop the buck being passed, because I know from listening and talking to my constituents that one of passengers' major concerns is that, when they have a problem with the railways, they do not know where to go to obtain redress. That is why they come to me. They are stumped, in short. I write to rail companies and their responses often blame another rail company. Pinning them down has been one of the major problems for my constituents and passengers from west Wales.

[Mrs. Jackie Lawrence]

The railways are important to west Wales. From the days of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who saw the potential of having a railway junction in west Wales, which was also where ships could dock for transatlantic travel, we have had a long and noble tradition in the railways. We were fortunate to keep our rail link through the 1950s and 1960s and the days of Dr. Beeching. The railways are important because two ports still rely on them—Stena at Fishguard and Irish Ferries at Pembroke dock. Many of their passengers are foot passengers who travel by rail to cross to Ireland.

Our area is dependent on tourism. Part of our economic development strategy has been to preserve the beauty of the area and to encourage people to come to us by rail. We have tried to increase cycling and walking holidays, which has meant encouraging people to come by train. There are social considerations, too. Many people in Milford Haven, in my constituency, do not have personal transport. The rail link between Milford Haven and Haverfordwest is a valuable lifeline to our county town.

I mentioned the lack of an apology from the Tories. We can talk about money and the facts and figures until the cows come home, but it is the evidence on the ground that is important. In the 1980s, we lost our sleeper service to London. In the 1990s, before 1997, we lost our daily 125 service to London. That was an important factor for economic development; it prevented individuals from taking a day trip to London for business purposes or other reasons, because they cannot get back to Pembrokeshire and west Wales in the same day.

That problem was compounded by flawed privatisation, which is the most apt description of privatisation. Pre-privatisation, it took two hours 45 minutes to get from Paddington to Swansea; it now takes three hours. A cynical person could say that the extra 15 minutes were added on so that the privatised rail companies were less liable for compensation if things went wrong. Several hon. Members—notably from south-west England—have complained about journey times. I wonder whether their experience is the same as mine, because journey times in west Wales are certainly 15 minutes longer than they were pre-privatisation.

The other problem we face—again, it may be common to the south-west—is the replacement of train services by bus services. I inquired about that when it first happened because there seemed to be no logical reason, such as conflicting services, why the train should not carry on. The answer was simply a shortage of drivers. Since fragmentation and privatisation, drivers have been employed by different companies, so there is no pool of drivers to call on to take the trains to the end of the line. In addition to having an impact on links to the ferries, it also affects elderly and disabled passengers. They often catch the train because of the facilities and services that it offers and so that they do not have to lug their luggage on and off a bus.

Another important problem is that of local train connections. They have had a dramatic impact on train services to our area. The local linking train used to wait in Swansea for passengers from the mainline train. Post-privatisation, that changed. The train waits for a maximum of seven minutes because, after that, the other train operating company becomes liable for compensation. What are the benefits of that for passengers and customers? In my experience, privatisation has detracted from the service and removed choice and quality.

I mentioned my personal experience of passing the buck. I welcome the change at the top of the SRA. As a Member of Parliament who wrote to it, I have been unhappy that it appeared to be an apologist for the rail companies. The plan and the change at the top will, hopefully, lead to an improvement and to those companies being called to account across the board so that the buck can no longer be passed.

A pie chart in the SRA's strategic plan shows that Railtrack is responsible for 42 per cent. of rail delays whereas the train operators are responsible for 43 per cent. I had a meeting the other day with First Great Western trains. It gave me another pie chart that showed that Railtrack was responsible for 74 per cent. of the delays. Other reasons for delays, including the state of the fleet, were down to 26 per cent. That again shows the need for the vision and co-ordination that the SRA will offer from now on.

In my meeting with First Great Western, we obviously focused on a Welsh perspective. I want to draw the attention of the House to one or two things that I think can improve services in Wales. I also want to show that investment further up the line can have a dramatic impact on our services. It has been brought to my attention that there is no signalling in the Severn tunnel, which means that there is a seven-minute gap between every train that goes through it. If signalling were put in the middle of the tunnel, capacity would be increased and trains could go through every four minutes. Clearly, that would have a dramatic impact on the service to Wales in terms of capacity and reliability. I am told that only £2 million of investment is needed to do that, which seems a small sum in terms of the benefits that it could bring to Wales.

Junctions at Cardiff and Newport, which are especially slow, add to journey times and affect track capacity. That is another issue. First Great Western raised several problems further down the line. With regard to Swindon and Didcot, the joint use by slower freight trains has an impact on services to Wales. There are also concerns about the Reading bottleneck. That is a good example of how investment all the way down the line in the UK has an effect on the whole of Wales.

As a rail user, I have one small additional matter to raise: car parks. In my area, it can be a 40-mile journey to the nearest station to get a long-distance train. One problem is the lack of car parks and the security in them. Friends of mine have returned after four days to find the wheels missing from their cars. If we are to meet the Government's targets for rail use, it is vital that the problem of secure car parking be addressed.

Finally, one welcome feature in the strategic plan that has not been mentioned is the idea of providing accessibility for all and what that offers for disabled people on trains. The fact that all new vehicles will be fully accessible and that additional funding will be available to make all stations accessible is important, especially if rail is to play an increasing role in public transport in this country.

5.48 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I do not think that the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) should be in any way apologetic for taking a parochial view in the debate. If the debate is to serve any purpose, and I think that it serves many, it is for us to express on behalf of our constituents the cri de coeur that derives from their daily experience of public transport. If there is one thing that unites the House, it is the lamentable state of the railway system.

All hon. Members recognise that the travelling public's patience with the railway system is exhausted. They have to go through a daily misery, whether it is on the trains, the tube system in London or in the alternative forms of private transport on the roads that they choose to use instead of public transport—there is a knock-on effect. The most common sentiment that I discern among my constituents is a fatal resignation to the idea that the trains will not do the job that they want them to do. They are resigned to the fact that they will not arrive when they expect them to and that things are not getting any better.

Not only is that view expressed by people throughout Britain, but it is alarming to note that it is also expressed abroad. I draw the House's attention to an article in *Le Monde* this morning—I shall not attempt to read it out in French. Under a heading that includes the phrase "the worst railway misery in Europe", the article states:

> "One cannot begin to find an end to the list of the difficulties that millions of users live with every day: breakdowns, accidents, delays, overcrowding in the coaches . . . "—

I suspect that that series of dots leads on to a gallic shrug. If that is the impression gaining currency both in this country and abroad, something must be done.

My constituency is served by several railway systems, not least of which is South West Trains. I do not want to dwell on SWT's problems today, save to say that the mud wrestling in misguided pursuit of machismo that has featured in industrial relations within that company does neither the railway industry nor passengers any good. The sooner a settlement is reached, the better for all concerned.

For every person in my constituency who struggles with SWT, there is a person who shares the experience of the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire of trying to use First Great Western, which operates the alternative route to London, or someone who has attempted to use the almost mythological cross-country service—everyone knows that starting in the south-west and trying to get anywhere other than London involves at least a day's journey, because the connections simply do not work—or local services. I am not over-sentimental about filling the gaps that Dr. Beeching left behind, although I remember as a child seeing from my bedroom window the old Cheddar Valley steam train. That track will not be brought back into service, but there are serious questions to be answered about infrastructure and the provision of better local services.

The knock-on effect of not providing a rail service is misery on our roads. It is instructive that on the first day of the industrial action on SWT it was almost impossible to use the A303 and M3. I am told that the traffic was backed up from London all the way to Winchester, which is not something that anyone with an appointment in London was prepared to countenance.

Our constituents expect, and it is reasonable to do so, reliability, efficiency, safety and affordability in their train services. They are sick and tired of the merry-go-round of excuses. The hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire mentioned the buck passing from one company to another, each denying responsibility for the day's delays in the service. There is a merry-go-round of excuses at official level, among Ministers, Departments, and the various bodies charged with regulating the rail industry. Those merry-go-rounds are now matched by the carousel of consultants, some of whom have scant experience of the rail system, who have been brought into advise Ministers and the rail service. What on earth John Birt's role can be, I do not understand. No expert on the police, he does not appear to have improved that service, and he is certainly no expert on trains—indeed, it is reported with some degree of authority that he is averse to using trains in both his personal and business life.

Now we have the strategic plan. As is typical of the railway system, it is late in arriving, we are not quite sure in which direction it is going, and there is no indication that it will ever reach its destination. Those of us from the west country who read that compendious document find little to support investment in the west of England. The best expression of any interest in the west country is the glossy picture in the section headed "Conclusions", which shows Bristol Temple Meads station. Unfortunately, there is no train in sight, only a rather nice new bus. That says everything about the services we can expect to receive.

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Does the hon. Gentleman not approve of integrated transport?

Mr. Heath: Yes, I would, if a railway element were included; currently, however, none is.

On Monday, the Secretary of State told us that

> "The strategic plan for railways draws a line in the sand and represents the point at which we say enough is enough."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 33.]

We agree—enough is enough. However, the amnesia that has afflicted members of the previous Government—as evidenced by the speech of the former Transport Secretary, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young)—has spread to the current Government. When Ministers talk about decades of underinvestment in the railways, they forget that we have had half a decade of underinvestment under a Labour Government.

Where did all the promises made by the Deputy Prime Minister during his period of responsibility for the railway get us? How did they improve the system? Instead of improvements, the right hon. Gentleman bequeathed a system in chaos to the current Transport Secretary, who now wants to start with a blank sheet. It is a nice trick—if it can be pulled off—to start with a blank sheet half way through a Government, but I doubt that the travelling public will accept that, or that they will judge the Government's performance by any yardstick other than whether their travelling experience improves or continues to deteriorate.

Malcolm Bruce: My hon. Friend is rightly highlighting the growing cynicism of a public who were faced with the fuel escalator, which gave huge revenues to the Exchequer but did not result in any investment in the public transport to which they were asked to switch. Now, they have no confidence in the future of the plan. Not only the short-term objective of a decent transport and communications policy, but confidence in our ability to

[Malcolm Bruce]

get people off the roads and reduce emissions in accordance with our long-term Kyoto commitments, are being undermined by a Government who have failed to inspire confidence in the future of public transport as a viable alternative to the roads.

Mr. Heath: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the crux of the matter. If we are to attract people back to public transport and the railway system and get them to leave their cars at home, we must first reverse the disintegration of the railway system that resulted from privatisation and has been continued by the current Government. Secondly, we must create a fair fares structure to encourage people to believe that they can afford to use the railways.

Thirdly, we must secure the infrastructure investment and development that are needed. I have a modest request to make on behalf of my constituency. We have been trying to use the Great Western line to Penzance as a means of providing local services by reopening stations at Somerton, Langport and Witham Friary. Although that reached "feasibility" stage under Railtrack, the plan has now disappeared from the map, which is regrettable.

We need a safe system. I was alarmed by the Secretary of State's comments on the Cullen recommendations for Paddington. Those of us who use the station want to know that Paddington is safe to use, but it appears that the right hon. Gentleman himself does not yet know whether the recommendations that emerged from Cullen have been implemented. That is a disastrous omission on the part of the Secretary of State and his advisers.

Mr. Don Foster: My hon. Friend might be even more alarmed to learn that when purportedly giving information about signalling improvements in the Paddington area, the Secretary of State assured the House that the required TPWS—train protection warning system—improvements had been made. My hon. Friend is aware, although the Secretary of State clearly is not, that Lord Cullen made two wholly separate recommendations. We still have not heard about the recommendations on signalling.

Mr. Heath: That is precisely the case. The Secretary of State does not know whether signalling improvements have been made. He is waiting for the Health and Safety Executive to report—three months late. He is apparently not curious about whether that critically important safety improvement has been made—an improvement that would allow passengers to travel safely into Paddington. That speaks volumes about the Government's priorities.

Privatisation was a terrible adventure for the rail industry. Coupled with underinvestment over a long period, it has had disastrous consequences. The fact remains that the Government were elected five years ago to do better. They have failed to improve the system over that period, and for the public it is now time for delivery or removal.

6 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): This is the fourth occasion in recent months when Opposition parties have initiated a debate on aspects of the railways. The Conservatives have secured three debates, and the Liberal Democrats have selected the topic for today's debate. I do not think for one minute that anyone in the House would criticise Opposition parties for raising the subject of the railways, because it is clearly an important issue that concerns the public. Many Members experience rail travel in their daily lives.

I suspect, however, that members of the public who have followed the debates in the past few months would not have been impressed by what we have heard from the Opposition parties, such as the Conservative party spokesperson's staggering refusal to explain its policy on the railways. The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) was pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies), and she failed to answer his question about what the Conservatives would do and how much money they would put into the railways. If a member of the Conservative Front-Bench team replies to the debate, perhaps they could at least give us an inkling of Conservative party policy on the railways—how much money it would put in, what it would do about Railtrack as it now stands and whether it supports or opposes the Strategic Rail Authority's 10-year plan. I do not think it too much to ask for the House to be given an inkling of Conservative party policy on the railways.

I listened carefully to the opening speech of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). I was genuinely interested to find out about his party's constructive policies on the rail network, but I did not hear too much about that.

Mr. Don Foster: The hon. Gentleman may be aware that on 14 February we published our detailed proposals for the future of the railways. We are delighted that the Secretary of State has now adopted some of those proposals on the future of Railtrack. We are hopeful that he will shortly adopt our proposals for the future of the London underground too.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. It seems that the Liberal Democrats support the Government's proposals on Railtrack and the 10-year plan, which makes me wonder why the motion was tabled in such terms. Perhaps the Liberal Democrats should support the Government amendment.

I am sure that the public welcome the fact that the SRA has a 10-year plan, which, together with the Government's 10-year plan, provides a real strategy for improving rail services. Some of the improvements in the rail network that have already been made since the election of a Labour Government have been possible despite the lack of investment in safety and the fragmentation of the network that we inherited.

In a few months, for the first time in 40 years, rail services will return to a line in south-east Edinburgh, where two new stations have been provided with funding from the Scottish Executive and the SRA. Those improvements can be built on under the SRA's plan, and I welcome that strategic plan and the Government's response to it.

Of course many of us would like to expand on the SRA's proposals. We have our own ideas. Because of the nature of the transport sector, it is almost impossible to please everyone all the time, because people have their own strongly held views on this area of policy.

Even in a sector that tends to be critical of initiatives from Governments of whatever colour, there has been a guarded but positive response to the SRA's plan from the industry and from industry commentators. That suggests to me that the SRA is acting on the right lines, at least in broad terms.

Having raised in parliamentary questions and in correspondence my concerns about the future of rail services in and around Edinburgh, I want to put on record my acknowledgement of the response from the SRA and from Ministers to concerns expressed by me, by other hon. Members and by many outside bodies. I welcome the decision announced today on the two-year franchise for GNER. Unlike the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), who has now left the Chamber and has been the only member of the Scottish National party present during the debate, I recognise the benefits that travellers in Scotland and in the rest of the country will enjoy as a result of that two-year extension of the franchise.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State listed some of the improvements that have been made. I refer also to the improvements to the diesel train sets, which provide the train service to north-east Scotland and which the hon. Member for North Tayside did not acknowledge in his criticism of the Government.

I particularly welcome the decision to give the go-ahead to the rebuilding of Edinburgh Waverley station, which is essential for the east coast main line upgrade. It is also essential for the planned improvement to local services in the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland area, and is vital for the better development of Edinburgh city centre.

I also welcome the confirmation that the east coast main line upgrade is to be included in the medium-term programme. I note that the SRA will be bringing forward detailed proposals in the near future. That upgrade is vital not just for Edinburgh but for cities and communities along the line from Edinburgh to London. It is vital for tourism, business, leisure travel and freight.

I note that the SRA makes it clear that it will take the lead in the joint venture set up to take forward the east coast main line upgrade. I strongly urge the SRA to ensure that it provides strong leadership, because none of us wants the east coast main line upgrade to be bedevilled by the problems that affected the west coast main line upgrade because of the complexity of the contractual relationships that were necessary to take that project forward.

I welcome many other aspects of the SRA plan. They bring benefits to my constituency and to Scotland as a whole. Even the improvements in the east coast main line outside Scotland will bring benefits to people in Scotland. They travel to London and use trains that start in London. Their trains are affected by delays in the south-east commuter network. Benefits from the upgrade further south will also be felt in Scotland.

There are always more things that can be done and further improvements that can be made. The SRA is right to give a high priority to achievable objectives in the short term, but what I find particularly exciting about its proposals is that it identifies a list of longer-term projects that should be investigated for possible future development. Those projects would revolutionise rail travel in many parts of the country. From my constituency perspective, and as a Member from Scotland, I am excited about the vision of a new north-south, high-speed line, which would offer immense possibilities for leisure, tourism and business travel, would take pressure off the road network and air services, and would also help to bind the United Kingdom together as a concrete embodiment of the benefits to Scotland of our links with England.

I hope that the Minister will favourably consider the proposals for a new high-speed line from the south of England to the north. Such projects require costings and value-for-money analysis, but they also require a leap of faith. I urge the Government to take that leap of faith, and to take the SRA's lead in developing that idea. What better monument could there be to the Government's commitment to modernising the rail network than to open such a line? It would mean that people in this country would no longer look to the continent for its high-speed, modern services and look in despair at the largely 19th century railway network in this country. I urge the Government to do what they can to take that proposal for a high-speed line further forward at the earliest opportunity.

6.10 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interests in the Register.

I had hoped that we would have a proper debate on the so-called 10-year plan, which was issued on Monday with such a fanfare and received a pretty disappointing press thereafter. Perhaps we have not done so, other than some interesting detailed observations from Members with constituency interests, because there is so little in the plan before us. Perhaps it has dawned on Labour Members that they have been rather let down.

If we look to the plan for a promise that 140 mph trains will be bought and will operate on the west coast main line, we look in vain. If we look to the plan for a guarantee that the full west coast main line upgrade will go ahead, we see instead that it is subject to review and very likely to be downgraded. If people in my part of the world, the Thames valley, seek the promise of a solution to the problems of conflict and lack of capacity on the lines through Reading into Paddington and Waterloo, they will be answered only with a deafening silence.

There will be no solution to the obvious problem that after a very successful period immediately after privatisation, in which there was a big surge in the usage of the railways, the Government have, during the past five years, failed to make the commitment to invest in the new capacity that is so obviously needed to respond to that successful growth.

We see the schizophrenia on this issue not only in the statements of various Ministers and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) admirably pointed out, in the contradictory statements made by the Secretary of State, but in the words of the newly appointed chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority. In his foreword to the plan, he points out that privatisation has been a great success, and he draws great comfort from the fact that there has been a 34 per cent. increase in passenger usage of the railways, a 40 per cent. increase in freight and a 20 per cent. increase in train usage of the network.

Mr. Hopkins: Is it not the case that the main factor behind that increase is the recent growth of the economy under a Labour Government, and in fact it has nothing to do with privatisation?

Mr. Redwood: I do not accept that, because we had periods of substantial economic growth when the industry

[Mr. Redwood]

was nationalised, and it never succeeded in increasing passengers and freight as it did in the beginning of the railways' remarkable renaissance after privatisation. I know from experience in my own area that we had a strong economy in the late 1980s, and we did not see anything like that growth in passenger usage of the railways in those days. When we introduced privatisation, there was successful growth in the industry—services improved and companies accommodated more passengers. That growth was, rightly, proudly trumpeted by Ministers until recently, and in the plan it is proudly trumpeted by the chairman of the SRA.

The chairman goes on to explain, however, that all is woe on the railways because of the obvious failure, which has been most pronounced in the past five years, to make any response to that success or to make a commitment to the new rail capacity and the investment required to cash in on that success and further expand the railways. The chairman's prose is not particularly elegant, but its meaning is devastating. He says:

> "We have to rediscover the service ethos and an accountable delivery culture, rediscover industry-wide investment planning and rediscover how to train, manage and motivate our people so that the team works together like an efficient machine."

This is after five years. It is after the Government introduced their chosen vehicle, the SRA, appointed a boss, gave him his head and then, for some unknown reason, decided to sack him and replace him with someone else.

How long will it take for the Government to get the SRA up and running in the way that they would like? Why is it that, five years in, we hear from their recently appointed nominee this devastating indictment that practically all the measures that the Government said are necessary to perfect privatisation have not been taken because they chose the wrong person and did not get the SRA straight?

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Does not the right hon. Gentleman admit that the privatisation introduced by his Government is the reason for the current fragmentation and disjointedness in the rail service to which he is referring? It is not down to people's failure to work in teams; privatisation was flawed and has led to the breaking up of the railways. Under this Government, the SRA is trying to put strategy and vision back into our rail service.

Mr. Redwood: I wish that that were true, but I take the view that the original structure as set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), the Transport Secretary at the time, was beginning to work extremely well. There was a great increase in rail usage, but the intervention of the SRA and the Deputy Prime Minister, in his role as Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, completely undermined the working relationships in the industry and put on ice quite a lot of the investment. The Government deliberately stopped investment by refusing to renew or extend franchises for companies that would otherwise have made big investment commitments. They worked away gradually to undermine Railtrack, leading to its administration, as we saw.

The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) smiles and he is sure that he is right, but he ought to read the plan because it is a great admission of failure. It is all about the failure of the Government's body, the SRA, which was going to solve the problems that they thought existed but which has clearly made them all worse. The chairman goes on to say in his foreword:

> "We will change the way the SRA is structured and managed to deliver this new railway."

Here we are, five years on, and two or three years after the SRA got up and running, and we are told that the body was completely wrong. That is the view of the Government's chosen agent, and the SRA must now be fundamentally restructured. Will the Minister tell us how long that complete restructuring of the SRA will take? How long will it be before the SRA stops looking at itself and engages with the chief executives and chairmen of the private companies running the industry, gets them on side, gets us back to work and gets the industry investing again?

This is not so much a plan as a plan to have a plan. Again, the chairman lets the cat out of the bag in his remarkably forthright foreword. He says that we need one plan, and that is the key target that he has set himself for 2002. This is not the plan; it is a plan to have a plan. The plan is even more delayed than the trains that it is talking about. The Government say that they believe in planning; they set up a body to make a plan; they have two launches of a plan that is not a plan, and they then decide that the latest plan is a plan to have a plan at some unspecified date this year.

Bob Russell (Colchester): It has nice pictures though.

Mr. Redwood: Some of the pictures are quite jolly, but the Government seem to be interested in photographing buses and empty railways because they are rather embarrassed by the shortage of good train shots caused by the cancellation of so many trains due to strikes, absent plans and the failure of investment because franchises have not been renewed in time.

We are told that the Government have embarked on creating a new type of vehicle. They should be rather more honest with their supporters about what is going on. The Secretary of State has been absolutely masterful in leading many of his Back Benchers, who never really liked privatisation, to believe that in some mysterious way he is renationalising the main part of the railways, Railtrack. Some of them are happy because they think that that is what is happening. However, if they read the plan carefully they will be deeply disappointed.

We have a private company that was put into administration by a Secretary of State who wanted to waste taxpayers' money and give far more money to the receiver than he would have had to give the company to keep it flourishing in the private sector. We now have a private company, run by private sector accountants in a private sector administration, which the Government are looking to sell on to another private company in due course. The Government say that they may come up with a new type of private sector bid—a company limited by guarantee that is not for profit—but it will be difficult to attract capital into a venture that makes no money for its shareholders.

From what I have read in the newspapers this week it will be even more difficult to raise bond finance for such a company. I hope that Labour Members understand how serious the matter is. Apparently, a group of convertible bond holders voted against the scheme of arrangement for the bond finance in Railtrack which the Government hoped would go through. The Government are now in an invidious position, and some people believe that they, through the administrator, may not meet all the payments on the debt. If we get into an Argentinian situation with Railtrack bonds, the Government will find it difficult to raise money from the City for a future vehicle, if they manage to construct one that is a front for the Secretary of State.

The Minister has leave, if he wishes, to intervene and assure me that the Government will make every payment on those bonds and guarantee that the bondholders will have all their interest and money repaid. I am happy to give way if he wishes to give that assurance. The fact that he cannot do so and is trying to smile and pretend that it does not matter means that I have touched a sensitive nerve; the Government are trying to launch a company on bond finance but, at the same time, they cannot give a guarantee that they will be any better than the Government of Argentina on a bad day in meeting obligations incurred by a company that has almost become a creature of the state.

The Secretary of State has enormous influence and a lot of responsibility for the railways. He made a big error in putting a private company into private bankruptcy, but now hopes that he can get it back into the private sector. He has underwritten the position, presumably because the Treasury insisted that he do so, by stating, through the chairman in the 10-year plan, that practically all the projects of the new Railtrack will be privately financed; that will be done through public-private partnerships, not private capital. For a long time, I have tried to get the Government to tell the markets and the travelling public their plans for granting money to the new Railtrack, whether it is taken on by a company limited by guarantee, as they wish, or some other private bidder.

That question is not unreasonable; the Government will have to reveal the answer before they can have a competition to get Railtrack moved back into the private sector, up and running and perhaps investing again. Answer came there none until we had the strategic plan, which includes a little clue. It says that out of the £33.5 billion of public money, some £26 billion will subsidise the existing railway, quite a lot of which will be routed through the train operating companies. Only £7.5 billion therefore could conceivably be for Railtrack-type investment over the whole 10-year period, which demonstrates that unless something dramatic happens, there will be a fall in investment in mainline railway activities compared with the poor totals managed in the years prior to privatisation. That is an extremely disappointing outcome, which Ministers should take more seriously.

The chairman of the SRA has a delightful sense of humour. In his foreword, he gives one of his aims:

> "I want to see fewer accountants, fewer lawyers and fewer consultants. Instead I want to see more engineers, more operators, more project managers".

To assist the chairman, the Government put all of Railtrack into the tender loving care of a set of accountants in administration, then went off and hired a whole load more consultants, lawyers and accountants to advise the Secretary of State. Railtrack plc, which is in administration, has to have that sort of advice, as does Railtrack Group. It is therefore turning into a field day for a lot of hard-working and intelligent lawyers, accountants and consultants.

I have previously estimated that the total cost of Railtrack administration in lawyers' fees, administrators' fees, accountants and consultants will be more than £100 million. No Minister has ever been prepared to gainsay that figure, and I am now beginning to feel that my expectation is far too modest; the legal complexities, with failed bondholder issues and possible lawsuits from Railtrack group, will be such that millions more pounds could be spent on those fees.

Mr. Don Foster: The right hon. Gentleman and I may fundamentally disagree about the ideal future for son of Railtrack, but would he at least agree that he has just made a significant point, which is amplified by the bizarre situation? The administrators Ernst & Young, with all their consultants and advisers, are currently working up a number of alternative models while, at the same time, the Secretary of State is bringing in further advisers to come up with his own preferred model. That will then be put to Ernst & Young which, in turn, will have to put it to the Secretary of State who, at the end of the day, will make the decision and choose his preferred option. Why Ernst & Young is wasting all that time and spending all that money is frankly beyond me.

Mr. Redwood: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. The Secretary of State is in such a complex and difficult legal position that he has to allow work to continue on other options besides his favoured option. He has to be careful, if he thinks that he can make those decisions himself, not to be conflicted when he comes to make the ultimate judgment. It would be difficult for him if his company limited by guarantee were up and running and had put in a bid, but it was not quite the best bid on the table. If he were behaving honourably, as I am sure that he will, he would have to award the contract to the best bidder. However, if the two bids are dissimilar—if a direct comparison is difficult and it is arguable which is the best bid and which is not so good—he has to make sure that he has avoided any conflict during the process and has given a fair chance to the other bidders. It would be much better if one Minister were the advocate for the company limited by guarantee and someone else made the decision; otherwise the Government could well have even more expensive legal actions on their hands.

For reasons of natural justice, the Government need to be fair-minded, but they must also satisfy a series of legal problems. First, they must demonstrate to the administrators and, through them, the Railtrack shareholders, that the best possible deal has been done for the shareholders, who still have rights. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead always points out, many of them are railwaymen and many are pensioners living on their pension funds; they are not rich and would like to get something back from this awful mess.

The Secretary of State also has to satisfy European competition law. If it appears that he only ever had in mind one option, which then wins the competition, there could be difficult questions to answer in Brussels and the European Court about whether European competition law had been properly observed. A private sector company is in private sector administration, and has to be properly open for tender and bid. It is also a private sector company

[Mr. Redwood]

with a strong Government interest—the Government are the subsidiser of last resort—and has a strong monopoly position in a particular sector of the British transport market, which means that regulators and lawyers will take a strong interest in it.

We see from the document that an important part of the task of the chairman of the SRA in 2002 is to try to attract private capital for the railways. Hallelujah—that is exactly what is needed. Many Members have said that it is difficult to see how all the money in the modest plan will be drawn in. It is certainly difficult to see how there will be anything but delay in the really big sums needed in 2002 and 2003, given the uncertainties. The problem for the SRA and the Government are the contradictions. They say that 2002 is the year for delivery and the year to bring in private capital, but they are not making the decisions that they need to make today to maximise their chances of attracting that capital.

I put two simple points to the Government; if they seriously want lots of private capital, the first thing that they should do is get Railtrack out of administration and into workable ownership and management as quickly as possible. If reports are true—they may well be—and there is no chance of Railtrack being out of administration before this autumn, and possibly not until next year, we will have wasted more than a year. There can be no effective negotiations on private financing in conjunction with Railtrack because everyone will say, "We need to know who will own the company, what the rules are and what its balance sheet is before we can make an assessment."

The second thing that Ministers should do if they want private capital is settle the franchise position, which they undermined by granting short franchises or delaying franchise renewals. Instead of apologising for that mistake and agreeing proper franchise periods which could lead to those companies making a lot of new investment in new trains, which my constituents and others want, Ministers have compounded their error by saying through the SRA that they now wish to amalgamate franchises. The amalgamation of franchises is not a simple task. It means asset swaps, asset mergers, takeovers; all sorts of complicated corporate finance and legal activity; great complexities in bringing the franchises together under new and existing owners; and sorting out the resulting financial and asset complications, which would result in much more delay. By their decision, the Government have guaranteed a big gap in the order pattern for new trains in many parts of the country while we sort out who will run the franchises and when they will be up and running.

The chairman of the SRA says:

> "The clear message . . . is that the prospects for Britain's railway have never been better."

However, that does not seem to follow from all the other things that he said in his foreword. A few paragraphs earlier, he told us of a state of confusion; the Secretary of State has given him the impossible task of trying to stabilise an industry when the Government are making up policy as they go along. This is the man who is told that most of the money must be from the private sector, but we must not tell the Labour Back Benchers because they think that it will be a public sector operation.

My constituents and I want a big expansion in railway capacity. We want to be able to drive to the station, park in a decent car park with proper security, and find that there is a regular service to London and other important towns in the neighbourhood. We want four or five trains an hour to London, not two or three, as we have at present. I can promise Ministers that there is plenty of business out there if the companies are allowed to get on with it.

I have been asking endlessly for Ministers to give an assurance that a scheme that I have backed, and which is wanted by the local train operating company and the local council, and was wanted by Railtrack before it went into administration, for a new station and better waiting facilities and for work to begin on improving the track, would go ahead despite the administration. There is no such reassurance, and there can be no such reassurance, I fear, because although Ministers have heavy influence and are paying very big bills, they are not in control, nor is the SRA, and they are not driving forward the better railway that we want.

When the story comes to be written in a few years' time of the Secretary of State's decision to put Railtrack into administration, it will go down as one of the biggest bungles in the interface between politics and business over which any Minister has ever presided. We will discover during the next two years that it will have been massively more expensive to have that animal in administration than it would have been to do a deal with a private sector company. We will discover that the Government do really want to get it back into the private sector, because the Chancellor does not want all the money on his Budget for the massively expensive upgrades and improvements in the railway.

We will discover that while the Government and their lawyers, accountants and consultants are busily arguing with each other and trying to protect the Secretary of State against a minefield of legal actions, the travelling public have walked away, bought a load more new cars, and are sitting in traffic jams because they have no choice.

6.32 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I have very little time, so I shall make just a few key points. I regret that the Liberal Democrats have chosen to throw barbs at my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, instead of the brickbats that are due to the Conservatives, who caused all the problems. My right hon. Friend is doing a tremendous job in extremely difficult circumstances. He has my strong support and that of my hon. Friends. I look forward to his success in future years.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George. Young), in his own elegant way, put a wonderful gloss on a national transport disaster perpetrated by his Government. We are trying to pick up the pieces—rather belatedly, I think. We should have taken action in the first week of May 1997. We have taken action only now, but we are at least beginning the process, which will be long and difficult.

My right hon. Friend has taken the first necessary step, but he must go a lot further. He should look at the state-owned, integrated national railway systems on the continent, which are light years ahead of our railway system. They are integrated and publicly owned and rely on public investment. We must review the way in which we invest not only in the railways but in other parts of the public sector and question the Treasury rules on borrowing. Many other countries in the European Union park such investment off their public sector borrowing requirement so that they can get inside the borrowing limits of economic and monetary union and the stability and growth pact. They are right to do that and we should follow their example. If they can get away with it, so can we. We could solve many problems in the public sector if we did that.

There are two fundamental problems arising from privatisation—fragmentation, about which we have heard much, and the fact that it is finance driven, not public service driven. I take issue with the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, who compared railways with airlines. If airlines have a route that is failing, they take it off. There is no problem. However, we cannot take off the Circle line. It is part of the fundamental infrastructure that is necessary for the functioning of our country, not to mention its capital city. There is a difference between the vital infrastructure of the railway network and airlines, which can change.

We heard reference to Railtrack being the problem, whereas the train operating companies seem to be blameless. According to the strategic plan published this week, the total delays caused by train operators were 43 per cent., and the total delays caused by Railtrack were 42 per cent. so they are equally to blame. We heard today that the train operating companies have serious financial problems. We must look to reintegrate the train operating companies, the track and the engineering work into one integrated railway industry—we must get back to what we had before.

The problem with British Rail was not that it did not work, but that it was starved of finance. If we had invested in British Rail in the way that the continentals have invested in their railways, we might be where they are now. I recently visited SNCF in France and saw developments that we will not see in this country for a decade, even with the best will. I spoke to an SNCF engineer and asked where the finance came from. He said, "In France, when we speak of PPP, we mean public, public, public." I urge my right hon. Friend to consider the possibility of going back to a properly integrated state-owned railway system.

6.35 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) for introducing the debate in his usual forceful and entertaining manner. He painted a bleak but accurate picture of the railways today: train delays up 70 per cent., cancellations up 45 per cent. and overcrowding running at 39 per cent.

My hon. Friend focused on some of the key unanswered questions in relation to Lord Cullen's recommendations, which were due to be implemented by 19 December, and he set out a number of Liberal Democrat proposals which, if adopted, would ensure that the line in the sand drawn by the Transport Secretary would not be washed away by the waves created by the next multi-billion pound infrastructure overrun, or the failure to secure the very high levels of private investment that are needed to deliver his 10-year plan.

Significant contributions were made by other hon. Members, and I shall touch on those briefly. I echo the comments of the Secretary of State about the dedication and commitment of the people who work in the railway industry, and I welcome his honesty about the state of our railways. The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) posed a number of pertinent questions to the Minister, particularly about the cost implications of the fact that Railtrack has been put into administration, and how that will affect the private finance that the Government seek to secure, in relation to both the rail industry and the PPP for London Underground.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) made an interesting bid in support of past Conservative policies to reintroduce a Department of Transport. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), who is in his place, used a French term—renaissance—to describe the railways under the Conservatives. I would use another French phrase to describe his attitude—"Je ne regrette rien." However, I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's point about contradictions between the Government's policies in relation to rail and to the tube, where the approaches that they have adopted with regard to who runs what are diametrically opposed.

The hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) said that she would make parochial points. There is nothing wrong with that; our constituents often want us to raise matters that are relevant to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said that the mud-wrestling at South West Trains must stop, and I agree with him entirely. On Lord Birt's involvement, that is startling.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is rather odd that Lord Birt has been appointed to his new role? When he was at the BBC, he took a unified structure, split it into little pieces, set them against each other and put a bureaucracy on top. Given that the Tories did that with the privatisation of the railways in the first place, what useful contribution can he now make?

Tom Brake: The Transport Secretary stated what Lord Birt's involvement will be. His involvement with the railways is simply to keep him occupied, although I hope he does no damage in the process.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) wanted to know more about Liberal Democrat policies. Several of his hon. Friends are consulting our paper "Transport for People", so I advise the hon. Gentleman to speak to them about that.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I have indeed examined "Transport for People", which has a very catchy title. I congratulate the Liberal Democrats on specifying—although they have not used any figures—where they would get some of the extra investment that they propose. The proposals include congestion charging and workplace parking taxation. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that will be a revelation to Liberal Democrats in my constituency, who have been criticising the Labour party for allegedly taxing motorists off the road?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, although I had hoped that it would be slightly shorter. The Liberal Democrats are happy to let local communities make their own decisions on congestion charging.

I agreed with the comments of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) about the plan. If there is anything in it, it is simply reheated existing policies. It is

[Tom Brake]

certainly long overdue. He will not tempt me, however, into talking about Argentina's economy—a matter for another debate. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) said that there was a difference between aviation and the Circle line, as one cannot shut down the Circle line, but I am afraid that London Underground currently does that far too frequently and easily.

In the remaining few minutes, I should like to concentrate on two matters that have not been discussed in any detail: the supply of power to trains and carriages, and the future of London Underground. If the issue of power is not resolved, it is extremely unlikely that the Transport Secretary will be able to deliver his plans. We know that the SRA strategy has announced 1,700 new trains, although they are not really new trains and this is not news, as they have been on order for some time and their delivery is already way behind schedule. Some 2,019 new carriages have been ordered, but only 195 have so far been delivered. The train operating companies will have to get 12 of the vehicles into service every week. Will the Minister tell us how the Government will ensure that they do so? That target sounds extremely ambitious.

None the less, when and if the trains are delivered, they will need a power supply. The arrangements in Railtrack southern region are in disarray. It is thought that the power network cannot be upgraded there by the deadline of the end of 2004. It appears that many millions of pounds have been spent on trains that cannot be used for a number of years. Who is responsible for the blunder? According to the Secretary of State, it is pre-administration Railtrack. However, *Modern Railways* magazine disagrees. It believes that Railtrack simply did not have enough notice to upgrade the power supply in time. As I said, that means that the commitment of £1 billion-plus on new carriages and trains could be jeopardised, as those trains will not be able to run on the system once they are available. Southern region representatives say that it will take at least another six months before even the scale of the upgrade is known. Additional work needs to be done in respect of 630 substations and so on. Apparently, the equipment could be ready for that, but there is a significant problem—I know that the Secretary of State is aware of it—in terms of the manpower that will be needed to do the work.

Will the Minister tell us whether he believes that that is a failure of Railtrack, as the Secretary of State said, or of the train operating companies or, as *Modern Railways* suggests, the Strategic Rail Authority and possibly the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions? I await his response. I hope that he will answer a very simple question: will the power be ready at the right time and in the right place to allow all the trains to run when they are available for service? A simple yes or no will do.

The second issue on which I want to focus is the London underground. Many hon. Members are as perplexed as I am about the fact that the Government appear to be committed to recreating on the London underground many of the structural failures that we have seen on the railways. Indeed, they are almost building in the same faultline. Furthermore, the tube PPP has many other faults. One of my main concerns is the almost excessive secrecy and commercial confidentiality that have been involved, which seems incompatible with the democratic need for accountability. That has led to some disturbing incidents.

In 1999, the Deputy Prime Minister said that a £4.5 billion saving would be achieved through the PPP. Since he made that statement, I have been trying to pin the Department down on the subject. I received a response on 14 November 2001 telling me that the £4.5 billion figure was meant only to "inform the debate". Can we really believe any of the figures that are spouted by the Government, or must we assume that they are all about spin and have no financial substance? The obsession with commercial confidentiality means that we have to rely on the media to find out—we hope—about the state of the PPP.

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that if the rumours are true and the Government have become bored with the PPP and do not think it can work, massive cancellation fees will have to be paid to the unsuccessful bidding parties, on top of the £100 million that has already been incurred in advisory fees?

Tom Brake: I have pursued the Government on that subject, but they have been unable to supply me with information about the additional costs not only of consultants but of the whole process.

As I have only one minute in which to conclude my remarks, I return to the motion and our proposal to dock the Transport Secretary's pay on the grounds of poor performance. Part of the remuneration of the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, who has just been appointed by the Government, is received in a bonus, and train operating company managers are also paid by results, so I think it is entirely fitting that the Transport Secretary's pay should also be performance related. To date, his achievements are less than remarkable. As I said at the very start of my speech, train delays are up by 70 per cent., cancellations are up by 45 per cent. and overcrowding is running at 39 per cent. The right hon. Gentleman is presiding over a rail system that is on the verge of collapse. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is fortunate for him that we have a minimum wage, because his performance to date warrants nothing more.

6.47 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's comment was in the same league as a remark made by a departed colleague, Simon Mahon, a long-standing member of Bootle council who prefaced his peroration in the Chamber, "Finally, Mr. Mayor." I am sure that you will let the comment pass with your usual graciousness, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Fortunately for you, Madam Deputy Speaker, you did not have to sit through the debate. This was not a great parliamentary occasion. Indeed, the motion set the tone for the debate. No answers and no policies were given by Opposition Members. There was also considerable confusion. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) drew attention to the Liberal Democrats' policy of paying for the railways out of congestion charges and workplace parking charges. Their spokesman answered that it was their policy to let local communities make their own decisions on congestion charging. Perhaps they will not accept my suggestion that that is not exactly the firmest base for financing the national railway system, let alone that there might be some disparity between the two.

Tom Brake: Is the Minister really suggesting that the national railway system should be financed through local congestion charging schemes?

Mr. Spellar: Of course not; I was citing paragraph 317 of the Liberal Democrat document. If the Liberal Democrats have their way, it will be difficult to fund anything out of congestion charges. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme suggested that there were local differences, so I checked today. I asked whether any Liberal Democrat councils were progressing with proposals on congestion charging. For once, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is right: the answer is none. I am willing to stand corrected, but as far as I know, no Liberal Democrat-controlled authorities are pushing for congestion or workplace charging in their areas. There is a slight hole not only in their policy but in their finances.

Mr. Don Foster: The Minister is right; I know of no Liberal Democrat-run council that currently proposes congestion charging. However, in London, where the first scheme is most likely to take place, the Liberal Democrats are backing it, unlike Labour members of the Greater London Authority, who refuse to support a proposal that was introduced by a national Labour Government.

Mr. Spellar: I understand that Liberal Democrats are happy to jump on someone else's bandwagon whenever possible, but taking responsibility is different; that is why the motion contains no details about their policy or any alternatives. We are considering a franchise party, which has a rag bag of policies. I note that the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) is not here today; he is continuing the habits that he had when he was a Labour Member. What other party that believes in increasing fuel prices would welcome into its ranks the only Labour Member who said that we should have given in to the fuel protesters and cut fuel prices? What a shower!

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) issued a rail users survey. He asked what we should do about it. I expected him to present a policy.

Mr. Edward Davey: I put forward Liberal Democrat policy.

Mr. Spellar: Let us consider Liberal Democrat policy. Liberal Democrat Members believe that the company that runs the trains should also be responsible for the tracks and signalling. However, their document states that their proposed form of Railtrack should take care of the tracks and signalling. Their policy is, "Tell us what you want, and we will propose it." However, they did not propose much tonight. There was therefore some confusion on the Liberal Democrat Benches.

Before I consider the rest of the Opposition, I want to refer to the positive and thoughtful speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew). He has long played a positive role with regard to the west coast main line and he drew attention to some of the genuine problems that have to be faced. I shall deal with their origin shortly. He mentioned potential conflict between express, local and freight trains.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) made the same point, although her surprising conclusion was that proposals for one operator for each London terminal would exacerbate the problem. It is generally agreed in the industry that those proposals would improve matters. We are prepared to consider the problems that she believes might arise, because doing that, and examining the way in which we create extra capacity, can lead to their resolution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle rightly identified the skills shortage in the industry, much of which was created by management failures at the time of privatisation. For example, the train operators made approximately 1,000 drivers redundant. The results have been only too clear in recent weeks. The same applies to track engineers. Much expertise left Railtrack; in some cases, it went to the subcontractors, but in others it left the industry. According to the Railtrack mantra of the times, skill and expertise in the industry were perceived as a cost which had to be driven out. Instead of regarding the skills base and the experience as an asset, Railtrack viewed them as costs to be reduced.

I was slightly surprised and disappointed by the contributions of the right hon. Members for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) and for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who were joined at one stage by another old lag, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). They presided over doubling the national debt in five years, adding £175 billion to it. That constituted a huge burden on future generations and an enormous problem that the Government had to solve. We have done that. Conservative Members often talk about the confidence of financial institutions and the City. The financial community probably has more confidence in a party and a Government who have put the national finances on an even keel than a party that doubled the national debt in only five years.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire identified one of the difficulties. He said that Gerald Corbett had resigned and that Railtrack had lost the City's confidence. That was a charitable admission that Railtrack's problems had long and deep roots in its senior management. Contrary to the scare stories that some newspapers are publishing, the majority of the reduction in the value of the shares—from nearly £18 to £2.80—happened as a result of the judgment of the markets on Railtrack's management. Not once did Opposition Members give the slightest indication of what they would have done with a Railtrack that was failing organisationally and financially.

Railtrack management approached our predecessors in the Department in April and secured a commitment of some £1.5 billion. That was honoured. However, the company returned in July and claimed that without new and additional money, it would not be able to describe itself as a going concern.

Mr. Redwood: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Spellar: I shall give way if the right hon. Gentleman tells us what he would have said to Railtrack managers came back with a begging bowl, in the words of the regulator, in only a few months.

Mr. Redwood: Anyone sensible would have sat down with Railtrack's management, haggled, negotiated and

[Mr. Redwood]

worked out what the Government wanted to secure in terms of strengthening the board and in return for promises of money, and provided the money. The Government had already promised some money. A deal then would have been billions of pounds cheaper than their current actions.

Mr. Spellar: The right hon. Gentleman claims we should have done a deal with that company when we had sat down, negotiated, haggled and done a deal with its representatives in April, only for it to return in a few months—not influenced by Hatfield or any other event—to say that the money was not enough and that it had no idea about the amount of the final bill. Not only Ministers, but others in the industry judged that Railtrack had no control over its costs. That was apparent on the west coast main line. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) asked about that line, on which the costs rose by some £2.3 billion to more than £7 billion.

Mr. Pickles *rose—*

Mr. Spellar: The Opposition did not mention John Armitt, the new chairman of Railtrack. He is a highly respected civil engineer, who is pulling things round. Although the right hon. Member for Wokingham sneered at the appointment of Richard Bowker to the SRA, I believe that the new team will provide a new vision for the industry.

I have said a number of times in previous debates that the Tories were not only unfit to be the Government but unfit to be the Opposition. I suppose that meant that there was a vacancy for an Opposition. Well, it was certainly not filled today by the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Don Foster *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The Minister is obviously not going to give way.

Mr. Spellar: The only party dealing seriously with transport is the Labour party, and that is why I have no hesitation in calling for the rejection of the Liberal Democrat motion and the carrying of the Government amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 207, Noes 339.

Division No. 134] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond

Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cousby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd

Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
  (Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Phil Woolas and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House believes that the railway infrastructure was badly damaged by decades of underinvestment and a flawed privatisation; recognises that the Government made tough decisions in the first two years of the last Parliament to deliver the economic stability that means it can put record levels of investment into the railways; notes that annual average total investment in rail over the 10 year plan will be £4.3 billion, compared to £1.4 billion for the period 1989/90–1996/97; congratulates the Government on its decisive action over Railtrack, so undoing a failed Conservative privatisation; welcomes the SRA's Strategic Plan that sets out an effective agenda for the railways; calls for the resolution of the present industrial disputes through negotiation not strike action; and believes that the steps taken have laid the groundwork for a railway system that will be fit for the 21st century.

Care System

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Will Members please leave the Chamber as quickly and quietly as possible? We now come to the debate on the state of the care system. Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the underfunding of social care by successive Governments has led to bottlenecks and delays in the NHS, reducing health care capacity and increasing waiting times; further believes that it is the most vulnerable elderly who suffer the consequences of inadequate care; regrets that the piecemeal approach of the Government to hospital delayed discharge simply shifts the pressures from one part of the care system to another; condemns the Government for its mishandling and misunderstanding of the care home sector and the consequent loss of homes and beds; regrets that the failure to adequately fund social care has produced serious staff shortages and reduced choice and quality for those in need of care; and calls on the Government to undertake a whole system review of funding for social care to tackle staff shortages, increase capacity, promote choice and ensure that people get the right care at the right time.

I am pleased that my hon. Friends and others are staying for this important debate on the state of the care system and the crisis in it. The national health service is always in the news, but the Government often overclaim for it and for their delivery. In fact, it frequently under-performs. As with the railways, they have been too timid and from day one they failed to invest in our health care and our health systems.

The results of that are there for all too see: long waits in our accident and emergency departments, more people waiting for treatment, more people waiting to get out of hospital after being treated. The NHS is short-staffed and struggling to deliver, but it is only part of the picture. Step back and take a look at the bigger picture—the care system outside our hospitals. The Cinderella status given to social care and the failure to invest in the care system are fuelling the pressures on accident and emergency departments and hospital wards.

There are countless victims of this Government's failure to invest in the care system—every year, 700,000 elderly people find themselves stuck in hospital and unable to leave because there is not enough care provision outside. Grotesquely, elderly people are left in hospital waiting for someone to die in a care home before the council will fund their care home place. In parts of the country, two people have to die before one new care place is funded. People are labelled bed blockers as if it is their fault that they are stuck in hospital. It is the Government's fault, but those 700,000 are just the tip of the iceberg.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): My hon. Friend refers to "bed blockers" and suggests that the Government blame elderly people for being in those beds. Should not we use the expression "bed lockers", because it is the lack of Government funding that ties elderly people to beds?

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. As a consequence of the Government's failure to invest in social care and the care system outside our hospitals, there is increasing gridlock in the care system. As a consequence of that, people are suffering and receiving bad care.

What is happening to people waiting for treatment? We know that in the five years since the Government came to power at least 5,000 years of bed time have been lost to the NHS as a result of delayed discharges. Who pays the price for that incompetence—5,000 years of time wasted? In the first quarter of this year alone, 22,000 more people could have been treated if the care system did not leave people stuck in bed once they are well. If we managed to treat those people in the health service and get them out quicker, we would be able to reduce or perhaps remove the need for them to fly abroad or rely on private health care for treatment.

Madam Speaker, looking at the figures for the first quarter—

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Burstow: Maybe in the future. Let us guess how many operations have been cancelled in the first quarter of this year. For want of an NHS bed and appropriate treatment, 20,000 people had their operations cancelled.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's argument. Although the Government are open to criticism for the way in which they fund social services authorities, does he not agree that some authorities hardly assist in ending bed blocking? For example, the Rev. David Barker of Nettlestone in my constituency is concerned that the Isle of Wight council, which is of course led by the Liberal Democrats, is not providing the necessary support for people who are sent home, so they are left in beds.

Mr. Burstow: It is a great pity that the hon. Gentleman is not backing his council to make sure that it has the resources to do the job. It will be noted in the Isle of Wight that he is not standing up for the Isle of Wight to ensure that it has the resources; many of his hon. Friends do defend their social services departments.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: No, the hon. Gentleman has made his point. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he is not giving way for a second time.

Mr. Burstow: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman may not have liked the answer, but that is the answer he is going to get.

There is a chronic shortage of staff and a substantial loss of care home beds, and care increasingly is being rationed. These are the hallmarks of a Government who have neglected the care system. Last year the King's Fund report "Future Imperfect" warned the Government of the increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff, with vacancy rates in excess of 20 per cent. and turnover rates in excess of 16 per cent. It is no wonder that some home care agencies have hit crisis point and have gone out of business.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Before my hon. Friend leaves the causes of bed blocking and the subject of social services departments, does he agree that there has been a gross neglect of district nursing services by all health authorities in recent years? District nurses are getting older and unable to cope. People are not going into the profession, because of the pay and conditions. However, they are crucial to relieving bed blocking from hospitals.

Mr. Burstow: District nurses are an essential part of the team that is needed in the community to facilitate appropriate and prompt discharge from hospital. In too many places, as my hon. Friend has rightly said, they are not there in the numbers needed to do the job.

Added to that is the issue of the new standards for domiciliary care and the fact that a high proportion of home care workers are not far off retirement. As a result, things are set to get worse before they get better in that sector. The same difficulties beset the care home sector.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): My hon. Friend is being extremely generous in giving way. Before he leaves the subject of the domiciliary sector, is there not now a real problem in recruiting domiciliary assistants not only in the public sector, but in the private and voluntary sectors? Is it not the case that the standard spending assessment for personal social services across the country fails to deal adequately with that problem this year, which means that the situation can only get worse?

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend is right, and I wish to refer to the social services SSAs in due course.

I was about to say that the same difficulties beset the care homes sector. The Association of Residential Care said recently:

> "With some supermarkets offering £8 per hour to stock shelves overnight it is hard to attract staff to a complex and often stressful job for much less money. In some parts of the country the only people applying for vacancies are those that Mcdonald's and Tesco have already rejected."

It is a frightening thought that our care homes are so dependent on the rejects from McDonald's.

Staff shortages are no excuse for a minority of care homes that resort to the restraint and chemical management of residents instead of offering decent care. The Local Government Association has warned the Government about staff shortages: in particular, the vacancies of about 10 per cent. in management posts which have led to a cycle of heavy workloads, low morale, long hours and high staff turnover.

Care staff are voting with their feet. As many as one in five care staff, social services staff and others are actively seeking new jobs. No wonder two out of three social services departments are reporting recruitment difficulties. We are faced with the real prospect of importing staff from abroad, only to export elderly people to the continent to be cared for.

In the care homes sector, there is no escaping the fact that a combination of falling incomes and rising costs has resulted in a substantial loss of beds. In the last three years alone, 35,000 beds have been lost and the number of new registrations has dropped dramatically.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): If the hon. Gentleman feels so strongly on this point, can he explain why, during its eight years of running East Sussex county

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

council, his own party came consistently bottom of the national league table for the rates it paid to care home owners?

Mr. Burstow: Probably for the same reason I gave to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner): the council in question was not properly funded in terms of social services. Yet again the hon. Gentleman plays into the hands of the Government by dividing councils and accusing them of failing to deliver, when in fact they have not been given the resources to do the job in the first place.

As a result, care home fees have been driven down so far that we are in a situation where it is impossible to be certain that continuity of provision can be maintained. With figures as low as £225 per week for residential care and £336 for nursing care, how are owners supposed to comply with the new standards, let alone staff their homes and care for the residents?

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I have some sympathy with the points that the hon. Gentleman is making. But how does he reconcile the difficulty that he describes, of new care standards—which he criticises—and of staff whom he describes as McDonald's rejects? Surely if we want the right staff in place, we must have the standards to encourage them.

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that standards must be appropriate and that there is a need for extra training. But training is not cost free; it requires money. The problem is that the Government have not recognised that and they appear to be in denial when it comes to the extra costs that are a consequence of compliance with the standards. That is where the problem lies and that is why we are bringing the matter to the House tonight.

On issues of funding, we see that private payers and so-called preserved rights residents are subsidising the shortfalls in state-paid fees. In the case of preserved rights residents, this was in excess of £50 million last year alone. Charities that run care homes are using as much as £185 million of their own funds to plug the gap in state funding for care. That is 19 per cent. up on last year and it is still rising. Money given by the public for charitable purposes is used to prop up state-funded care that is inadequate because it is not properly funded.

On top of that funding shortfall and the staffing crisis in care homes, care homes are also faced with the new care standards coming in this April. Higher standards will mean fewer residents and even less income. Try selling that to a bank manager: "We want to make adaptations and changes to our care home and we need extra capital to pay for that. But we will have less income once we have made the changes". I do not see many bank managers signing up to that.

It is no wonder that, faced with mounting difficulties, care homes are often realising a better rate of return on their capital by selling the property. The victims of this are the frail and vulnerable elderly who are forced to pack their bags and move to another home. The trauma can and does kill. Despite mounting evidence of the extra costs of complying with the new standards, Ministers seem to remain in denial.

Earlier today I was briefed by Leonard Cheshire Homes, which had done some calculations on the costs of complying with the standards for young adults. It found that the weekly cost per resident in one of its homes for disabled adults will rise from £680 to £1,092, a 62 per cent. increase to comply with the training and other standards laid out by the Government. In addition it has estimated that it will need to find an extra 237 nurses to deliver the standards. Where are 237 extra nurses coming from? The NHS? I do not think so. The Government need to spell out where the extra resources are coming from.

Home care fares no better. Under the Government, there has been a 19 per cent. reduction in the number of people receiving home care—93,000 fewer people a year receiving home care in just four years. The Government amendment says that more people are living independently. Perhaps that is what it means—93,000 extra people not being supported in their own homes.

The rules have been rewritten so that only the most frail and dependent are looked after and the rest have to fend for themselves. To make money stretch a little further, care is increasingly being rationed. It is being rationed by denying help to those with moderate care needs or with a carer at home. It is being rationed for those who have high care needs by having them wait in hospital beds or, more likely, having them wait unseen in their own home. It is also being rationed by setting limits either on how much the council is prepared to pay or on the quantity or quality of care to be provided.

According to the LGA, six out of 10 councils have tightened or proposed to tighten the way in which they ration care, as a way of controlling their spending. All we are talking about tonight are things that are not luxuries—help with getting in and out of bed, getting dressed, keeping clean, eating a reasonably balanced diet, having nails cut, using the toilet, having clean laundry, living in a decent environment. We are talking about a person's basic dignity. That is why Liberal Democrats remain committed to the principle that personal care should be free, on the basis of a person's need.

Increasingly, personal care involves services that would have been seen in the past as nursing care, such as changing catheters and dressings, preventing or treating pressure sores and managing medication. That is why Liberal Democrats say that nursing care should be free on the basis of need, not according to who provides it.

The Government's answer to the crisis in the care system is to treat the symptoms and not the causes. The £200 million initiative to tackle bed blocking that was announced last year falls well short of what is needed to tackle the staff shortages, capacity constraints and rationing of the care system that are causing delayed discharges. The £200 million has to be set against a long history of underfunding.

Year by year, the gap between what councils spend and what the Government think needs to be spent on social care has widened. The gap has increased from 3 per cent. in the early 1990s to 8 per cent. in the mid-1990s; in the past three years, it has widened to a gulf of 12 per cent. More than £1 billion has to be found by local councils through council tax to meet statutory duties and respond to yet more Government initiatives and priorities. As a direct consequence, over the past two years three out of four social services departments have overspent their budgets.

How much worse would the problems in the NHS be if councils spent down to the level the Government think is necessary and clamped down on overspending?

Against that backdrop, the absence of any extra cash for social care in this year's local government settlement is mind boggling. Social care has been short-changed to the tune of £113 million in the coming year—money that was pencilled in by Ministers in the spending assessment in 2000, but not actually delivered this year. As a consequence, overspending will continue to rise.

Health and social care are two sides of the same coin: underfund one and the other is undermined. It is for that reason that the Government must undertake a whole system review of funding social care. Such a review must go beyond the Government's sticking-plaster solution of cash to tackle delayed discharges. What is needed is long-term, sustained investment in social care, informed by a realistic assessment of what is needed to deliver real improvements.

Social care is stuck in crisis management mode. Those with less acute needs drop off the queue, only for the vicious circle of lack of support, leading to increased dependency and greater calls on high intensity care, to start all over again. That is a false economy that is doing great harm. The true cost of running the system in that way is measured in two ways—in ministerial failure and in human misery.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Hinchliffe. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: I apologise. I thought that the Minister was holding back.

7.33 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> "welcomes the Government's strategy for modernising social care services through unprecedented real terms increases in resources, which enables and promotes better joint working between the NHS, social services, and the independent care sectors, develops a national framework for standards and quality and ensures a greater emphasis on users and patients in the design and delivery of services; notes that this has led to more independence for older people, fairer funding of long term care, reduced levels of delayed discharge and greater choice for users; and condemns the Liberal Democrats for their obsession with producer interests over those of users and patients and their failure to recognise that investment must be matched by reform."

I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the peroration of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) was so underwhelming that I had not realised that he had finished speaking.

The care system plays a vital role in ensuring that vulnerable people of all ages receive the care that they need, and I should like to start by commending the efforts of those social workers and care staff in both the public and independent sectors who, every day of the week, provide support and opportunity to people in need. Incidentally, those staff will not have been impressed by their description by the hon. Gentleman as rejects from McDonald's. That reference might have been noted outside the House.

Mr. Burstow *rose—*

Jacqui Smith: I hope that the hon. Gentleman intends to withdraw that slur on our care staff.

Mr. Burstow: It was an attributed quotation from an organisation. That is all.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman has not apologised, but he has attempted to pass the buck.

However, it is clear that we can all do more to ensure that the care system provides the right care at the right time and in the right place, that it promotes independence and choice and that it puts the user and the carer at the centre of services.

The hon. Gentleman made much of delayed discharges and we are all agreed that we need to make sure that people do not have to wait in acute hospital beds when they could be better cared for elsewhere. That is, of course, not a new problem and, in fact, the proportion of older people who have to wait while their discharge is arranged has fallen steadily over the past four years. It is true, however, that we need to consider the issue seriously.

A serious consideration of this issue must start with an honest look at the figures. Today we have heard ludicrous claims about the number of people who have their discharge delayed. This evening, the figure went up to 700,000. Throughout the day, the figure has varied by about 200,000, depending on which edition of the press release is being referred to. The hon. Gentleman's calculator may have been red-hot today, but I am afraid that taking a figure from a parliamentary answer and then multiplying it by the number he first thought of might make for good stories, but it does not get us any further in the important task of ensuring that everybody gets the care they need when they need it and where they need it.

Mr. Waterson: We have all learned to disbelieve figures quoted by the Liberal Democrats, but will the Minister comment on the figures published on Friday by Eastbourne district general hospital that show that, despite the extra money that has been invested recently by the Government, the number of beds blocked has risen since June—when it stood at 46—by so much that the acting chief executive said that the hospital had 75 beds blocked and a consistent flow of patients who need them?

Jacqui Smith: I do not have the figures for Eastbourne at my fingertips, but I know that like other areas it will have benefited from the extra investment and will be subject to the targets for reducing delayed discharges. Of course we need to tackle delayed transfers in order to make sure that the whole system works effectively, but I have to point out to hon. Members that, contrary to what the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam suggested, more operations are now being done in the NHS and waiting lists are down.

We know that there is more to be done. That is why, in October, we announced an additional £300 million—not £200 million—during this year and next for councils to work with their health and independent sector partners to tackle the delays and the causes of delay.

Richard Younger-Ross: The Minister mentioned a figure of £300 million, but the directors of social services

[Richard Younger-Ross]

estimate that £1 billion is required. What will fill the gap between the £300 million that the Government are providing and the £1 billion that the experts in the field say that they need?

Jacqui Smith: That is not the first example, and I am sure that it will not be the last, of the Liberal Democrats calling for more money regardless of how we change the system. I will say more about the extra resources that the Government are putting in to personal social services over and above the £300 million, but the point remains that we have been willing to invest that sum in order to ensure that we can tackle delays.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Is the £300 million intended to deal only with delayed discharges from hospitals or also with delayed admissions from the community?

Jacqui Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention and I know of the good work that he has done in Birmingham on the problem of delayed discharges. As I will explain later, the investment in social services, and that £300 million in particular, has to deal with all the problems in the system, including funding projects that will ensure that people do not end up having to go into hospital, perhaps by providing better support in their homes, as well as ensuring that we have the capacity and the necessary services to get them out of hospital in a timely manner.

Mr. Heath: Everything that the Minister says shows that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) is right to say that the Government are in denial. For example, is it not the fact that in Somerset the extra money that has been provided to deal with bed blocking is almost exactly matched by reductions in grants for other parts of social services? That means that no improvement is possible.

Jacqui Smith: No, it does not mean that, as I shall explain later. I monitor carefully the figures for delayed discharges and can assure hon. Members not only that the trend is down but that since last September there are fewer blocked beds and fewer people wait more than 28 days. The investment and the new services that it has brought are working, and the health service and its social care partners deserve congratulations on the progress that is being made.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam made some points about care home capacity. The Government are well aware of those issues. Once again, however, the truth has been misrepresented. Figures show that the loss of beds during the past few years is nowhere near as high as the figure of 35,000 cited today, or the figure of 50,000 that has often been cited. Indeed, residential care and nursing home capacity is roughly the same today as it was four years ago.

It is nonsense to consider closures in isolation. Laing and Buisson's figures, for example, show that more than 33,500 beds were created between 1996–97 and 2000 as a result of new registrations. The net loss of care home beds during that period, according to Laing and Buisson, which has no axe to grind in the matter, was about 19,000. To claim a higher figure is both mischievous and misleading. After this debate, I hope that figure will not be used again.

What must we do to maintain that capacity and to ensure that standards are what we would expect for our constituents who use those services?

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I am listening to the Minister's comments with interest, but let us put the dispute over the historical figures to one side for a moment. When I visit care homes in my constituency, I am told that the wholly erroneous standards specified in the Care Standards Act 2000 are forcing them to make real decisions about the future. They have to decide whether they can afford to make those so-called improvements even though their homes already function perfectly. The owners are all drawing up plans to sell their large old houses for flats. What impact will the Act have on the number of future places in homes? Has the Minister made an assessment?

Jacqui Smith: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. We are witnessing a certain amount of confusion among Liberal Democrats this evening—certainly as regards their historical position. The hon. Lady seems to be suggesting that we should oppose the whole idea of setting up national standards, while the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam supported it. I take the impact of standards extremely seriously, as I shall explain later.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Liberal Democrats seem to be denying the need for care standards to protect elderly people who desperately need them? Is she aware that, when the Government held their widespread consultations on care standards, most care home owners in Lancashire told me that the standards were, by and large, examples of good practice. Those owners were already implementing such standards. If they had a concern, it was about building regulations. The Government responded to that concern by extending the period needed to convert the buildings to the new standards.

Jacqui Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I know that she has a close and good relationship with the care homes in her constituency. I shall talk about care home standards in a moment.

It is also worth pointing out that the Liberal Democrats have turned their fire on domiciliary care. Those services have never been regulated. I am interested to know whether the Liberal Democrat approach is that there should be no regulation of the whole sector that deals with care services provided to people in their own homes.

Mr. Burstow *rose—*

Jacqui Smith: Hopefully, we shall now receive clarification.

Mr. Burstow: I am more than happy to make it clear, as we did throughout the passage of the care standards legislation, that we support the introduction of national minimum standards but, as we pointed out, higher quality comes at a cost. The problem is that the Government are not prepared to write the cheque.

Jacqui Smith: I am glad that I gave the hon. Gentleman the chance to correct the impression that he gave in his original comments.

It is important to remember why national standards are being developed—that relates to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble). The old regulatory system for care homes is riddled with gaps and anomalies. Existing standards for care homes are set and administered in different ways by different authorities, and some homes are not regulated at all. I am sure that hon. Members will have heard—as I have—the complaints of care homes and users about the current inconsistencies.

The introduction of national minimum standards will mean that providers will be clear about the standards that they have to meet, and users and their carers will know what they can expect as a minimum. It is right to provide that protection and assurance for the vulnerable people who use our care system.

Andrew George (St. Ives): The fundamental point is that, although we welcome the introduction both of care standards and of the increase in the minimum wage, there is an increasing mismatch with the money provided to social services. The Minister knows that, next week, I shall be meeting her with a delegation of representatives from health authorities, social services and the independent sector to raise the issue of that increasing gap between the cost of meeting the welcome standards and improvements in the residential sector and the money provided for social services. That problem affects not only Cornwall but many parts of the country. The Minister must address that gap.

Jacqui Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I have lost count of the number of Liberal Democrat demands for extra money but I shall deal with his point.

The way that we implement the standards is crucial. In particular, the focus of the National Care Standards Commission, when it takes over regulation and inspection in April, will be to work with providers to help them to meet national minimum standards. In practice, that means that if standards were not being met in a few respects the commission would note that in its inspection report and would write to the home owner giving reasonable time in which to make the changes.

Of course, the point of national standards is to ensure consistent high standards throughout the country, not to close good homes. That is why, when we heard the results of the consultation, we made changes to the standards, putting off the environmental space standards until 2007 and ensuring that space could be used flexibly. However, I am determined that the standards will be introduced in a way that will safeguard users and maintain good homes. I will be discussing with industry representatives and with the National Care Standards Commission the details of the environmental standards, and how we can ensure that they are introduced in a way that promotes higher standards for users but does not drive high-quality care homes out of business.

Local authorities are rightly responsible for decisions about the fee levels that they pay. It was interesting to hear Liberal Democrat Members speak about the failure of some Liberal Democrat councils to live up to the enthusiasm of their Members of Parliament. However, fee levels should reflect the quality of care that we expect from care homes for our older people. That is why I welcome the fact that local authorities are using funding from the £300 million building capacity grant to buy additional places in care homes.

A number of councils have drawn up new agreements—which include increased funding—with the independent sector, to stabilise the sector and ensure that standards of care are maintained. That will help to ensure that capacity is maintained locally, so that the right range of care services can continue to be provided to older people in the future.

The debate about care goes wider than care homes alone. The Government have also introduced a range of reforms to the long-term care system. Free nursing care in nursing homes was introduced on 1 October, as we had promised. The benefit is felt by more than 42,000 people, who could save as much as £6,000 per year. Councils have had extra money to introduce deferred payments, so that people do not have to sell their homes to go into residential care. Since last March, the value of a property has been disregarded for 12 weeks in the residential care means test, and capital limits have been increased.

It is important to maintain capacity and make the system fairer, but more of the same just will not do if we want to provide real choices and independence for our older people. I am encouraged by the figures that show that 5 per cent. more households were receiving intensive home care packages in 2000 than in 1999. About 1.5 million people now receive care packages of all types in their own homes.

In addition, the national service framework for older people, published in March last year, focuses on raising standards and promoting independence in services for older people.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Is not the Minister concerned that the 5 per cent. more people receiving intensive care packages at home might have come at the expense of the 93,000 fewer people who receive all types of care packages at home? Stealing from one group of vulnerable people to provide for another such group is a cynical tactic, not something of which she should be proud.

Jacqui Smith: I am sure that Liberal Democrat councils around the country will be interested to hear that Liberal Democrat MPs think that they are stealing when they make local decisions about resources. The important point is that local authorities and their health partners are using the extra resources that have been made available to find new and different ways to support old people's independence. That is to be welcomed.

Central to raising standards in the national service framework is the increased development of intermediate care services to provide rehabilitation, to support independence, to prevent people from going into hospital into the first place, and to help them back into their own homes after a spell in hospital. The extra investment in these services has already led to more beds, more places and more people receiving these services.

[Jacqui Smith]

A new advice and information line, Care Direct, went live in the south-west from 1 October, providing advice and information on health, housing, social care and social security issues. These types of services—new services that promote information and independence for older people—will be developed across the country. These and other initiatives already being delivered, totalling £1.4 billion from 2001 to 2004, will support older people more effectively and independently.

Richard Younger-Ross: The Minister is generous in giving way again. She is good at blaming Liberal Democrat councils for what they do or do not do, as if we controlled the world. No party is in overall control of Devon county council, but the leaders of all the four political groups in that county—Liberal Democrat, Conservative, independent and Labour—came to lobby Devon MPs last week. They had but one message: that funding for Devon is inadequate, and that there is insufficient money for the SSA for services for the elderly or for children. Devon's problem is that it cannot deliver enough money to the independent care homes. It recognises that, as do the independent care homes. How can the council improve the care standards—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. An intervention is meant to be brief.

Jacqui Smith: I had started to speak about the extra resources going into local authorities. Some of those extra resources are, rightly, finding their way into new services and into increases in fees.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam called the Government's policies quick fixes, or words to that effect.

Mr. Burstow: Sticking plasters.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman called the policies sticking plasters, but not one of them is a quick fix. The accusation is ironic, coming as it does from Liberal Democrat Members, who think that the only fix is more money, more quickly.

Of course we need to reform the system further: we need new services, new choices and new ways for health, social care and their independent partners to work together. That is why my predecessor established a high-level strategic commissioning group to give greater direction to the commissioning of care services for adults.

The agreement published by the group, which brings together representatives from a variety of organisations, sets out responsibilities and expectations for central Government, local government, the NHS and independent providers. It stresses the need for councils and the independent sector to enter into long-term agreements on placing people into care homes or giving them other forms of support. It will lead to improvements in the commissioning of services and therefore more choice and security for older people.

The Government have broken down the legislative barriers that prevented health and social services from working together, so that services are now beginning to be designed around what older people actually need and want rather than what fits administrative boundaries. We need to see even more of that type of working. Of course, that needs more investment and resources and, yes, social services have been underfunded. That is why the Government have increased social services funding by more than 20 per cent. in real terms since 1996–97—an average annual real terms increase of 3.2 per cent.

Incidentally, before we hear from the Conservative Opposition spokesman, I should say that that increase stands in contrast to an average annual real-terms increase of 0.1 per cent. in the last five years of the previous Government and no promise to match our social services spending at the last election.

Mr. Burstow: Perhaps we can have a quick reality check. Will the Minister confirm that the gap between what the Government say social services need to spend and what they actually spend amounts to £1 billion—a 12 per cent. difference? That is the reality, is it not?

Jacqui Smith: We are working with the Local Government Association to ensure that, as I have said, we continue to put extra resources into social services. In fact, the gap has narrowed in the past year. We are working to attract more staff through a recruitment campaign that we launched last year, and it has already attracted at least 14,000 responses. We are investing in training support to ensure that our care workers have the skills that they need.

Today, Liberal Democrat Members have been big on calls for more money and short on vision or ideas for reform. The Tories will be big on complaint and low on investment. What people will get from a Labour Government is more investment, higher standards, more services, more choice, more independence and more hope for the most vulnerable people in our society. I commend the amendment to the House.

7.57 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I certainly welcome this debate, but I must say that listening to the increasingly bitter exchanges between the Minister and the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), I began to feel that I was intruding on private grief—it seems that the love affair between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats is well and truly over if the early stages of the debate are anything to go by. It is amazing to think, Madam Deputy Speaker—and even you can think about it—that there was a great cosy love affair only 18 months ago. Lord Ashdown, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) were all involved in a Cabinet Sub-Committee—the first time that that has happened since the time of Lloyd George. Tonight, we can well and truly see that that love affair is over. The bitterness of both sides is more than apparent, given the way they were at each other's throat.

Just yesterday, it was widely reported that the elderly in Britain are being penalised by the NHS because of widespread health care bias and discrimination. Although that is deeply alarming, such discrimination is not a wholly new revelation. Indeed, such prejudice towards the elderly has increasingly manifested itself in another aspect of Government policy since 1997—long-term care for the elderly. Between 1998 and 2001, the number of general nursing homes in England fell by 13 per cent. During that relatively short period, nearly 22,000 nursing homes beds were lost and about the same number of hospital patients had their discharges delayed because there were no places available to look after them properly in the community.

Less than one year ago, there were 525,900 places in residential settings for long-stay care for elderly and physically disabled people across all sectors.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am a little concerned by the fact that the debate seems to be concentrating on beds when community care should be about preventing people needing beds. How do countries such as Denmark, with a similar proportion of elderly and very elderly people, manage without any care homes whatever?

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue concerning domiciliary care, and I will refer to it in my speech. The simple answer to his question is that the debate has revolved around beds because it is about the crisis in care. Unfortunately, the Government's record on what has happened to the number of beds over the past few years has helped to contribute significantly to the crisis. That is why the issue will be an integral part of the debate. I know that the Government do not like to hear bad news or, in many cases, the truth when it is unpalatable, but they will have to listen to it this evening without the fantasy, the spin or the denial of Ministers.

Mrs. Humble *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Turner *rose—*

Mr. Burns: I will give way when I have made some progress.

As I was saying, less than one year ago there were 525,900 places in residential settings for long-term care for the elderly and for physically disabled people across all sectors. That is a drop in capacity of almost 50,000 places since 1996–97. Indeed, 760 care homes were closed in 1999 alone, resulting in the loss of more than 15,000 beds. In anyone's mind—except that of the Minister, who does not seem to think that it is happening—that is an extremely alarming situation.

I do not know about the Minister's constituency, but in mine two care homes have closed in the past 12 months. I suspect that most hon. Members—certainly those on the Opposition Benches —will probably have experienced the same tragic situation. For some reason, it is not obvious to Ministers, who want to perpetuate the myth that everything is fine and that any fact or statistic that suggests otherwise is not true.

Mrs. Humble: I remind the hon. Gentleman that his Government introduced the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. When the then Secretary of State for Health announced its introduction, he agreed with Sir Roy Griffiths who had been commissioned by the then Government to produce a report, and who said that 25 per cent. of care home beds would be lost as a result of that legislation because it was deliberately designed to move people out of residential care and into a home care setting.

Mr. Burns: The hon. Lady must understand that one of the fundamental principles of community care was to examine where it was possible to allow people to remain in the familiarity and security of their own homes with domiciliary care packages. If there were a static population, that would lead to the loss of some beds because they would not be needed. The hon. Lady is talking about what happened 10 or 11 years ago and the elderly population has increased significantly since then. For a variety of clinical and funding reasons, many people have not been to able to remain in their homes. In recent years, care homes have closed and beds have been lost not because there is no demand for them, but because it is not viable for a variety of reasons—some financial and some bureaucratic and administrative—for them to be retained.

The other problem is that the closure of homes is not taking place where there is spare capacity. More often that not, it is happening in the south-east, the south-west and the eastern region, where there is the greatest demand, and that creates a greater problem. The situation is critical. A survey in May 2001 showed that more than 70,000 pensioners were forced to sell their homes in 1999 to pay for the cost of residential nursing care. That represented a near doubling of the 40,000 pensioners in the same circumstances when a similar survey was carried out in 1995.

Even more worrying is the survey of 104 councils which showed that

> "potentially more than a quarter of a million"

pensioners have been forced to sell their homes to pay for care costs since Labour came to power. Is that what Labour meant when it claimed that things can only get better? That is not how most elderly people who have gone through that tragic process or who are fearful that it might happen to them would define getting better.

Mr. Burstow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: I want to make some progress first.

The Government have failed to address the problem for far too long. The average age of this country's population is increasing. Some demographic projections indicate that the provision of nursing home beds needs to expand by around 65 per cent. by 2031 if the population is to be adequately cared for. Yet with the number of beds falling, an even greater expansion—possibly as much as 100 per cent. over the next 30 years—will be needed to meet the target.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No, I am going to make progress.

The Government can continue to spin the situation, to fiddle the figures and to call it what they like, but the stark fact is that there is a crisis in long-term care. They may refuse to recognise that, but Opposition Members are not the only people who live in the real world and understand what is going on. Frank Ursell, the chief executive of the Registered Nursing Home Association, has commented:

> "The Government can rightly be accused of fiddling while a vitally important part of the health care sector declines before its very eyes. Inaction by the Government, coupled with chronic underfunding of services for older people, could mean that there will be insufficient long-term beds available in the years ahead."

[Mr. Burns]

The National Assistance Act 1948 is long out of date. Fortunately, the provision and the policy of caring for old people has moved on from the undignified and sole-destroying placement of the elderly in long-stay hospitals, where they had little comfort and little self-respect or dignity. That has gone, and I suspect that no one would object to that.

We have to ensure that community care is developed—I strongly support this policy—so that it provides the back-up and the freedom from fear that the elderly deserve in the 21st century. I am afraid that despite some welcome strides forward, such as the raising of standards, more has to be done to address the problem. The knock-on effect of the loss of nursing homes and beds is causing a critical problem with delayed discharge, or bed blocking. A vicious circle is emerging. The increasing number of residential home closures has led to further delays in discharging older people from acute hospital wards. Not only does that prevent them from leaving hospital, but it lengthens the waiting times for patients who want hospital treatment.

The situation is ridiculous. On 9 October last year, the Government claimed that approximately 6,000 beds were blocked by patients who were well enough to be discharged. On 15 October, the *Daily Mail* revealed that the real number of delayed discharges was 100 times higher. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says, "It's wrong." It is not. I am worried that a Minister can sit there and, almost ostrich-like, blind herself to the reality of what is going on in the real world.

Although the Minister says that the article was wrong, after the *Daily Mail* had pointed out that the Government's figures were wrong, the Government admitted that they were wrong: they had referred only to those beds blocked in NHS hospitals on any one day, leaving out the other 364 days in the year. There is no point in the Minister repeating like a parrot, "It's wrong." It is not wrong. The *Daily Mail* also revealed that Department of Health statistics showed that over the course of the year, there were more than 680,000 elderly bed blockers. The Government insult the country by systematically refusing to accept what is happening. How are we to believe Ministers if whenever they are given information they do not like, they say it is not true?

Last year in inner London, 11 per cent. of acute beds were blocked. In December, in response to a written question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), the Minister acknowledged that 36 per cent. of patients subject to delayed discharge were delayed in hospital for more than 28 days. That equates to almost 245,000 patients. How many patients could have received acute treatment had those beds been available and not blocked by people who had nothing wrong with them but had nowhere else to go?

The Government's policy and the knock-on effect of delayed discharge is having a profound effect throughout health care provision. Insufficient care facilities in the community mean that elderly people are being kept inappropriately in hospital, which in turn prevents those who need hospital treatment getting a bed.

We recognise that hospital is not always the most appropriate environment in which to care for elderly people. Wards tend to be noisy and overcrowded, with individuals afforded little privacy. The Government have failed to meet their deadline for ending the use of mixed-sex wards. Even more disturbing is the high risk of elderly people in hospital acquiring infections: almost one in 10 of all hospital patients contract an infection during their stay

Although I welcome last October's announcement by the Government that they would release £300 million over two years to tackle delayed discharge, I agree with Sheila Scott of the National Care Homes Association, who described the sum as a "sticking plaster". With 680,000 bed blockers last year, 1,000 extra beds will do little to alleviate the problem that the money is intended to tackle. The vicious circle will continue to revolve until the problem of bed blocking and delayed discharge is brought under control. In the meantime, all care suffers. Under new Labour, we have been put in the ridiculous position whereby one is put on a waiting list both to get into hospital and to get out of hospital.

The Government have failed on another key aspect of health care: free nursing care. Before the last general election—under new Labour, these things always happen just before a general election—the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State promised that there would be free nursing care in England as soon as its introduction was viable. Since then, the implementation of the policy from 1 October has not lived up to the expectations raised by that promise.

Many people feel betrayed because they took the Government's words at face value and believed that everyone would receive free nursing care. They failed to realise that it was the Government who would define nursing care and personal care. Now, a significant number of people who thought they would be entitled to receive free nursing care have been told that they will not get it, because the care they need has been categorised as personal care. Some sufferers from Alzheimer's disease or dementia, for example, may not receive nursing care because it is judged that their care is personal care, and under the new policy personal care is not paid for by the system.

Mr. Burstow: I seek clarification. Is the hon. Gentleman advancing the view that personal care, like nursing care, should be free? Can he explain why his Front-Bench team, who in opposition took that measure through in the last Parliament, did not pick it up and did not deal with the complications of the Government's free nursing care scheme?

Mr. Burns: We fully support the provision of free nursing care, as we did before the last general election.

Dr. Evan Harris: Not personal care?

Mr. Burns: No, free nursing care. Like the Government, we also said at the last general election that we would not give a commitment to free personal care. We fought the last election on that policy, and so did the Government. I know the Liberal Democrats had a different view, but I am stating the policy on which we fought the last general election.

Far too many people feel that they have been let down over the free nursing care promise, which has not lived up to expectations. The Government wring their hands and will not accept evidence that any constituency MP is more than familiar with, especially if they live in the south-west, the south-east or the eastern region. They see homes closing down and being sold off for other endeavours. Homes are under tremendous financial, bureaucratic and administrative pressures. They are desperately trying to provide the highest standards of care for their residents."

We all support the idea of more provision of domiciliary care for people for whom it is a viable and rational option, so that they can remain in the security and familiarity of their own homes. However, there is a crisis, as the title of the debate on the Order Paper shows. It would be far better for the elderly of this country if the Government recognised the arguments and did more to help alleviate the problem, rather than pretend that it does not exist or that it will merely fade away.

8.17 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I welcome the debate. I shall probably break the consensus that has existed so far. I do not subscribe to the view that the success of community care policies can be evaluated on the basis of the number of beds in private care homes. I worked in the care sector for many years, including in care homes. My mother ended up in a care home, and that was the worst experience of my life. I do not want to end up in a care home. I think that we can do a damn sight better for our elderly people than sticking them in institutional care. As the Minister implied, it is about time that we showed vision and courage by moving in a more radical direction.

I felt depressed when I listened to the criticisms of the Government, which were almost wholly based on the decline in the number of care beds. If community care is working, of course there will be a decline in the number of care beds. Reference has been made to people such as Sheila Scott, the chairman of the National Care Homes Association, and others whom I have known for a long time. I probably know more private care home owners than most hon. Members, and I have never known any who have been poor. Someone somewhere is making money out of the sector. I have not seen them walking away from the private care sector.

I want to explore key areas that have not been touched on so far. I was surprised that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) did not mention the structural problems that have occurred as a result of the split between health and social care since the 1940s, which is a major area. I understood that Liberal Democrat policy was to do something radical about that, but perhaps they have moved away from that position.

Somebody mentioned the National Assistance Act 1948, which set out local government services that were to be means-tested. There was also the National Health Service Act 1946, under which care was to be free. Since then, we have had difficulties in matching up the two parallel systems. In 1974, the Conservative Government moved more elements of local government health care into the health service, complicating matters even further. I worked in social services at that time, so I am aware of the difficulties involved in getting the two elements of the care system to work closely together.

We have talked about the royal commission on long-term care, which was proposed by the Labour party when I was a Front-Bench spokesman on community care policy. I claim no credit for the proposal, because it was the idea of my right hon. Friend the present Home Secretary, who is a good friend. It was right to try to develop a consensus on the direction that the long-term care of the elderly should take. Personally, I believe that the conclusion in the majority report was correct. The split between nursing and social care is unsustainable, and nobody has managed to define the two types of care. At the moment, the definition of nursing care is anything that a nurse does. What absolute nonsense. I think that the definition will be challenged in law; it is impractical and it will not last very long.

My Government have made tremendous progress on community care, and I concur with much of what the Minister has said. I fully and actively support many of the Government's reforms, but I do not believe that we yet have the right policy to tackle the divide between personal and nursing care. We will have to revisit that matter. I would go further and tackle the separate structures for health care and for social care. I do not want to rehearse arguments that I have been making for many years about having a common system delivering health and social care, but until we get that we will have problems.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Gentleman and I have worked together over the years and I know of and share his concern. However, I must enter a caveat. In Northern Ireland, health and social services work together, but we still have the same problems with the availability of beds. We must deal with the financial structures so that one section is not holding back from another.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I have the greatest respect for the hon. Gentleman, whom I have known a long time. He has had a passionate concern about health and social issues for all the years I have known him. Obviously, he knows the Northern Ireland system far better than I do, but I understand that the problems there arise from the fact that although there is one common organisation, there are still separate budgets.

That brings me to my next point, which relates to the figures on delayed discharges which were given to the Health Committee. In October, we were told that 6,000 beds are blocked on any one day. That was the Government's figure. I do not know whether it is correct, but I have not seen a revised figure. We were also told that the cost of an acute bed averaged out at £120,000 a year, so a quick calculation tells us that blocked beds cost £720 million a year.

I would bet my bottom dollar that for a small proportion of that sum, we could have got those people out into the community and cared for them more cheaply, more effectively and, from their point of view, more happily and in a more settled environment if we had a coherent organisation running the whole show. I make a plea for a common health and personal care organisation—a plea that I have been making in the House for the past 15 years. I hope that by the time my career in this place ends, I will have got somewhere on this issue. I look forward to the Minister tackling that point in her winding-up speech; my hon. Friend is really suffering this week.

I turn now to a point that was not dealt with in great detail by the Liberal Democrats. The difference between the marked and welcome increases in NHS funding under

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

this Government and the less positive developments in personal and social services funding is having a serious effect on our ability to unblock beds and tackle difficulties in the community. The Government told the Health Committee that the total gross expenditure on the NHS had increased by 8 per cent. in the last financial year. That is an impressive increase, and I welcome it. The budgeted personal social services expenditure for the same year went up by only 1.4 per cent. That is a big difference, and I am sure that the Minister understands the consequences.

I was reminded of the consequences at my surgery only last Friday night, when a lady came to see me about her mother, an elderly lady who had been in hospital for a hip operation. She was on an orthopaedic ward and was told, to the surprise of her daughter, that she was fit to be discharged into a private care home. The daughter was told that she had to get on with getting her mother out because she was blocking a bed. The daughter felt that her mother ought to be transferred to a geriatric ward or into intermediate care, but she was told that her mother had to go into a private care home.

The daughter obtained a private care home place for her mother. Interestingly, she was told by the ward sister that because her mother had private resources she could fund her care and there was more pressure on her to leave than there would be on someone who would be funded in that care home by the local authority. I do not know whether that is true or not. If after making local investigations I find that that is happening, I may well draw it to the Minister's attention because I will be concerned; I am certain that she will share my concern.

I differ from Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members on the use of the private market. In a week in which the Government have talked about making more use of the private market, it is important to look at the implications of relying on the private market in care provision. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) appeared to accept no responsibility for the current situation in the care home sector. However, he knows full well that his Government decided in 1981 to allow supplementary benefit payments to top up private care home fees. That unpublicised decision led directly to a massive explosion in private institutional care. As a result, huge numbers of nursing homes and care homes sprung up across the country. Mrs. Thatcher believed in stimulating the market; consequently, we are bogged down in the community care system and locked into the kind of debate that we are having tonight in which we worry about the number of beds that we have.

The huge explosion in private institutional care arises directly from the market's involvement. Figures that I obtained from the Library show that, between 1981 when that decision was taken and 1993 when community care changes were introduced, the Conservative Government spent £10 billion subsidising private care homes. How much could a proportion of that money have done to keep people in their own homes? There was money to put people in institutional care, but not to keep them out.

Mr. Burns: Will the hon. Gentleman help me? Is it not the policy of his Government and the Secretary State to use the private sector in the provision of acute health care as well?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am still trying to explore what has happened this week; it has been an interesting experience for one or two of us. I referred to the use of the private sector in care because I fear the consequences of its use in the NHS, as the hon. Gentleman knows full well; he knows my feelings in great detail.

Mr. Drew: Following that point, does my hon. Friend agree that as a result of the Griffiths report the previous Government wrongly decided to demand that 85 per cent. of all moneys be spent in the so-called independent sector? They spoke about a mixed economy of health and social care provision, but it was nothing of the sort.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend is right; that decision pushed people into permanent, expensive institutional care when in many instances they did not need it.

Mr. Waterson: I have not lost the thread of the hon. Gentleman's fascinating argument, which is being followed closely by his own Whips. Will he comment on places such as East Sussex, where well over 90 per cent. of care home beds are provided by the private sector?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I did quite a bit of research while advising the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen on community care for a number of years. In a sense, the problem in East Sussex arises from the use of the market. We found from my research that the market had gone for areas where there were large houses and where, in some but not all cases, there were larger elderly populations. We found that people were being moved out of inner London to places such as Sussex and Surrey, where there were more private care homes. The investment was not in the areas where they were living.

My concern is that the Conservative Government allowed the market to provide what was in the interests of the care home owners, not what was in the interests of the people who ended up having to occupy those homes. The solutions that those people got were not what they wanted. They wanted care in their own homes, or at least near to where they lived. Precisely the opposite happened.

My main concern about the use of the private sector is the way in which it invested in wholly outdated models of institutional care. There was no recognition that most old people do not want to go into a care home. Our country is unique in our reliance on institutional care. In Denmark, which is the obvious example, care homes were made illegal in 1988. Other models of care exist there, because care homes are deemed to be a humiliating form of care.

The models developed by the private sector in this country until recently were based on our old workhouse institution. Some of the care homes are not much better than some of the workhouse institutions of many years ago. I am sad to say that, and I am sorry that there have been attacks on the care standards legislation from the Liberal Democrats. *[Interruption.]* There certainly seemed to be attacks. I shall check the record. I was actively involved in exposing standards in the private care sector, where people were genuinely suffering.

Dr. Evan Harris: When he checks the record, the hon. Gentleman will see that our concerns have been about care standards that have not been funded and are therefore threatened. When he criticises care homes that are doing their best with the resources and staff that they have, he should reflect on the implications for the care home staff. Are they workhouse staff?

Mr. Hinchliffe: Of course not. I am speaking of the model of institutional care, which is a direct consequence of the workhouse system. It is its historical successor, whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not. In 2002, it is about time that we moved away from a system set up in the 1600s. None of us here wants to end up in an institutional setting, but the debate assumes that we all want to end up there and that we all want to see more care home beds. I, for one, do not. I should like to see a gradual reduction in institutional models and a move towards the models that exist in other countries—

Richard Younger-Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No. I have given way enough.

I should like to see a move towards models such as care link schemes and housing with care schemes. There are many in the private sector, as well as in the public and voluntary sectors, where intensive care packages are available so that people are not permanently institutionalised in their old age. The key challenge is to move away from costly, outdated institutional care and to develop alternative models of care within the community. That is what people want and it is about time we delivered it.

I have studied the Liberal Democrat motion. As the Government amendment states, it relates more to the producer interest than to the consumer. The motion refers to the

"loss of homes and beds"

and is rooted in grossly outdated thinking. The Government amendment more accurately reflects my personal concerns and contains some vision of future developments. I am happy to support the Government this evening.

8.33 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am delighted to have the opportunity of taking part in the debate, and I am particularly pleased to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). We all feel for him in his personal voyage of discovery, as he finds out what modern Labour party policy is towards our health care system.

It is breathtaking to witness the sheer opportunism and cynicism of our Liberal Democrat friends in some of the matters that they choose to bring before the House, especially in view of the experience of some of us in East Sussex. For eight long, painful years the Liberal Democrats ran East Sussex county council. As I mentioned in an intervention, in every year they succeeded in hitting the bottom of the national league table as the lowest payers to the private sector of any council in the entire country. Interestingly, Sedgefield council was at the top of the table, but that is another matter. There was a combination of incompetence and political dogma. The Liberal Democrats were getting a bit excited about the remarks of the hon. Member for Wakefield, who speaks with great authority and knowledge on these matters. I do not want to upset him, but I must say that they are philosophically very close on these issues. I am convinced that the attitude of the Liberal Democrats in East Sussex during the eight years to which I have referred was based on dogma and the notion that people should not be able to make a profit out of running private care homes. I am sure that that is what drove their attitude to private care homes in my county. Other people's experiences may differ and I am sure that we will hear more about that.

Richard Younger-Ross: Value for money.

Mr. Waterson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will say that to the people running private care homes in East Sussex—especially those that have gone out of business in recent years.

As I said, several different pressures were faced. First, the area was the worst paid of any in the country. Secondly, there was the dogmatic insistence of the Liberal Democrat-controlled county council on keeping open its county council-operated homes. My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who is gracing the Front Bench, may not remember an Adjournment debate on 19 February 1997 on social services in East Sussex, which I initiated. He was the Minister who responded to the debate, in which I pointed out the disparity between what East Sussex county council was paying the private sector and what it was paying per bed per week for its own homes. At that time, the gap was a staggering £150 a bed a week. He said:

> "When a local authority is complaining that it does not have enough money, I cannot understand how it can justify spending about £152 a person a week extra just by placing them in its own homes."—[*Official Report*, 19 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 898.]

He calculated that the total amount that was being wasted from the social services budget in that way was £5 million.

More recently, in July 1999, I secured a debate on a similar subject. By that time, East Sussex was paying the private sector £209 a week, but it was paying for its own homes the equivalent of £401 a week. That is a difference of almost £200 for every single person in its homes. I am sure that that figure is now even bigger. In those days, it was difficult as a local Member of Parliament—I anticipate the points that the Liberal Democrats might make—to lobby the Government, whether Conservative or Labour, for more resources when the existing ones were being squandered by the county council.

The third factor that has been hitting care homes in my area very hard is the new standards that will be introduced in April this year. In principle, we are all in favour of better standards. It is right that there should be constant pressure to improve standards and make life better for people in care homes throughout the country. We have no problem with that, but the reality on the ground is that many homes have rooms that are the wrong size and do not have the facilities or the area of land that is necessary to expand their resources in the way the rules demand.

The details of the regulations were made available extremely late in the day. We should bear in mind the fact that this is a question not only of care home owners and operators, but of their bankers. For some time, banks that have previously been heavily committed in the care homes sector have stepped back and decided to wait and see how the new regulations impact on their existing and potential customers. That, too, has had a major impact on care homes in my constituency,

[Mr. Waterson]

It is worth considering the figures that were provided in answer to a parliamentary question that my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) tabled on 9 January 2002. The reply stated that in 1999, 48 residential care homes closed in East Sussex alone, and that in 2000 the figure had increased to 69. Five nursing homes closed in 1999 and 10 closed in 2000. Those figures are worrying. A rapidly escalating number of private homes are being forced to close through a combination of the factors that I have outlined.

We could face circumstances similar to those in Australia, where Government neglect over many years meant that the private care sector died, went out of business and had to be reinvented by the Government at vast expense—many billions of dollars—because there was clearly a need for it. East Sussex is not unusual in having such a high proportion—more than 90 per cent.—of care beds provided by the private sector.

More and more of our older people will need such facilities and they will have to rely increasingly on the private sector. As I said, East Sussex county council kept its homes open for several years. Some of them are simply not up to the task in the 21st century. Recently, I revisited such a home, Parker house, in my constituency. It was built in the early to mid-1960s, and its fabric is crumbling. The facilities do not fulfil existing requirements, and will certainly not fulfil the new requirements that come into force in April.

The now Conservative-controlled county council has consulted on whether Parker house should be closed. I do not want to pre-empt the process or suggest that I have any inside knowledge. However, I should be surprised if the consultation did not conclude that the home should be closed. However, in the run-up to the local elections in May, some prominent local Liberal Democrats will be beating their breasts and claiming that closing the home would be outrageous, and that old people would be thrown on the streets. We should tackle such cynicism head on, and I intend to do that. Liberal Democrats would be saying, in effect, that some of our older people should be consigned to third-rate facilities and care. That is a reflection not on the dedicated and caring staff but on facilities that do not meet existing standards, let alone new ones.

Richard Younger-Ross: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the home should close or remain open and be refurbished? Does he have a view?

Mr. Waterson: I thought that I had expressed my view, but I repeat that I suspect that a decision to close the home will have to be made. I surmise that it could be refurbished, but at inordinate expense. If I had a magic wand, I would start again on the site and build something more modern and in tune with the needs of local older people, such as a resource centre that would meet many needs that are currently not satisfied. Again, that is not to due to the staff. I shall be interested to read "Focus" on the issue. I hope that Liberal Democrats are forewarned that their actions will be met with the force of the argument that I have just presented. I am sure that there are similar facilities around the country in which similar arguments apply.

I want briefly to move on to the question of bed blocking, or delayed discharge, as I think it is more fashionable to call it nowadays. I have laid as much blame as I think appropriate at the door of the Liberal Democrats for the chaos in which they left the social services budget, and for their dogma over paying for the private care homes sector. However, the Government cannot escape blame, for two reasons. First, immediately on taking office, they changed the calculation formula for standard spending assessments so that the number of old people resident in East Sussex is no longer properly and fully taken into account by the formula.

Secondly, we have this issue of bed blocking. We keep being told that it is being solved by extra inputs of cash from the Government. At one time, bed blocking seemed to be a phenomenon that occurred in the winter months. Nowadays—at least if Eastbourne district general hospital is anything to go by—it is a phenomenon that starts in the summer and gets worse in the winter. Indeed, it is an all-year-round phenomenon.

The hospital had a major problem with bed blocking before the last election, and—lo and behold—under pressure from myself and others, the Government put in extra cash to tide it over during the election period. Last summer, there was also a major problem. Speaking from memory, I think that 45 beds were blocked in June. That is the equivalent of a couple of wards, if we want to look at it in that way. More recently, the Government have put in some extra funding. But last Friday, the district general hospital commented that the number of blocked beds not only matched but was now rising above the figure for last June, despite the extra funding. The acting chief executive, Glen Douglas, said:

> "Bed blocking is causing a considerable problem at the DGH. We currently have 75 beds blocked and a consistent flow of patients who need them."

I have to tell the Minister that, whatever extra funds the Government have put into this problem, it simply is not working. We still have a major bed blocking problem.

Norman Baker (Lewes): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially as I missed the first few minutes of his speech. I share his concern about bed blocking, which affects my constituency too. Is he aware that the money provided by the Government has been allocated first and foremost to Hastings, despite promises by the county council? One of the reasons the problem of bed blocking in Eastbourne district general hospital has not been solved is that allocation by the county council.

Mr. Waterson: It would have been helpful if the hon. Gentleman had been here for the first hour and 45 minutes of this debate, but it is nice to have his company none the less. I am not in the business of making knockabout party political points, and I would have hoped that he would agree with me that the extra funds that the Government have produced are not doing the job. Whether the money is allocated to Hastings or Eastbourne is neither here nor there, particularly as a merger of the two hospitals is on the cards in any event.

Will the Minister please promise to look again at the situation in Eastbourne? I appreciate that there are hospitals up and down the country that always have a story to tell about a lack of resources, but here we seem to have a genuine problem. I do not know whether the problem is administrative or endemic, or whether the money is not being disbursed properly, as the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) might have been suggesting. Whatever the practical reason for the problem, this extra money is not doing the trick. Far from bringing the figures down, we are heading towards them being twice the level they were at last summer, when they were already severe grounds for concern.

To echo my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), the Government have created a situation in which we still have significant waiting lists not only to get into hospital, but to get out.

8.49 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): The state system for providing medical or social care is crucial and I welcome the Liberal Democrats' choice of topic for this Opposition day debate. However, I was taken aback by the language used by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). I neither recognise the situation that he described nor believe that the elderly or the great majority of my constituents in Stockton would describe the care that they receive in similar terms. They most certainly do not see social services as Cinderella services. They see them as historically underfunded, but they also recognise the professionalism of the staff who run them, so they would object most strongly to the use of such language and the notion that they must wait for someone to die before they get a place.

Let me explain to the Liberal Democrats. We have too many places and too many homes, not insufficient capacity. There is over-provision, so my constituents would find your argument untypical of the situation that they face. It has been said that district nurses are getting older. We have young district nurses. Many are being trained and many are impacting on the community that I represent. Your use of language suggests to me that you are seeking press coverage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady must use the correct parliamentary language.

Ms Taylor: I am appropriately corrected. The language used by the Opposition seems to court press coverage, but it does not reflect reality.

I shall not pepper my speech with statistics—an awful lot of those have been bandied around—because I want to talk about the reality that my constituency faces. Our health and social provision has developed into a health and social services partnership that has been awarded beacon status. It is innovative and it has high standards. There is a clear, professional and qualitative relationship between health and social security professionals. I hope that the Minister has time to acknowledge the value of the partnership's innovative capability. It is one of only five such partnerships to achieve beacon status and I say to Stockton, "Well done." However, I would not say that everything is fine.

The partnership's policies are often innovative and they challenge a culture in which elderly and old people's residences are seen as coincidental. We do not see things that way and it is clear that my authority does not see things that way. I do not suggest to the House that the partnership is working to maximum effect. I am very realistic. I know that it needs time and that more, serious money is required. It needs space to accommodate individual needs, but my realism is appropriate. A dose of realism would stand Opposition Members in good stead.

Inevitably there are problems and some are historical. We do not need to be told what the Conservative Government did for 18 years. We all know what they did. We know that there are demographic problems and that there is an ageing population to accommodate. There are undoubted problems because we are challenging a culture. The remark of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) was so appropriate—the elderly do not always want to go into homes and residences. I talked to elderly people when I worked in Sunderland and I talk to them in Stockton. Often they would choose to stay at home.

I am not saying that there are no problems, because problems are inevitable when we propose change. I am especially conscious of the fact that stand-offs always arise when we change a policy relating to vulnerable people. People say, "We would rather things stay as they are because we are not too sure of the quality that you will provide." We understand that and I am not saying that the partnership in Stockton is achieving all. I simply say that it is innovative, achieving change, responding to higher expectations and delivering better services. It is responding in such a way that individuals feel that they are prized in the community.

A lot more has to be done, but a lot is being done. By speaking about my local authority and its relationship with the Government, I am speaking the truth. I am neither exaggerating nor underestimating the problems and opportunities.

It is difficult to see new policies delivering appropriate services, so it is valuable for all of us to hear the language used by professionals in my constituency on the Government's approach. The language of local policy-makers is invariably positive. Members might say that I would not quote them were it not. They would be wrong. It may be difficult but, as a policy-making Government, we have to face up to the problems as well as the opportunities.

The language used shows that partnership is valuable, as is supporting a fundamental change in culture. Establishing relationships between different professionals that are based on co-operation and support is valuable. Many of us in the House have professional backgrounds, and we are here because we want to deliver a policy or create a new approach. The partnership arrangements lead to co-operation. The days of ambivalence are becoming fewer and there is less indecision about whose responsibility a person is. Although all the problems have certainly not been solved, they are withering on the vine. Health and social needs are being handled holistically by partnerships such as mine, and we are achieving a much higher quality of care and support.

The director of social services for Stockton has said:

> "Labour has done a lot",

adding that local flexibility was liked. The Secretary of State's remarks about freedom for local hospitals and local social services will provide the opportunity to develop services that respond to local needs. Stockton's social services director warmly welcomed that, and believed that it showed that his staff's professionalism was being recognised. The director said that they believed that a relationship of trust was beginning to develop.

[Ms Taylor]

This is not pie in the sky; it is something that we hope to achieve. We have to start somewhere, and my local authority is starting a positive relationship with the Government because the Government have given them the opportunity.

My local authority has adopted a principled approach to helping the health and social needs of the elderly in a care package known as homes for life. There is determination to establish a service that encompasses the needs of all older, vulnerable people within the broader community, and in which the richness of being part of a community remains. The elderly and the vulnerable have rights and they must have easy access to family and friends. Independence must be a fact of life. This well-rounded and well-thought-out policy maintains the individual's connections with the community. It should not require two bus journeys for a family to visit an elderly person, or a difficult journey for an elderly person to visit their family.

There are problems, and it is early days. We are in a period of transition, but at least we are in that period. Homes for life is a clear and principled approach, and a policy that will support independence.

I wish to respond to the arguments about the private care sector and to refute categorically the challenge in the motion that Government policy has mishandled, and misunderstood, the home care sector, causing a loss of homes and beds. In Stockton, we have not lost any beds. I am the first to acknowledge that the relationship between the local authority and the private sector is not always easy, but no beds have been lost. Concern has been expressed about the amount of money that the local authority is prepared to pay for care and support of the elderly, but those concerns are now being resolved. Private owners are saying that that is because the Government have carefully organised the funding of social services in Stockton to allow private owners to pay appropriately. There has been disagreement, but it has been resolved and negotiations have taken place. Therefore, people in Teesside will wonder what on earth the Liberal Democrats have been talking about.

We do not have bed blocking either. We have two elderly people who have to be placed carefully in residential care.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Does the hon. Lady ever read a newspaper?

Ms Taylor: The hon. Gentleman thinks that this is funny. Good for him. The reality is that local people do not laugh about it. They are very grateful. As I was saying we do not have a bed blocking problem, but we have two people who need places. Where is the crisis? From the perspective of my constituency, my council and local private homes, the Government have achieved an innovative care system that is significantly better financed. It has a structure based on a partnership of equals between the public and private sector. It is a service based on the principle that people's individual needs, not profit, come first. It is also accommodating high standards. The local people know that it will take time for all those characteristics to become evident, but they know that we will persist until they do.

There is little evidence in Stockton of shortage of beds or bed blocking. In fact, there is much evidence that our policies are competent and achieving a much better service. There is no crisis. Unfortunately, in tonight's debate, the Liberal Democrats have been playing to the gallery. The language they have used is also used by my Liberal Democrat colleagues—and they are colleagues—on Stockton council. During a council debate, when the homes for life policy was introduced, it was warmly welcomed by the leader of the Liberal Democrats. However, when public opinion began to question the policy and the debate became a little bumpy, the Liberal Democrats immediately decided that a change of mind was the most appropriate response that they could make. I suggest that opportunism is the last thing required when a policy is being developed to respond to the needs of the old, the ill and the vulnerable in our society.

Stockton's approach—"Homes for life, a life in your own home"—is appropriate. That policy came about because the Government have allowed us to innovate and to challenge a culture; they have allowed us to say not only that we want quality, but that independent, individual lives should be accommodated in the social and health care system.

9.5 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): If only the whole country were like Stockton—it sounds like a paradise. I have never thought of Stockton in that way, but I learned much tonight.

The test of a civilised society is surely the way that it cares for its older people. Although I agree with the hon. Members for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) and for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) that we should facilitate independent living wherever possible, it is not appropriate for everybody. Ideally, there will always be a place for residential care in a mix of provision.

At present, the vast majority of people who go into residential care go into the private independent sector, so the state of that sector should be of concern to us all. Despite the paradise in Stockton, that sector is in a state of developing crisis and I shall explain why.

The sector has suffered underfunding for many years. In Norfolk, year-on-year fee increases are below the rate of inflation. Last year, the Labour-Liberal Democrat council budgeted for social services spending of £13 million above the standard spending assessment, but it still overspent by £1 million.

The competing demands faced by social services departments put those departments in an impossible position—for example, as regards their child protection work. In Norfolk, we experienced the awful and desperately sad death of Lauren Wright. Part of the problem is that there are insufficient social workers. I pay tribute to the work they do, but there are not enough of them. Furthermore, there is not enough money to pay for an adequate number as well as providing sufficient funds for the care of elderly people.

In addition to the underfunding in fees from social services, the costs incurred by care homes over the years have continued to rise. They have had to cope with the minimum wage and the introduction of holiday pay. I fully support both those things, but they must be funded. The increases have not been enough to fund those extra costs.

On top of that, there are the new care standards. I repeat the comments already made by my colleagues on the Liberal Democrat Benches. We support national care standards. They are important, but it is essential that they do not act as a straitjacket that makes it impossible for inadequately financed care homes to meet them, with the result that the homes become unviable and have to close.

The effect of all those measures is that a substantial number of homes have already closed—35,000 beds have been lost nationally during the past three years—and there has been a dramatic drop in the number of new registrations. We have also heard about the knock-on effect for the NHS where blocked beds inevitably result in cancelled operations—despite the situation in Stockton—and longer waiting lists.

The homes that are most affected are those that rely on social services-funded residents, so the most disadvantaged residents lose out most as a result of the current inadequate funding. Furthermore, those residents also lose out owing to the problems in the underfunded NHS—problems such as cancelled operations. They are unable to opt out as people with more money are able to do.

Finally, I shall comment on the situation facing care homes for younger adults—residents with learning difficulties. That sector is the real Cinderella service. Recently, I visited an impressive home called Abbottswood lodge, which is situated in Swanton Abbott in north Norfolk. It is highly regarded locally and has received very good reports from social services inspection teams, but staff there are very worried about the impact of the new care standards on the home. They are especially concerned about the limits on the size of units and rooms in the home. They feel that the overly prescriptive approach will have a severe impact on their ability to continue to operate as a care home for younger adults.

The home is wonderful, an old vicarage with delightful grounds. However, the extent of the grounds cannot be taken into account in the prescriptive rules of the new care standards. The introduction of the national care standards requires sensitivity and flexibility.

It is time for some joined-up Government thinking, to quote a new Labour phrase. There needs to be a whole-systems review, so that we can judge the impact on the health service and on the care sector. It is time too that the whole system received proper and sustained funding.

9.11 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I shall be brief, but various points remain to be highlighted.

The problem with the debate is that it is stuck in the past, whereas we should be looking to the future. However, I am not going to live in denial: there are problems in Gloucestershire. Recently, I met care home representatives from my constituency. Homes have closed there for a whole range of reasons, some of which have been noted already.

Yesterday, Lord Sutherland, Baroness Greengross and Ian Philp from the national service framework for older people addressed different meetings. Their various perspectives on the matter allowed hon. Members who attended the meetings to see the good things that are happening, as well as some of the problems with which we are all familiar.

My main aim in this debate is to make it clear that I think the mistakes that have been made are not necessarily the fault of this Government, or even of their predecessors. Although we could do some things better, the problem is that many previous Governments have failed to overcome the barrier between social care and health care. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) made that point very clearly.

The Conservative Government may not have been responsible for that mistake but, as I noted in an intervention, it was made worse by the way in which they tried to reallocate funds to personal social services as a result of the Griffiths report. As a result, the NHS was removed from the equation to too great an extent, and there was a failure to understand that it was not a mixed economy of care.

Moreover, that period saw the beginning of the end of county-led provision, certainly in my county. I believe that that was wrong. There was also a failure to realise the opportunities for the mutual sector. I hope that that matter will be looked at again. There is a role for mutuality in this sector, as it overcomes some of the distrust that people feel for the private sector.

I do not want to belittle the private sector. Some of my friends run care homes, and they are open about the fact that they want to make a profit. However, the private sector is not the only solution. We must give credence to mutuality, which is something from which we could gain considerable benefit.

The debate has already touched on various geographical and historical problems. Interestingly, the latest figures from Laing and Bouisson show that demand has not continued to rise exponentially, but has been capped. Perhaps that is a result of the way the funding mechanism operates, but alternatives are already being sought. Demand may grow as the population increases, but we must take demand into account as well as supply. The problem is not merely one of capacity: we must take account of what people want and where they want to go.

There is also a difference in expenditure. Again, I understand from House of Commons figures, drawing on Laing and Buisson's work, that approximately £9 billion is spent in the residential nursing sector, compared with just over £1 billion in the domiciliary care sector. Is that the right balance? Many hon. Members would argue that it is not, and we need to find a difference balance.

In trying to find some solutions, I would argue that the NHS has already moved too far out of the personal care sector. The NHS is invaluable precisely because it is the most trusted of organisations. Despite its various problems, it has a notion of how to deal with people, and we must ensure that that is carried into the personal care sector.

As I have said before in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall, there are different ways in which we can ensure that people are properly accounted for when they enter the system. In the United States, systems called minimum data sets provide a much better understanding of how people in the system can be moved more effectively. I hope that the Government will consider some of the pilot work that has been done in the Bristol area and try to roll it forward towards a national system. That involves using information technology effectively, but if that can be done people will not be lost but will be funded appropriately and they will feel that they are being listened to much more.

[Mr. David Drew]

Another concept worthy of mention is that of supporting people, which has not been mentioned at all in this debate. It is important because for the first time it genuinely locks housing into social care and health provision. People often want to go home when they leave hospital—they do not want or need to go into the residential or nursing home sector—but perhaps cannot do so for the simple reason that their homes have not been adapted, and we must highlight that problem. I have done a lot of work locally and nationally with Care and Repair, and through other home improvement agencies it can lock into that exciting debate.

A final issue is that of intermediate care. I shall not try to define it here tonight; the Government have much cleverer people than me working on that, but we could consider the way in which the NHS and others can provide the appropriate facilities for older people and the other groups mentioned—the vulnerable people—by pursuing intermediate care.

To give it a quick plug, Standish hospital will no longer be used for acute provision after 2004, so it could be considered for use as an intermediate care centre. In the years to come, I shall write to Ministers to advocate that solution, but that much-loved institution should be considered properly. If such things happen in the NHS, some of the pressure will be taken off the care sector, and we shall ensure that we do not view the solution as lying entirely in private provision. That would be neither fair nor realistic to the private sector; nor would it represent an appropriate use of state resources—people's resources—and we could have a much better system accordingly.

9.18 pm

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I shall be very brief. I am one of those hon. Members who still has not decided which way to vote this evening or, indeed, whether to abstain, but I have found all the contributions extraordinarily interesting and very helpful.

I am delighted that we have been reminded of the importance of care in the community, yet I am pleased that the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) reminded us that care homes are essential. One of my constituent's comments about his father were published in the *Daily Mail*. My constituent said:

> "He spent two weeks in residence and enjoyed it so much that he decided to continue to live there."

So care homes are right for some people.

I welcome the opportunity to expose the enormity of the task that the Government face. I agree with them absolutely that investment alone is not enough unless it is matched by reform, but the enormity remains. If the £300 million investment announced in October is broken down into counties, Worcestershire received £713,000. If all that money had been spent on residential care, it would have been enough to provide less than one extra place a week. I am not criticising the amount, but merely pointing out the enormity of the task.

The cost of care is not met by social services in my county. I would almost like to arrange a visit to Stockton to see how it does that. Care homes in my constituency hope to take large numbers of fee-paying patients because they subsidise those who are paid for by social services.

I shall end my brief contribution with a plea from the chair of the care homes association in Hereford and Worcester that the Minister might have seen. He writes:

> "In 2001/2 Worcestershire receives £53 million in respect of payments for Residential and Nursing Care and Domiciliary Care. However, due to political decisions in the Council Chamber, only £33 million is used for the purpose intended".

Will the Minister investigate that claim? If it is correct and if it applies to other parts of the country, will she take action?

9.21 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I enjoyed the news from God's own county. It is very much a contrast to life in Surrey. My father is 80 and lives in Yorkshire and I have told him. "Don't come south. Stay in Yorkshire." [HON. MEMBERS: "Go to Stockton."] I am not going as far as Stockton.

Many Members have spoken about what is almost crisis management and the problem is not that we resent it if care homes make a profit. Any business can stay in business only if it makes a return on its investment. The cost of living and the price of property is so high in Surrey that investing in care homes involves a bad return on investment. That is the problem.

We still want good-quality care homes and we support high standards in them. However, we recognise the need to fund the provision of that care. Those of us who have constituents who have been bedridden for more than a year as a result of poor care have plenty of reason to desire improvements to the standard of nursing in some care homes.

We are in crisis, but the Minister would be hurt if I did not recognise the contribution that "cash for change" has made to bed blocking in Surrey. Even though, as in other areas, there have been massive queues in accident and emergency departments and even though people have been virtually imprisoned in wards in the Royal Surrey hospital, some improvements have been made. Notwithstanding that, we need ongoing planning so that care homes can plan. Furthermore, we need the money to train and pay care workers to look after people in their homes. Without that funding and without the recognition that counties cannot pay with money that they do not have, we will make no progress.

Some care workers in Surrey work for 10 hours a day, unpaid for some of the time. They do not have enough time in the day to look after people, and that is not good enough. We need to treat people with decency. One of the problems is that there are not enough care workers in Surrey because they cannot afford to live there. However, we cannot bring them in from overseas, as we can nurses, because they are not at national vocational qualification level 3. People advertise throughout the country, but no one responds and we cannot bring people in from elsewhere. Consideration must be given to that point.

We have not touched on care for those who care for others. Although we have considered the revolving-door syndrome and bed blocking, a report commissioned by Help the Aged shows that one third of all carers over the age of 75 provide 50 hours of care a week. Three quarters of older people who live with the person for whom they care receive no regular visits from health or social services. One in 10 older carers who live with the person whom they look after receive home care themselves.

Carers over 75 are more likely to be providing intensive care than those between 60 and 74. By 2031, nearly one in three of the population will be over 60.

We all want people to lead happy and healthier lives, but we have to recognise that we not only have to meet the current crisis but have to plan for the long-term needs of the population. We need long-term, consistent planned growth, based on realistic costs of providing social care of a quality that not only meets Government objectives, but provides plain and common decency for our older people.

9.25 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): The Government amendment implies that all is improving in care for the elderly. The simple truth is that it is not. Every word of the Liberal Democrat motion will ring true with social services departments, the health service and, more important, users of the services and their carers up and down the land—perhaps with the exception of Stockton.

The Government are not doing enough in the round and the problems start with local government finance. I speak as a past chair of social services in Stockport, where we welcomed many of the social care modernisation reforms demanded by the Government. We are proud of working jointly with the health service and the voluntary sector, and we improved our management and record keeping. Basically, we did our best and the social services department in Stockport continues to do its best against both a backdrop of structural problems associated with local government funding of social services departments and a general backdrop of underfunding of local authorities in many parts of the country.

I wish to explore two issues. The first is the structural problem caused in budgets by the chronic underfunding of children's services. In Stockport, crude standard spending assessment measures do not reflect the levels of need of children within our community. The knock-on effect of meeting the needs of children's services is to steal money from older people's services, with the resultant increases in gatekeeping. That reduces social services departments' ability to provide the right service at the right time for the elderly. All too often, money has to be spent on firefighting instead of ensuring a dignified and supported older age for the infirm. The lack of funding in older people's services leads to bed blocking and to entry to residential care, two outcomes that the vast majority of older people and their carers do not want.

The second issue that I wish to explore is the shortsighted way in which the Government tackle the problems. By the time someone becomes infirm, it is almost too late to engage in issues to do with lifestyle and diet. All the evidence indicates that as our young people get older, their sedentary lifestyle and poor diet, which we know is causing obesity, will lead to greater dependency when they reach an older age. The Government are engaged in pilot schemes such as the school fruits initiative, but they need to do much more to counteract the insidious effect of junk food and drinks machines in school corridors and sports centres throughout the country. Young people used to engage in more vigorous activity in schools, and more needs to be done to establish a better balance between activity and academic work in their lives.

In addition, more attention needs to be paid to the difference that local authority leisure services can make. France, for example, spends eight times as much on sport per head as we do. Leisure services are also often starved of cash because of the needs of other departments, like social services, that are busy firefighting.

I am disappointed that four and a half years on, a Government with a big majority have not come up with proposals to replace the discredited local government finance system. Until they do, SSAs will continue to fail to meet people's needs and the improvements demanded by the Government cannot be implemented.

9.29 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): We have had a good debate, started by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), who stated the position clearly and backed up his remarks with evidence. It is important to provide data as well as solutions to the problems we see.

Using House of Commons Library figures derived from Government answers, my hon. Friend demonstrated that there are bottlenecks and delays in the health service. In the last year, 1,400 years of elderly people's time has been spent waiting to get out of hospital. The Minister may dispute those figures—perhaps she thinks it is only 1,300 years. However, the facts are clear and the Government must acknowledge them before they can claim that they are starting to solve the problem.

My hon. Friend demonstrated the loss of beds and homes in the care sector. He pointed out the cash shortages affecting many social services authorities, leading to a macabre game of musical beds wherein people who require funding can be placed only when one or more care home residents who are funded die. What a sad game to which to subject the elderly people of this country.

My hon. Friend further demonstrated the diminishing eligibility criteria caused by cash shortages, which lead to ever fewer people qualifying for any help from social services, as well as the staff shortages, vacancies and high turnover. Sensibly, he called for a review of the social care sector. In a thoughtful contribution, the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) pointed out how much thinking is needed in that respect. An independent review of how to get best practice across the country, new thinking and the funding required is long overdue.

Not only have the Liberal Democrats come up with that proposal, but we are prepared to state that we would put in extra investment and to say where that funding would come from. We have talked about extra investment to tackle delayed discharges. According to figures given by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, tackling delayed discharges in one year would release £720 million. In addition, we would free councils to raise revenues, as voters elected them to, to meet the needs of local people.

Unlike the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats said at the last election that we would be prepared to increase taxation, including setting a new top rate of 50p in the pound for incomes exceeding £100,000. According to Government figures, that would yield an additional £3.7 billion to spend on elderly people, including those in health care settings.

Ministers may disagree with asking better-off people to pay more to help the most vulnerable in society. I think that to do so is wrong, unreasonable and a betrayal of their principles. They cannot deny that we went into the

[Dr. Evan Harris]

election with a costed manifesto to deliver whatever cash the Labour Government had to spend plus £3.7 billion derived from having the courage to ask the better-off to help to protect the most vulnerable people in our society.

Ministers and their yes men and women on the Back Benches should be ashamed of having lacked the courage to say before—not after—the election that taxes would have to rise. They ruled out the only fair way to raise those funds, which is progressive direct taxation rather than stealth taxes. I suspect that many Labour Members wish that their Government's policy was different.

The Minister's response was astonishing, but nothing we have not heard before: "Crisis? What crisis?" She was eloquently and loyally—I hope it is worth it—supported by her hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), who claimed that there was no problem of elderly people requiring earlier discharge or better services. The hon. Lady was prepared to say that there was a "demographic problem" but added that these are the early days of the Labour Government. If these are the early days, lord help those who need help when the Government have got into the swing of things. She said that there were no lost care homes and no problems, and only two elderly people were suffering from delayed discharge. The Government's new policy to modernise the health care system will be to tell people who want to be discharged from hospital to go to Stockton.

By contrast, we heard testimony from my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) about the problems in Norfolk, from my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) about the problems in Stockport, from the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) about the problems in his constituency, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) about the problems that still exist in Surrey. In my own constituency, care homes that had survived years of Tory cuts had to close under a Labour Government, and now there is a shortage of beds and a huge increase in the number of delayed discharges in my local hospital.

It is remarkable that the Government refused to acknowledge those problems. The Minister admitted that there was a need to stabilise the private care home sector. If it needs stabilisation, that implies that there is already a problem. What does stabilisation mean? It means rescuing the situation, and she should admit that her limited funding is designed to do that.

The Minister's response was clever but unfair. She chose to centralise praise for the Government every time new money was announced, but decentralise blame to local councils when underfunding led to cuts in provision. She was supported in her tactic of blaming local councils—a few of them Liberal Democrat, but most of them not—and attacking the Labour-led Local Government Association by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who did not even remain in the Chamber to hear the rebuttal of his weakly put point.

The Minister talked about £300 million to tackle delayed discharge and to stabilise the private care home sector. That is not £300 million a year: it is £100 million in the first year and £200 million in the second. We are used to such double counting, but social services departments despair of it. We do not even know whether that will be recurrent. We certainly know that it is not the £700 million that the independent King's Fund has established is required, and we would provide at least as much by releasing those acute beds, as the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said.

The Minister does not put enough money in, but claims praise for the money that she does provide. She blames hospitals for delayed discharges by naming and shaming them, and by giving them zero rating when they are unable to discharge patients and do not have the capacity to admit others.

Ministers stand at the Dispatch Box and praise staff in the care home sector, but when care homes cannot afford to pay staff adequately they blame the employers. The Minister claimed that 5 per cent. more people receive intensive domiciliary care, and praised the Government for that. She blamed local councils for the fact that 19 per cent.—93,000 people—receive less care. She probably thinks that it is a triumph that people who do not qualify for care under the tightened eligibility criteria are happily living independent lives, but they are heading more quickly towards high-level care because of the failure of early intervention.

The Minister claimed to have tackled the problem through the establishment of the high-level, strategic commissioning group. Bully for her! That group has come up with fantastic ideas such as long-term contracts. Of course long-term contracts are a good idea, but long-term funding to go with them would be helpful.

The contribution of the hon. Member for Wakefield was interesting. At least he accepted that there was a capacity problem. Like us, he accepted that the ideal would be independent living and less institutional care. Although care homes are suitable for some people, we should not assume that they are suitable for everyone.

The hon. Gentleman said that he disapproved, as he has always done, of the structural divide between health and social care: what the Government describe as a Berlin wall, and what my local trust and social services department describe as a Berlin trench, as they are digging to find the funds to fulfil the extra duties imposed on them by Government. We agree with the hon. Gentleman on that point. He accepted that 6,000 people suffer delayed discharge on any one day, and he pointed out that it would save £720 million if that problem were tackled. Again, he agrees with us and our motion.

The hon. Gentleman said that social services were underfunded compared with the health service, and that the real-terms increase in social services was not keeping pace. Again, he agrees with our point of view. He criticised the Government for their non-evidence-based love affair with private sector provision of social care. He supports us in almost everything, but then announces that he will support the Government in the Lobby tonight. Wheels within wheels. If the hon. Gentleman disagrees with the Government but will vote for them when the crunch comes, it is not scrutiny but tribalism. I say with the greatest respect, because the hon. Gentleman is bigger than me, that those who agree with our criticisms ought to follow the logic of their position.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), one of the few Conservative Members in the Chamber tonight, confirmed in an honest speech that his party in opposition is committed to funding only nursing care, not personal care. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Burns: I am not going to change my mind. I shall state my position clearly so that there can be no misunderstanding by Liberal Democrats, because we all know what Liberal Democrats do in our constituencies. I said that, like the Government, the Conservative party fought the last general election on a policy of free nursing care, but we did not have a policy of free residential care.

Dr. Harris: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman repeated his position; I just wish that he had done so a bit more quickly. The hon. Gentleman does not understand, or perhaps he does, that such a policy discriminates against elderly people. It subjects them to the degrading assessment of whether bowel care, catheter care and stoma care is nursing care—that is, a requirement of their health needs—or personal care. What a way to treat elderly people. The Government are saying to them, "If that care need is delivered by a nurse, we'll pay for it, but if it is not, you'll pay for it. Having saved and paid taxes all your life, you will pay for care that you were told would be free from the cradle to the grave."

Dr. Tonge: Does my hon. Friend agree that the policy also discriminates against elderly people who are not only physically but mentally ill?

Dr. Harris: Absolutely. We know that people who suffer from dementia will have a mixture of personal care needs and nursing care needs, and it is degrading, discriminatory and invidious to try to make a distinction between them. We are prepared to say that we would fund personal care, and we have said where the money would come from. I know that there are Labour Members who know, in their heart of hearts, that that is the right policy.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford did us the favour of quoting Liberal Democrat research, the aim of which, as I think he accepts, was to show that people still have to sell their home to fund their personal care even though the Labour party, in opposition, used to claim that that was a scandal. Very little has changed.

The charges that the Minister must answer are clear. Discharges are delayed, beds are blocked and elderly people have to wait to receive suitable care in an unsuitable setting, which means that other elderly people who require that care have to wait to get into a hospital bed. Indeed, in many places, they have to wait in corridors, with the resulting lack of privacy. Who would have thought that five years into a Labour regime we would see wards made up in corridors, with no screens, no privacy and no dignity, and health care staff struggling to provide the care that patients need?

The Government stand charged with presiding over a system in which 19 per cent. fewer people are receiving social care because of the shortage of cash. They stand accused of under-resourcing that threatens the quality standards that Liberal Democrat and Labour Members want to see. The Government are committed to more tax cuts for the better-off at the expense of services for the less well-off. They are denying elderly people the free provision of personal care on the NHS and subjecting them to degrading and invidious assessments. They are overseeing the tightening of eligibility criteria by local councils, which they are making the scapegoats.

We want to hear the Minister accept that there is a problem, that funding as well as reform is needed and that the Government have the courage to say where that funding will come from. We believe that the better-off who have done well under this Government should help to provide care for the vulnerable elderly who are getting a raw deal from the Government.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The Government believe strongly in giving people the right treatment at the right time in the right setting. We have had a wide-ranging debate, but I was particularly disappointed by the contributions of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), who opened the debate, and the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), who closed it for the Liberal Democrats.

There were good contributions in between, but it was extremely disappointing that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam used incredible and unbelievable figures, from which he extrapolated beyond the bounds of comprehension to talk about 5,000 years and 88,000 operations. Where would he get the surgeons to do those 88,000 operations? He was utterly unreasonable and went on to insult care home staff in the most appalling manner that I have witnessed in the Chamber for a long time. To talk about them as rejects from Tesco and McDonald's, when they are putting in time and energy and showing commitment to looking after people in care homes, is dreadful.

I am disappointed that Liberal Democrat Members spoke almost exclusively on behalf of care home providers. That is nothing new. When the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon moved a motion at his party conference last year, he spoke 26 times about doctors, nurses and staff, but only once about patients; they are important, but he spoke about them only once.

Dr. Evan Harris: I know that the hon. Lady follows the Liberal Democrat conference carefully; I just wish that she would take note of the fact that the motion was about staff in the NHS. When we talk about staff in the NHS, we talk about staff, not stabilisers or modernisers.

Ms Blears: When we talk about partnership, we talk about a partnership of staff and patients working together to shape services; that is the difference between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party.

We appreciate that the independent care home sector is facing a number of challenges; we are certainly not in denial about the issue. However, the position is nothing like the one represented by Opposition Members. Let us have a bit of honesty in the debate—it would make a refreshing change for the Liberal Democrats. Figures have been bandied about; the loss of care home places was said to amount to 50,000 beds. It went down to 35,000 beds, but the true figure is 19,000 beds. Those figures are ludicrous. I am glad that Liberal Democrat Members reduced their first figure by about half; perhaps by the end of the debate we shall have the proper figures. They did

[Ms Blears]

not take into account the fact that 33,500 beds were created between 1997 and 2000 by new registrations. They should be clear about the figures that they submitted.

Our policy is to allow people to remain as independent as possible and be supported at home, which is why 1.5 million people are receiving care packages of various types in their own homes. Last September, the number of people receiving intensive home care packages was 3,500 higher than it was the previous year. My hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) spoke imaginatively and creatively—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry, it appears that Liberal Democrat Members do not recognise imagination and creativity when it stares them in the face. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South spoke passionately about the local partnership in her community that is beginning to design facilities around the needs of patients. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield said correctly that we must not judge our success in community care by a simple number-crunching exercise involving the number of beds. We must look at the kind of services that we provide to support people in the community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned, extremely importantly, the role of the mutual sector in drawing up new solutions to those problems. The Secretary of State in his speech yesterday talked about new models of care. The mutual sector has a role to play. I have recently been made aware of a project in St. Helens in which the co-operative movement is looking at providing a range of services—not just residential care, but supported housing with care services in place. When someone begins to become frail, they can get day care; when they are a little more frail, they can get sheltered housing; when they need residential care, they move into that; when they need nursing care, they move into that. They do all of that within the same village community in which their carers and families are involved. That is the kind of new model of care that local people want, and which the Government, with their creativity and imagination, will begin to put in place. The Liberal Democrats have simply spoken about more money for business as usual and the same old system. That simply will not wash.

Solving delayed discharges is important to us and we have made tremendous progress. Since last September there has been a 10 per cent. drop in the national number of delays. We are keen that the figure should fall even further, which is why we announced the investment of £300 million. I am pleased to tell the House that by 6 January 501 beds had been freed across the country.

Richard Younger-Ross: I thank the Minister for graciously giving way. She makes the situation sound rosy, but can she explain the following statement from all 15 local authorities in the south-west, including Labour-run local authorities? They state:

> "Local Authorities are placed in an impossible situation with no recourse other than to hold back spending on older people in order to provide marginally safe and adequate services for children and other adults."

Is that the rosy garden that the Minister is painting?

Ms Blears: I was not painting a rosy picture. I acknowledge that there are problems. The Government are not in denial. We are dealing realistically with problems in the community. If local authorities are taking that position, after they have received extra resources from the cash for change programme, it is outrageous that they are not putting in place services for older people. We will look into the matter.

About 2,500 more people will be able to leave hospital at the appropriate time as a result of the extra funds that we have allocated. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) stressed the need to ensure that that happens in his area. I shall examine the distribution of the allocation of those funds in his area, but I understand that the Conservative-controlled county council there has cut grants to carers, leaving them without respite care. That is a serious matter, which will not help the situation.

Mr. Waterson: Before the hon. Lady hands out brickbats, she should bear in mind that a few short months ago, the Conservatives took over a social services budget in chaos, brought about by the Liberal Democrats. I hope that she will also address the point that I made—that the Government changed the SSA calculation for East Sussex to disadvantage central Government funding for older people.

Ms Blears: If the hon. Gentleman wants to argue with the Liberal Democrats, I shall not intrude.

The agreement last year, "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care", set out a new way of providing long-term care for older people. It envisages long-term partnership, joint commissioning, new forms of service and the development of new models. It will give us the sustainable system that we need. The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) spoke of the need for long-term planning. That is the aim of the agreement.

Several hon. Members mentioned free nursing care. On 1 Oct 2001 we delivered on our commitment to provide free nursing care for everyone in England. Some 42,000 people will save money on their nursing home costs. We are moving away from a means-tested system of nursing care to one based on clinical need.

We have been much maligned for failing to follow the Scottish Executive and offer free personal care to all, but to implement free personal care for everyone in England would cost approximately £1.5 billion a year. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield takes a different view, but we decided in the NHS plan to make £1.4 billion available per annum to improve services and standards for older people. Spending a vast amount of public money on free personal care would not guarantee improvements for older people. We firmly believe that we have targeted resources so that those most in need will receive high-quality care at no cost. It is important to decide the right priorities. It is right for a Labour Government to target funds on those in most need.

Dr. Harris: The Minister defended her refusal to follow up the recommendations of the majority of the long-term care commission by saying that the funding required would have to come from other vulnerable groups. What about the proposal to raise the funding from the better-off in society through fair, progressive, open taxation?

Ms Blears: As usual, the Liberal Democrats want to face both ways at once. One could say that they want to have their cake and eat it. They want to ask the better-off to pay and to implement free personal care that will, in many cases, benefit those who are better off rather than those who are in most need. There is a fundamental contradiction in their policies.

It is all too easy to spread a mood of doom, gloom and crisis. I challenge Opposition Members to do some hard thinking. I know that that is not easy for them. It is much easier merely to complain and sit on the outside carping and criticising than to come up with constructive new ideas. I am asking them to propose new models to put people at the centre of the service and to design facilities around their needs, rather than to force them into ideas and traditional care that can sometimes rob them of their dignity and independence.

This debate has highlighted some very real differences between the Labour Government and the Liberal Democrats. We put patients and the public first; they put providers first. We want creative and imaginative solutions; they want more places in nursing homes. We want to promote people's independence; they want them to be passive. We want a partnership between the national health service, local government, the voluntary sector and the private sector; they simply want to concentrate on care home numbers. We are forward looking; they are stuck in the past. We are creative and positive; they are negative. We are committed to reform; they have the same old ideas.

There is a lot more for us to do, but we are putting in the investment and reforming the services. The two must go hand in hand if we are to deliver the top-quality care to which people are entitled in this day and age. As ever, the Liberal Democrats are guilty of political opportunism of the worst kind. They just want more money, as usual—the same old record—but they do not want any reform; they just want the same old system.

The Tories are just as bad, but they are not even prepared to put the money in. The only thing that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) could find to talk about was age discrimination. I am delighted to tell him that the Government's national service framework addresses for the very first time the rooting out of age discrimination throughout the national health service.

The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) again raised the very sad case of Lauren Wright. I spoke in the Adjournment debate on the case and, as I recall it, the director of social services in the area was honest and open, and recognised that his problems stemmed not from a lack of funding, but from the systems that were in place and the difficulties of joining up the different parts of the care system. The hon. Gentleman needs to be very careful about putting the blame on that individual.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) said that he had not yet made up his mind about how he was going to vote at the end of the debate. He now has precisely two minutes in which to do so, so I hope that he can make the decision fairly soon. It is right that his local council will set its priorities. I am afraid that political decisions are made about priorities—that is what we are all here to do and that is what will happen.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) said that we were in crisis, but then recognised that lots of improvements were being made because of the cash for change money. I do not know whether she thinks that we are in crisis or not. She seemed very confused about that, but I am pleased that she has welcomed the improvements in her area that have resulted from the Government's action.

It is this Labour Government who have the courage to invest in better services and to challenge all our partners in local government, the national health service and the independent sector to work together in new ways to deliver for the people whom we represent. The Liberal Democrats said in their manifesto for last year's general election:

> "Three simple words. Freedom, justice, honesty. These sum up what the Liberal Democrats stand for."

We have certainly seen tonight just what they stand for. Three simple words sum them up: cynicism, confusion and opportunism. I ask the House to reject the motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 60, Noes 314.

Division No. 135] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
John Thurso and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin

Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Sión
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. John Heppell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 301, Noes 60.

Division No. 136] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm

Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Webb, Steve
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
John Thurso and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's strategy for modernising social care services through unprecedented real terms increases in resources, which enables and promotes better joint working between the NHS, social services, and the independent care sectors, develops a national framework for standards and quality and ensures a greater emphasis on users and patients in the design and delivery of services; notes that this has led to more independence for older people, fairer funding of long term care, reduced levels of delayed discharge and greater choice for users; and condemns the Liberal Democrats for their obsession with producer interests over those of users and patients and their failure to recognise that investment must be matched by reform.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is the convention of the House that the official Opposition occupy the Benches above the Opposition Gangway. Liberal Democrat Members are not Members of the official Opposition. As no Members of the official Opposition are in the Chamber at present, it does not matter that Liberal Democrat Members are seated on the Benches that are normally occupied by the official Opposition, but tomorrow Liberal Democrat Members will be in their usual place. They have only a short loan of the Benches in question.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Ordered,

That, following the Order of 20th November 2000, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Frank Cook and Mr. Edward O'Hara be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Following the observations that you made a few moments ago, are we to take it that if the official Opposition do not turn up tomorrow their Benches may be occupied by others?

Mr. Speaker: In this place, we take one day at a time.

Manufacturing (Denton)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

10.26 pm

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful to have the opportunity to debate manufacturing industry in Denton, but I am sad that I have to report the tragic state of that industry in my constituency.

In the past four months, in and around Denton, a substantial number of jobs have been lost. Just across the border, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Heyes), we have lost Celestica—the former ICL company has completely disappeared from the Greater Manchester area. Strachan and Henshaw has closed. A large number of my constituents work at Woodford and Chariton, where there have also been substantial redundancies. Other engineering firms in my constituency face short-time working.

The real blow for the people of Denton—I feel it too—is the decision by Oldham Batteries to close its operation at Crown Point. The company has been in Denton for more than 100 years and it employed more than 1,000 people not so long ago. It is a sad blow that the firm—the largest manufacturing firm in Denton by far—is about to close.

There is a sorry tale of lack of interest from a succession of the people who owned the company. As long as it was a separate enterprise, there was a willingness to invest, but as the company gradually moved—first into the Mirlees Blackstone group, then to the Hawker group and, more recently, to Invensys—there has been a lack of concern for the people of Denton.

It is especially sad that, recently, Invensys has been sending a managing director to Denton for only one day a week to run the plant. How can anyone have a commitment to a local community when they visit it only once a week? That makes it extremely difficult for shop stewards and other people to lobby and argue for more investment in the Denton plant.

We can see in Denton a microcosm of the problems facing the whole UK. We are allowing manufacturing industry in this country to get into a state of terminal decline. Who is to blame? There has been a succession of people in Whitehall—civil servants as well as Ministers from both parties—whose hearts were not in trying to protect and defend manufacturing industry in this country.

I want to examine some of the factors that are crucial for manufacturing industry. The first is the rate of exchange between the pound and the euro. That has worked against manufacturing industry. If we go into the euro system, we must find an exchange rate that is much more favourable to the industry.

It appears that it is much easier for companies to get rid of jobs in Britain than in many EU countries. I have repeatedly been told by shop stewards that employment laws in France and Germany offer workers far greater protection. Because of that, firms with trans-European interests are much less likely to consider reducing employment in those countries, but find Britain a soft touch.

Perhaps shop stewards always make that point, but Oldham Batteries' managing director, Mr. Rowson, said the same thing when he gave the management's point of view. It is high time the Government gave much better protection to people in British industry, and ensured that they were not the soft touch in Europe when it came to getting rid of staff.

We must also consider how the capitalist system works in this country. Shareholders seem to feel little or no concern about whether companies operate as manufacturers or whether the aim is simply to sell off land. When I look around Denton, I am sad to see the numerous examples of how manufacturing industry has been destroyed by companies that can make more money from selling sites than from maintaining manufacturing.

Such companies include Lancaster Carpets and Sainsbury. I am not quite as critical of the toilet seat company called Celmac, which is turning its site over to Morrison supermarkets. It is moving to another location in Tameside, so at least the jobs are being retained, but it is another example of a company that sees that it can make more money from turning a site over to retail than from continuing in manufacturing.

Oldham Batteries wants to sell its site for retail usage, but the company now complains that it might not be able to. That seems a sad reflection on the attitudes of companies and shareholders in this country. They are just as happy to make money from selling land as from providing jobs.

How far should the Government support industry? It is recognised, on the east side of Manchester, that there is a lack of jobs. However, instead of helping industry, the Government devote money to various regeneration packages. That money does not find its way through into encouraging innovation.

I argue that the Government should encourage innovation with regard to batteries. I accept that, since Oldham made the generating batteries for underground haulage in mines and for cap lamps, the industry was likely to contract. However, there has been great opportunity for innovation in the manufacture of electric batteries for cars, for small vehicles used in street cleaning, and so on. The Government should have encouraged innovation much more.

I shall not go on much longer, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne wants to make a few comments. However, I hope that the Government will act quickly to ensure that companies in Britain cannot get rid of their labour force more quickly than firms elsewhere in Europe.

My second plea to the Government is that, if we are to protect manufacturing industry in this country, we must look at the exchange rate. We cannot consider joining the euro at the present rate.

At present, Oldham's work force is working with the local Tameside council to see whether a rescue package can be produced. One possibility is that the manufacture of miners' cap lamp batteries could continue as a small operation in Tameside. I plead with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for at least some help in that regard. It would be much appreciated.

A small number of manufacturers have an attitude different from the one that I have described. For example, the Hyde group that operates in Tameside does not have to worry about making a profit this year and satisfying shareholders in the short term. That is because of the way the shares are held in the company. The group has a

[Andrew Bennett]

record of investing in manufacturing industry in Tameside. The Government should work hard at finding ways to help the group with that, and they should recognise the large amount that it does to help the area.

I spoke to Tony Hodkinson, the managing director of Harvey, which is a part of the Hyde group that wants to make machine tools for the aircraft industry. During September and October it was on short time, but it has the necessary long-term commitment and is trying very hard to fight its way through what in manufacturing terms is a recession. I plead with the Minister to offer some hope to those companies. The Government should realise that some companies are trying to fight the system and keep manufacturing in place, and they should give them some recognition for doing so.

It would be easy for the Chancellor to provide much better allowances for the investment, but the message that I want to get across in this Adjournment debate is that manufacturing industry is in crisis across the country, of which Denton is a microcosm. We cannot go on just with service industries; we need to keep our manufacturing base.

When I was brought up in Greater Manchester, one of the best things that a youngster could do was get an engineering apprenticeship. Over the years, we have destroyed almost all the apprenticeship system because of the decline in manufacturing industry. We now have at least to tell the companies that are trying to do something about that that the Government want to help them, so I have some requests for the Minister. Please let us do something about changing the redundancy regulations in this country, so that we give workers some protection. Let us consider our exchange rate policy, so that it provides manufacturing with some protection. Let us ensure that some help is provided in the Budget to keep manufacturing industry going in this country.

10.36 pm

Mr. David Heyes (Ashton-under-Lyne): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) on securing tonight's debate on this most important matter, which is hardly less important to my constituents than to his. I am pleased to have the opportunity to make what I promise will be a very brief contribution.

My hon. Friend and I are, of course, next-door neighbours, with the larger parts of our constituencies sitting in the borough of Tameside. Many of my constituents travel to work in Denton, and I am sure that many of my hon. Friend's constituents travel to work in Ashton-under-Lyne. That travel-to-work pattern has been made easier in the past year, since the opening of the final section of the Manchester outer ring road. Junction 22 at Hollinwood and junction 23 at Ashton- under-Lyne serve my constituency, and junction 24 serves Denton in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Although that road's completion was 20 years behind schedule, we all had great hopes that improved access to the national road network would give a much-needed boost to efforts to attract industry and employment to our part of the world. In fact, the reverse has been the case. Despite the energetic and persuasive efforts of local partners—I single out for special mention our local authority in Tameside—there has been an exodus of relatively high-tech manufacturing jobs in the past six months. In some cases, those jobs were located just a few yards from the new motorway.

My hon. Friend has spoken of the problems in Denton, and I share his sadness about hundreds of job losses at British Aerospace in Chadderton and Woodford, where many of my constituents and his are employed, and at Siemens in Hollinwood. More than 800 electronics jobs have gone at Celestica—the remnants of the once mighty ICL, which bestrides the boundary between our constituencies. Many other jobs have gone or are currently under threat.

So how are we to explain what has been happening? One thing is certain: in none of those cases should blame be laid at the door of the workers or trade unions. Productivity levels can match those anywhere else in the United Kingdom or western Europe. Our industrial relations climate has been exemplary. Our labour costs, given the highly skilled nature of many of these jobs, are among the keenest. That, coupled with the skill, dedication and experience of many of our locally based managers, has often given us the competitive edge, until recently.

The global economic forces, structural shifts and exchange rate problems that we have witnessed being played out locally, which my hon. Friend has mentioned, are frankly beyond the ability of our constituents or local agencies to control. My hon. Friend has given his explanation for what has gone wrong and his prescription for action to hold the situation and to start to turn it round. I need not repeat that; I simply wholeheartedly endorse what he said. For the benefit of my constituents, as much as his, I join him in requesting that serious attention be given to what has been said in this debate. I know that I can count on the Minister to take on board our plea.

10.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) on securing this debate on manufacturing in Denton and my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Heyes) on his thoughtful contribution.

I wish to express my concern at the loss of the manufacturing facility of any leading company. Manufacturing matters, and it matters to the Government, to the economy, to the people who work in it and to all of us who enjoy its products. It accounts for about a fifth of our national income, with almost £150 billion of output each year. It employs about 4 million directly, and millions more depend on manufacturing for their livelihoods, including 2.5 million people in the service sector. A strong manufacturing sector is the backbone of our economy.

As the Minister responsible for small and medium-sized enterprises, I have visited manufacturers who were pioneers 200 years ago and who are now innovators at the cutting edge of competition. On Monday this week, I visited two leading manufacturers in Cornwall—Precision Audio Products and Allan and Heath—and both are major local employers and leaders not just in the UK but worldwide. They export all over the globe. Many of the components for those companies are foreign sourced so they do not advocate the devaluation that my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish has advocated. However, I recognise that the exchange rate impinges on companies in variable ways.

Manufacturing is led by some of the most innovative businesses that invest heavily in research and development. It drives innovation in the rest of the economy and creates jobs and prosperity. It is the crucible for productivity improvements across the whole economy, through advances in technology, new goods and processes; but most of all through a highly skilled and highly flexible and dedicated work force. In the last four years, we have helped 3,000 businesses, and supported £6 billion of investment and 135,000 jobs—most of them in manufacturing.

Manufacturing is proportionately even more important in some areas of the country, and Denton is one of them. In Tameside as a whole, around one third of the work force are employed in manufacturing, as against a national average of about 17 per cent.

I was very sorry to hear about the announcement made by Hawker Traction UK that the Oldham Batteries site in Denton is to close. No constituency has a more doughty fighter for manufacturing than that of my hon. Friend. Although such decisions are for the companies concerned to make, they are always extremely regrettable and the effects are devastating for staff and their families.

When redundancies are inevitable, we will not walk away. We will do everything that we can to help people to find new jobs and to get new skills. We cannot, sadly, make up for what my hon. Friend described as the lack of interest shown by successive managements. That is a damning indictment of those managements, but I fear that the Government find that the position is difficult to influence or to reverse.

The company has been in contact with the Small Business Service in connection with the present situation, and the service has provided advice for and assistance with the task of identifying alternative employment opportunities for Oldham Batteries staff. In the north-west, helping businesses is a key element of the North West Development Agency's regional strategy. A number of tools are available to the agency and other Government bodies to help them to assist businesses. In 2000-01, 81 offers of regional selective assistance to businesses in the north-west were accepted. That is the largest number of any English region. The total value of the assistance was close to £20 million, and went towards capital investment of almost £158 million. That had the effect of creating 3,267 jobs and safeguarding 2,056 more across the region. At the same time, 93 offers of enterprise grant funding were accepted in the 12 months to March 2001, with a total value of £3 million going towards capital investment of more than £26 million.

We are always seeking to improve the assistance that we give to companies, and we want to have the right toolkit to do that. Our rapid response units have a creditable record in finding new employment for people who are affected by major job losses. The rapid response unit helped to ensure that about 94 per cent. of the work force at Fujitsu in county Durham found new jobs within 12 months. At Siemens in north Tyneside, the Employment Service played a major role in helping about 90 per cent. of the work force to find new employment. Recently, the Government helped Kirpak Ltd., near Wigan, when its plant was threatened with closure. Plans to move production overseas threatened 169 jobs. Following Government assistance, the company invested £10 million and created an extra 116 jobs. The new plant will be officially opened on 1 February this year.

The rapid response service has shown that it can be effective in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish. The Canadian-owned company Celestica announced in September its intention to close its plant in Ashton-under-Lyne, with 570 job losses. By the end of the year, 412 employees had sought the assistance of the Employment Service job shop. Some 243 were referred to job opportunities and 71 were referred for training.

My hon. Friend touched on the comparative costs of making people redundant across Europe. He will know more than most that that is a difficult and complex assessment to make. It is not necessarily cheaper for companies to close down plants and make people redundant in the United Kingdom than it is elsewhere in Europe. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development rates the UK eighth out of 15 for redundancy costs. Many firms here pay above the statutory minimum redundancy compensation.

Individual circumstances of employees in companies that are making redundancies can, of course, cause significant variations in the overall cost of each large-scale redundancy. By comparing Britain, France and Germany, economists at the Department of Trade and Industry found, on average, that while it is cheaper to make workers with only one or two years' service redundant in the UK than it is in France or Germany, if a worker has longer service, the cost of making them redundant in the UK is less than it is in Germany.

Andrew Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the problems is the amount of consultation, in particular the period of notice in which discussions have to take place? As I understand it, the consultation period is substantially longer in both France and Germany.

Nigel Griffiths: I am happy to refer my hon. Friend's concerns to Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions. However, I chaired a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), a trade union, and key representatives of a plant that was threatened with closure. I put it to the management of that company, which was based in the United States, that the local work force believed that it was keeping the German plant open at the expense of the British plant because it was easier to make people redundant in the UK. The management told me that that was not the case and, separately, that the German plant was being closed as well. There is not a uniform position on that, but obviously I will ensure that the DTI considers my hon. Friend's thoughtful points carefully.

It is of course important that we constantly review the Department's business support activities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has announced several important changes to ensure that, in the regions, Government agencies work together to improve the delivery of support to manufacturers and other businesses.

We can no longer compete on labour costs and raw materials alone. With globalisation, low value added goods can be produced more cheaply elsewhere. The challenge for

[Nigel Griffiths]

the UK is to shift focus from competing on cost alone to competing on high skills and high value added products and processes based on quality, innovation and know-how—the very qualities demonstrated in many of the manufacturing plants in the constituencies of my two hon. Friends. Like many British manufacturers, companies in their constituencies are responding positively to the new challenges. A good example in the north-west is that of Bodycote International in Macclesfield in Cheshire. Originally a garment manufacturer, it is now a world leader in heat treatment technology.

The Government are committed to providing high-quality help to people faced with redundancy and to companies facing change. To enable them to overcome the difficulties, we have put in place a combination of mechanisms to encourage inward investment and technological investment in UK companies. At the same time, if companies are not able to keep up or catch up with global competitors, we want to enable the work force to be redeployed to more successful companies, and to retrain if necessary.

Andrew Bennett: Will my hon. Friend consider carefully the possibility of helping people, especially the stewards, who want to keep the manufacture of cap lamp batteries in Denton? Are the Government able to give some help to get their efforts off the ground?

Nigel Griffiths: We are already in touch with the Small Business Service and the Business Links organisation in my hon. Friend's constituency. I am happy to give him an assurance that we will facilitate a meeting with our key business advisers and Employment Service representatives to ensure that every avenue is explored and that all thoughtful and practical suggestions made by my hon. Friend's trade unionist constituents are taken fully into account.

We recognise that the Government have a clear role in helping companies to face the challenges of globalisation, technological change, and the various stages of the business cycle. We are investing £15 million in a new manufacturing advisory service to spread best practice; that will include a centre for manufacturing excellence in every region. The Government are committed to working in partnership with manufacturing and other business sectors, and with employees, to maintain and develop a strong British economy.

We will promote closer links between education and industry, with a view to improving the skills base on offer in all the regions of this country. The Government's policies for delivering stable and steady growth are working, and we shall continue to pursue them as the best means of supporting manufacturing and British industry generally in a global and competitive economy. British manufacturing and business will change, as they must, but we will ensure that they match the best in the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Eleven o'clock.

CORRECTION

Official Report, 15 January 2002: in column 265, Division No. 133, in the Noes, insert Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) and leave out Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East)

House of Commons

Thursday 17 January 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Research and Development

1. **Mr. Mike Hall** (Weaver Vale): What steps she is taking to encourage research and development in UK manufacturing industry. [25545]

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson): We have a range of policies to encourage manufacturing research and development. Recent steps have included the announcement on 26 November by my noble Friend Lord Sainsbury, who has ministerial responsibility for science, of the creation of 12 innovative manufacturing research centres, backed by £60 million of Government cash.

Mr. Hall: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Does he agree that centres of excellence and research facilities are vital to manufacturing in the regions? Will he comment on the Casim project, which is vital to the future of Daresbury laboratory in my constituency and fundamental to securing a key part of the knowledge base of the north-west?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend is right to stress the importance of the two Casim projects. I am happy to give him and the House an update on the fourth generation light source project. The proposals are undergoing peer review to establish the science case, which is due to be completed in March. The business case will be reviewed thereafter. As for the Sirius project, the science case passed peer review last year and the outcome of the business case is due in March.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I wish to highlight the situation at Westland helicopters, where 900 jobs are being lost: 300 in my constituency and 600 in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws). First, will the Minister take on board the need for support for the rapid funding response bid that will be made this week, and follow that up? Secondly, the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) talked about development of manufacturing industry. In Weston-super-Mare, we are going to lose a high-quality manufacturing facility. Will the Minister consider seriously whether he can do anything to avoid that closure? Once we have lost that facility, we will have lost it for ever. I understood that the Government previously made a commitment to keep it going

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is right to stress his concern about Westland, which is an important British company and has been mentioned before in the House on various occasions in the last 10 to 15 years. We shall do everything that we can to help it through its current difficulties. I agree that it is an important manufacturing base that we should strive to keep.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My question is about research and development in the UK aerospace industry. My hon. Friend will know that 46 per cent. of research and development by Rolls-Royce now takes place outside the UK. The commitment of other countries to their aerospace industries is much bigger than that of the UK. Rolls-Royce is a huge employer—in my constituency, it employs 1,200 people—but a third of the work force are being made redundant. It is important that the Government address that to see whether more help can be given to keep research and development in the UK and to tie launch aid to research and development programmes.

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of aerospace and research and development. We have invested £1 billion in launch aid for the aerospace industry, some of which is associated with research and development. I fully accept his point about the importance of research and development in all sectors, particularly aerospace. He knows that we have various projects designed to help the aerospace industry and other industries in that important area.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I recently wrote to the Secretary of State to ask whether she would meet a small delegation to discuss the heavy redundancies announced by BAE Systems, not least in respect of the regional jet division at Woodford on the periphery of my constituency. I deeply regret the decision of her junior, the Minister for Industry and Energy, who has just had a quiet word with her, to decline to meet me because he is too busy—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes, that is exactly what the letter said; he was too busy.

Does the Minister for Employment and the Regions not think that 1,000 redundancies at Woodford, on top of more than 600 redundancies in other parts of BAE Systems, is a serious matter? Considering the limited research and development that this country puts into the aerospace industry, it would be appropriate if the Secretary of State or one of her Ministers met me to discuss the matter at an early date.

Alan Johnson: Of course we will. My right hon. and hon. Friends are pleased to meet any Member to discuss such important issues. There may be some confusion in respect of the hon. Gentleman's point, but we would be delighted to meet him to discuss that important issue, not least because the aerospace industry has suffered in the context that he mentioned and experienced considerable adverse effects after the horrendous events of 11 September.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): Is the Minister aware that in the Treasury report, the north-east appeared at the bottom of the league table for research and development in both the public and the private sectors? If we are to get manufacturing to flourish in the north and move out of a Burger King economy, we need one of those centres of excellence in the north-east. Will he tell us whether we will get one?

Alan Johnson: Yes. My hon. Friend will get a centre of excellence. We have introduced centres of excellence in six regions so far, and we have another six regions to go. That is an important part of our strategy on research and development. I assure him that there will be a centre of excellence in the north-east.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Is the Minister aware that the figures for manufacturing output announced this week show the biggest drop for a decade, and that the Trades Union Congress predicts the loss of another 150,000 jobs in manufacturing this year? Did not the Secretary of State's much-vaunted summit last month send out the message that the Government would continue to sit on their hands and watch manufacturing industry in this country disappear?

Alan Johnson: That accusation is ludicrous. Yes, manufacturing is having a tough time. Around the world, imports have declined across all the economies of the G7 countries. Manufacturing in the US has fallen by about 7.3 per cent. and it has fallen faster and further in Germany than in this country. We cannot insulate ourselves against world events, but the accusation that we are not taking the issue seriously is ludicrous.

It is politic to examine the policies that we have heard from the Opposition about what we should be doing. If we speak to manufacturers, some of them say that there is a problem with the single currency and the weak euro—no help from the Opposition there. Some say that they need more help through regional development agencies, but the Opposition would scrap them. Our approach is to raise the game of British manufacturing industry, improve skills and investment, and introduce projects such as the industry forum. That is the way to help manufacturing and enable it to compete in a difficult global situation.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I hear what my hon. Friend says, and I agree with much of it. However, many of the problems could be put right in other ways. We ought to ensure that grants are made available to non-assisted areas for manufacturers who need to invest in new technology to compete with the rest of the world. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Alan Johnson: I always like to agree with my hon. Friend. Grants are available, and we have assisted many companies. We do not simply sit back, like the previous Government, and leave the issues to market forces. Hon. Members who represent the north-east will remember the help that we have given in respect of ViaSystems, particularly the help directed through the RDAs. We give assistance through enterprise grants and other grants. We are not looking to prop up failing industries, but we are ready to help and advise companies that need it in difficult times.

Mr. Whittingdale: May I pursue the Minister on Government grants? The manufacturing summit resulted in a package worth £20 million, a large part of which will go to the partnership fund, whose major success so far has been to establish an employee forum at Pizza Express. Meanwhile, the climate change levy is costing the engineering sector alone an extra £100 million, even after the cut in national insurance contributions. Was not the general secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union right when he said two weeks after the summit:

> "They're incompetent when it comes to governing. They don't care about manufacturing. The end result is that my members' jobs are going down the plughole and this Government isn't lifting a finger to help"?

Alan Johnson: Once again, that is the wrong analysis of the problems facing manufacturing industry. It does no service to manufacturing to make such comments. According to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), the Tory party is defined more by what it is against than by what it is for, and it is time to stop point scoring. *[Laughter.]* I am only quoting the hon. Member for Buckingham. The problems that manufacturers face were discussed at the manufacturing summit. The £20 million investment is for the partnership fund and the industry forum. The industry forum, which has been introduced into the automotive industry, into the aerospace industry and now into chemicals and other parts of manufacturing, has had huge success. I remind Opposition Members that the TUC and Confederation of British Industry report on productivity, particularly as it pertains to manufacturing industry, is what we are taking forward from the manufacturing summit on 5 December.

Renewable Energy

2. **John Thurso** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): When she last met the energy regulator to discuss renewable energy supplies. [25546]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I met the energy regulator on 15 November, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy met him on 11 December. The matters that we discussed at those meetings included the development of renewable energy supplies.

John Thurso: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that reply. Is she aware of the article in the *Financial Times* of 5 December in which the energy regulator was reported as saying that energy projects such as those in my constituency

> "would represent poor value for money"?

May I draw to her attention the unique combination of circumstances, both climatic and tidal—and including skills such as those available at Dounreay after decommissioning—that make areas such as my constituency extremely good for renewable energy? Will she ensure that it will be Government policy, irrespective of what the regulator says, to continue to support such initiatives in such areas?

Ms Hewitt: I am aware of the press report to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I am also aware that the energy regulator was misrepresented in it. If he cares to read the transcript of Callum McCarthy's appearance at the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, he will find that it does not bear out the press report.

I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's other point. In Scotland, we have some of the best offshore wind, wave and tidal resources in the world. We want to use those resources to deliver cleaner energy to consumers. Callum McCarthy was saying that we need to ensure the right transmission and distribution infrastructure, especially on the west and north coast of Scotland and England, to enable us to use renewable energy sources that are situated at some distance from the main centres of electricity demand. That is what we are seeking to do.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): What guarantees can the Secretary of State give to the House that huge swathes of the beautiful English countryside will not be blighted by these obnoxious looking windmills—noisy instruments that cannot generate enough electricity even to boil a decent kettle? What guarantees will she give that the English countryside will not be ruined by these obnoxious things?

Ms Hewitt: I am sorry that my hon. Friend does not like the appearance of modern windmills. I think that they are rather beautiful. Environmentalists cannot have it both ways. If we are committed to the development of renewable energy, and if we want to meet our Kyoto targets—and, indeed, targets beyond that—and deal with the problem of climate change, then yes, we have to meet the targets that we have set. That means ensuring that 10 per cent. of our electricity comes from renewable energy by 2010—and, frankly, more beyond that. Environmental issues, especially in respect of areas of outstanding natural beauty, are always taken into account when planning decisions are made on the siting of wind farms.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): It is all very well the Secretary of State saying that and telling us how keen she is on renewable energy, but what is she going to do about NETA, the new electricity trading arrangements, which, as she will know, have led to the closure of several small wind farms and other projects, and have caused a reduction of more than 60 per cent. in the production of energy by combined heat and power plants? They are destroying renewable energy projects and not working to increase the amount of renewable energy that is produced.

Ms Hewitt: I am well aware of the concerns that have been expressed about NETA, especially by producers of combined heat and power. Let me stress that, generally speaking, the arrangements have been an enormous success, as we have a much more transparent and efficient pricing system that has brought wholesale electricity prices down by 25 per cent. These are new arrangements and yes, they are causing difficulty, especially for CHP and other small-scale renewables. We are considering that problem and consulting on possible measures to deal with it. We now have a working group that will report to me and my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy by the end of January on how we can overcome those obstacles and ensure that, within the NETA framework, we can still ensure the development of small-scale renewables.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Does my right hon. Friend agree that until there is a critical mass of facilities in the United Kingdom, renewable energy will be considerably more expensive than the traditional, rather dirty and sometimes environmentally unfriendly systems? We must ensure that the attack on fuel poverty continues. She and her colleagues must advise the regulator because the problems with NETA arose in the absence of such advice. The rightly desperate desire to roll out the new system resulted in short-term disadvantage for renewable energy. A balance must be struck, but in the interests of the poor in the first instance.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right about the overriding importance of dealing with the appalling problem of fuel poverty, which stems fundamentally from an outdated and inadequate housing stock. The Government are making huge investments in warmer, energy-efficient homes, which allow people on low incomes to heat their homes better at lower cost. We will maintain that programme. We are also doing a great deal to invest in the development of renewable energy, not least through the renewables obligation.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Job losses have occurred in a small company in my constituency that manufactures hydro-generating equipment. It is one of the few remaining such manufacturers in the United Kingdom. When renewable energy is next examined, may I appeal to the Secretary of State to consider thoroughly the delays in the planning process throughout the United Kingdom? Such delays in approval for projects deny jobs in many constituencies.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We have extended the renewables obligation to include smaller-scale hydro-electricity plants. I hope that that will help to stimulate the growth of such plants and thus of demand for the products made by the manufacturer in his constituency. That is the best way in which to deal with his constituents' problems, with which I have enormous sympathy.

Dominican Republic

3. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If she will make a statement on the role of the Export Credits Guarantee Department in supporting British trade with the Dominican Republic. [25547]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): In the past two years, the Export Credits Guarantee Department has provided more than £50 million in export credit support for British exporters to the Dominican Republic. It has recently made a further £10 million available.

Mr. Edwards: Fairfield-Mabey in my constituency has negotiated a contract for $125 million of work, providing steel road bridges in the Dominican Republic. However, the ECGD is providing only $10 million of cover, whereas the equivalent agency in America is offering much fuller cover. That may mean the loss of jobs and technology to the Americans. Will my hon. Friend discuss increasing the cover with the ECGD to help to keep the jobs in my constituency?

Nigel Griffiths: The Mabey group has already received substantial support of more than £340 million from the

ECGD for eight projects in six countries. More than half the ECGD support in the Dominican Republic has gone to Mabey and it has been offered a further £10 million in that country. Of course we shall continue to work hard to eliminate unfair competition among international export control agencies.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is not it essential for the interests of the taxpayer that the ECGD exercises its scrutiny responsibly and carefully on a case by case basis to ensure that unnecessary exposure does not occur? The Dominican Republic has one of the sounder economies in the Caribbean, with a big tourist trade and reasonable political stability. Will the Government therefore maintain a positive attitude towards British business in the area?

Nigel Griffiths: Of course we will maintain a positive attitude. As I have said, more than £25 million out of £50 million of ECGD support to the Dominican Republic alone has already been made available to the group of companies to which my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) referred. Each case must be examined on its merits.

Postal Services

4. **Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): What steps she has taken to ensure that the universal service provision is adhered to in the UK market for postal services. [25548]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government enshrined the universal service obligation in the Postal Services Act 2000. The Act provides that it is the primary responsibility of the postal regulator—Postcom—to exercise its functions in a manner best calculated to ensure the provision of a universal postal service. It is therefore for Postcom to determine how the universal service obligation is implemented in the interests of consumers.

Mr. Pickthall: Is my hon. Friend confident that, given its recent performance, Consignia is capable of sustaining the universal service obligation? Given that that obligation involves reliable daily deliveries to every household and business in the country, will he use his influence to see that it is extended to the Liverpool postal area?

Mr. Alexander: I appreciate the points that my hon. Friend has made. There have been particular challenges in Liverpool, which is why I was pleased that Lord Sawyer attended the Liverpool sorting office while preparing his report on the Post Office.

Of course Consignia has to do more in terms of providing the quality of service that people are looking for, and we have actively taken steps to strengthen its management. I must re-emphasise the point that the primary obligation of Postcom is to secure the universal service obligation. It is the regulator's prime function to ensure that the service is enjoyed not just in Liverpool but right across the country.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Is it not wholly unrealistic to expect that the universal service obligation, which depends on cross-subsidy within the Post Office, can continue to be maintained when Consignia is making mounting losses because of intensifying competition and industrial disruption? What kind of guarantee can the Minister give that these crucial social service obligations will continue to be provided—by the Government, if necessary—when the Post Office is forced to default on its universal service obligation because of its financial difficulties?

Mr. Alexander: As I said earlier, the primary obligation of the regulator is to secure the universal service obligation. There is no doubt that Consignia faces considerable challenges. Not least as a shareholder, the Government are determined to see the improvement of the company in the months and years to come. That is why we have taken active steps to improve the management. The chairman of Consignia is being appointed at the moment. Allan Leighton has been appointed to the board with particular responsibility for overseeing network issues. A new financial director, Marisa Cassoni, has also been appointed. I am confident that, on the basis of continued application and hard work, not just by the management but by the employees, we shall see the kind of step change in performance that all hon. Members agree is necessary for Consignia.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Is the Minister aware that the regulator is putting thousands of postal workers' jobs at risk by allowing competitors to cherry-pick the most profitable areas of the postal business while restricting Consignia's ability to raise its prices to the levels necessary for it to meet the universal service obligation and to make a profit? Does he agree that this has the potential to plunge the country's postal services into a shambolic mess?

Mr. Alexander: One of the terms of the licence granted to Consignia was to uphold the universal service obligation. It is also important to recognise that liberalisation is coming not only from the Postal Services Act 2000—which was supported by many hon. Members on both sides of the House—but from Europe. There is simply no alternative for Consignia but to improve its performance, and that is why the Government are taking active steps to ensure that that happens.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): What action will the Minister urge on the regulator in the light of Consignia's persistent failure to meet its delivery targets, the scrapping of the second delivery, and the loss of 1 million items of mail a week? Given the already deteriorating postal service in this country, will he take this opportunity to condemn unreservedly the threat of strike action?

Mr. Alexander: Of course, any strike action is to be regretted, not least in a service on which so many people rely. It is important at this critical stage in the negotiations that management and unions work together to find a resolution to this prospective dispute. The implementation and securing of the universal service obligation rest primarily with the regulator; the terms of any change in delivery schedules by Consignia would also be a matter for the regulator.

Consignia

5. **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): If she will make a statement on the decision to grant commercial freedom to Consignia. [25549]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Commercial freedom for Consignia, which is provided by the Postal Services Act 2000, was widely welcomed on both sides of the House as well as by management and unions. That freedom is essential to enable Consignia to improve its services and performance.

Mr. Stewart: Will my right hon. Friend raise in future discussions with Consignia the issue of rural areas in which the post office is not just a business, but a community centre where postmen and women both deliver the mail and act as social workers? Does she share my view that with commercial freedom comes social responsibility?

Ms Hewitt: Yes I do, and that is precisely why the 2000 Act places on the regulator the primary duty of ensuring that the universal service obligation is maintained. My hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness and I have already discussed with Consignia the steps that need to be taken to maintain not only the delivery service in rural areas, but the rural network. That will prevent avoidable closures, and we are investing substantial sums in it.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Is not the unique achievement of this Government and this Secretary of State driving Consignia—the Post Office—into sustained and substantial deficit for the first time? Does she have any view as to why that has happened? There can be only two reasons: either sales have fallen or costs are out of control. Which is it?

Ms Hewitt: There is a simple reason for Consignia's current state of affairs: the complete failure of the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member to deliver commercial freedom to the Post Office when it started to ask for it 10 years ago. If it had been given commercial freedom when it should have been—when management and unions wanted it—it would have been able to begin the necessary restructuring instead of delaying that until now.

Alongside that is the fact that the growth in volume of mail and parcels has been dropping off, not least because of e-mail. The Post Office and Royal Mail in particular have high fixed costs that they simply do not have the income to cover. That is why management and unions must work together. They need to create an effective partnership to deliver a much better service to their customers and much better conditions to their workers.

Wind Energy

6. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What time scale she expects for the development of offshore wind energy. [25550]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): The Government are vigorously encouraging the development of all forms of renewable energy, including wind energy, both onshore and offshore. We expect offshore wind energy to make a significant contribution to the UK energy mix by 2010. Eighteen offshore wind farm projects, each of 30 turbines, successfully pre-qualified for sea bed leases from the Crown Estate earlier this year. Construction of the first of those projects could begin in 2003.

Mr. Blizzard: Does my hon. Friend agree that offshore wind power is not only an important new energy source with huge environmental benefits, but a great opportunity to create more jobs if British companies can get ahead of their German and Danish competitors in developing, constructing and installing the wind turbine structures? What encouragement can he give British firms in the supply chain so that they have the confidence to make the necessary investment to secure the jobs in this country, particularly in coastal communities with high unemployment such as Lowestoft, which is trying to diversify from oil and gas fabrication? Will he visit Lowestoft to see the pioneering work being carried out by a local firm, SLP, which is involved in a project to build the largest wind turbine in Europe?

Mr. Wilson: I know about SLP, I would be delighted to visit Lowestoft and I could not agree more strongly with the premise of my hon. Friend's question. The link that must be made between renewables and manufacturing is exciting and challenging. This country lost the lead in wind power 20 years ago, because we had a Government who did nothing to support it, and the Danes picked up what is now a £4 billion a year worldwide manufacturing industry and market. We shall not let that happen again with wave, biomass and other technologies in which we still have the worldwide lead. We can catch up on wind power, but to do so we must have both projects and domestic demand offshore and onshore, which means tackling what is obstructing that.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): When the Minister comes up to Lowestoft, will he also visit King's Lynn? He will learn that, subject to planning permission, the Crown Estate has indeed let a contract for 60 turbines at King's Lynn and one for 30 turbines offshore from Cromer. Does he agree that, however desirable offshore renewable wind energy is, it is vital that fishery interests are considered when locations are decided? Otherwise, irreparable damage could be done to the cockle, whelk, mussel, shrimp and crab fishery off the Norfolk coast.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I am due to meet the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations to discuss all these matters.

As in everything, we must strike a balance. Of course other maritime interests must be consulted and considered, but we must not have blocking mechanisms, and stalking horses of initiative that appear to be environmentally based but whose objective is actually to block renewables projects including this major potential source of energy, offshore wind.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): The Minister will know of proposals for not just one wind farm but three off the shores of my constituency. May I reinforce the point about consultation with the local community? In my area there are two issues, tourism and fishing. I hope the Minister will ensure that there is full and frank discussion with representatives of both those interests, especially representatives of the fishing industry, which was mentioned earlier. In my constituency, the proposal is to build the three wind farms on the Shell flat, which is the prime fishing ground for Fleetwood fishermen.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend makes a good constituency point. Of course there must be consultation, and people have a right to expect account to be taken of all possible impacts when applications are considered. What we must not have, however, is institutionalised objection to every project that is proposed. That applies to offshore wind, onshore wind and all other renewables. At some point, a contradiction will arise if we as a Government, and the country generally, pay lip service to renewables without willing the means to deliver the necessary contribution. Obviously each project must be scrutinised, but there must also be a generally positive attitude to the development of the industry.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): The Minister did not answer the question from the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) about the time scale. How confident is he that the growth in renewables will be fast enough to fill the gap left by the 25 per cent. drop in our baseload generating production with the gradual disappearance of nuclear generation—or will he replace it?

Mr. Wilson: The country currently has a healthy energy mix, and the Government and I have an obligation to ensure that it is maintained. That is why the Prime Minister established the energy review, whose recommendations he has now received. They will be published in the near future.

The earlier part of the hon. Gentleman's question related directly to my previous answer. We will not meet 10 per cent. targets unless projects go ahead, which is why we must maintain the momentum behind renewable energy that exists for the first time in this country. It did not exist 20 years ago, or 10 years ago. I shall not dwell on the failures of the last Government, but we now have a great potential contribution to our energy source and a potentially great new manufacturing industry.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): May I associate myself with what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard)? Offshore wind will be important for the diversification of the economy in the north-east, and important to Aberdeen. I can tell the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), however, that there is another source of energy that can plug the gap he mentioned. Yesterday's announcement of licences out of round for fields that were previously abandoned, and this morning's announcement of the 20th round for oil and gas licences in previously rediscovered and explored fields in the North sea, prove that there is still a future for oil and gas, and for the economy of the north-east.

Mr. Wilson: I could not agree more enthusiastically, having returned from Aberdeen only this morning. We have heard three wonderful announcements. We have heard about the revitalisation of the Argyll field, the first from which North sea oil came ashore, and about the initiation of a 20th licensing round. Late last night, the news came from Canada that Pan Canadian has identified the Buzzard field as the biggest discovery in the North sea since 1998.

We must make the link. This is not some abstract energy issue; it is about jobs. Many thousands of jobs related to North sea industry will be both protected and created as a result of those three excellent events.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does the Minister agree with the earlier comment from a Labour Back Bencher that many people are in despair at the proliferation of onshore wind farms, which do not even produce the amount of energy that offshore wind could produce? We need that to happen in the Celtic sea especially. Ireland is taking advantage of that resource and the Irish Government are investing in the biggest offshore wind farm in the whole of western Europe. Should not that be happening in UK territorial waters? What infrastructure will the Minister put in place so that offshore wind farms can be developed off Wales and in the Celtic sea?

Mr. Wilson: On the last point about infrastructure, I have initiated a feasibility study on a sub-sea cable off the west coast, so that all the areas that have the potential to contribute to our renewables industry can be linked to the grid. The grid was geared to a coal and steel economy and we must now change it so that it can also be linked to a renewables economy. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman realises the problem: he wants us to build large offshore wind farms all over the place, but the opposite view has been expressed by other hon. Members. People must take a balanced view and we must act collectively. If we are to have a serious renewables industry, we must be able to drive forward projects without them being blocked for years, sometimes on unreasonable grounds. At the same time, we must protect the right of scrutiny.

Steel Industry

7. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What steps she is taking to ensure that the UK steel industry can trade freely in the USA. [25551]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): We are making every effort to ensure that US markets remain open to exports of UK steel products. Working very closely with the European Commission and our European partners, we are in frequent contact with the US Administration to seek to persuade them not to impose unilateral restrictions on trade.

Ms Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will she impress on the US Administration that much of the steel industry in Britain has already undertaken the restructuring that President Bush has requested and that the imposition of trade restrictions would be detrimental to my constituents who work in the steel industry and would have negative effects on the steel industry in many countries? Importantly, it would significantly hamper the valuable work that has been done by the OECD steel group to find ways of addressing the need for restructuring throughout the world steel industry.

Miss Johnson: In addition to my answer, I can tell my hon. Friend that the Prime Minister yesterday wrote to Sir Brian Moffat to confirm that we take the issue very seriously. We are continuing to press our case at the highest level and he will press the case with President Bush at an appropriate time. I agree that the safeguard action will not solve the problem of global overcapacity in steel production. The problems that are being experienced in the US are largely of its own making and we believe strongly that it should not seek to export those problems to the rest of the world. We will continue to register our strongest opposition to the proposals and I agree that the OECD and multilateral talks about how to deal with the problem on a global basis are the way ahead.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Minister agree that those who advocate global free trade cannot just pick and choose which bits of free trade they are going to support? Are not the US's proposed sanctions and tariffs against UK steel in breach of World Trade Organisation legislation?

Miss Johnson: I entirely agree. The proposed US action is contrary to its WTO obligations.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): Is my hon. Friend aware that more than a year ago steel industry management at Corus announced the closure of Teesside technology centre and the transfer of the work force to a new technology centre in Sheffield? Many of my constituents who work at the Teesside technology centre are still waiting to hear about their future. Will my hon. Friend raise that matter urgently with the Corus management?

Miss Johnson: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point, because the staff involved are highly skilled scientists and lab technicians. Uncertainty over the future of such highly marketable individuals is not helpful. My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy will raise the issue when he meets the company shortly, including the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar).

Export Credits Guarantee Department

8. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): What real return on capital employed is required of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. [25552]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): None.

Mr. Viggers: I find that reply rather baffling. Is the Minister aware that other nations run their export credit as a facility for exporters, whereas the Export Credits Guarantee Department is run as a profit centre and is expected to make a 6 per cent. return on capital employed? Is he aware that there is a widespread feeling that our exporters—especially small and medium enterprises—are disadvantaged because of this? Is he concerned about that? What is he going to do about it?

Nigel Griffiths: The facts are these: last year saw the largest amount of supported business in this area for a decade. We backed more than 100 UK exporters and investors to the tune of £5.6 billion, securing tens of thousands of jobs here. In the light of that record last year, we will take no lessons from Conservative Members.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Is the Minister aware that there is great disquiet about the transparency of the export credits guarantee scheme; in particular the decision to allow an export to Tanzania before Christmas, which came under great scrutiny in the media? However, there has been little chance for Members of this House to scrutinise the decision here. Where there is criticism of particular export credit guarantees, will my hon. Friend take steps to ensure that we are able to discuss those and to press home the case that sometimes they are not in the best interests of the country concerned?

Nigel Griffiths: I am not sure if my hon. Friend is referring to the Tanzania air traffic control project.

Mr. Reed *indicated assent.*

Nigel Griffiths: He is. I can tell the House that it receives no ECG support, nor is it seeking it.

Computer Hardware Industry

9. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What steps she is taking to promote employment in the computer hardware manufacturing industry; and if she will make a statement. [25553]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government are today announcing a new £24 million LINK programme to support collaborative research in information storage and displays. This should lead to the development of the next generation of monitors and disk drives for PCs. The Government already have in place a range of assistance and schemes that are designed to increase the productivity and competitiveness of UK industry.

Michael Fabricant: That is good news for the industry. The Minister, who represents a Paisley constituency, will be aware of the fall in the number of jobs available in the development of computer hardware and computer chip technology. He will be aware that this is partly due, but only partly, to there being overcapacity in the world market. Is it not also the case, as the chairman of Fujitsu pointed out, that, for the first time since the last Labour Administration in the 1970s, the on-costs of employment in Britain are now higher than in Germany? Is it not the case that companies such as Siemens, Fujitsu and others who are having to cut back in a worldwide market are now choosing Britain to cut back rather than Germany and other countries because the cost of employment here is now so much higher because of Government legislation?

Mr. Alexander: As we have said, we cannot wholly insulate ourselves from international challenges at the moment, and the overshoot in the technology sector generally over the last couple of years is having an effect on the British market. The challenge does not come just from Germany. The challenge for computer manufacturing more widely is to move up the value chain in the UK. The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to mention my constituency of Paisley, South. In that area we are clear about the importance of computer manufacturing. The Compaq facility—where I myself was employed—is only just down the road. The challenge for such facilities is this: how do they move from basic computer manufacturing up the value chain, often involving software design? That is why the money being put into research and development by this Government is critical in assisting those companies as they move up the value chain.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend on yesterday's conference on women in IT, which was intended to increase the employment of women in the computer industry and across the technology industry. However, the record in terms of the employment of women is lamentably bad in that sector. With that in mind, what further measures will the Department take to increase the awareness of employment opportunities in those industries among young women, particularly, whose perception of the industry is that it is full of net nerds?

Mr. Alexander: I endorse entirely my hon. Friend's statement. If we are to be globally competitive, we cannot afford to draw on the talents of only half the population of the UK. That is why I particularly welcomed yesterday's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. If I had to refer to one aspect of it, it would be the work done by ambassadors, who are going into schools and actively talking to young women about potential employment opportunities within this dynamic and important sector.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Minister may recall that the 2000 Budget document stated that Britain would be the best place in which to trade electronically by 2002. The year 2002 has arrived and the latest report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development suggests that Britain is 22nd in the ranking of those with access to broadband technologies. Will the Minister acknowledge that the Government have failed in their target, and what will he do to rectify the lack of broadband access?

Mr. Alexander: The hon. Gentleman will know that, in December, we published the broadband stakeholders group report, which drew on wide expertise from across industry. We also published the next stage of the Government's strategy in response to the challenge of broadband. Two challenges exist: extending the 60 per cent. infrastructure coverage that exists at present, and driving up broadband usage levels. At present, 1.9 million small businesses are online. One of the challenges in broadband is to deliver services and content that small businesses consider to be valuable. That is I why I especially welcomed the initiative that we launched in December, "Broadband Britain: The Content Challenge", which was directed specifically at developing content that will drive up broadband usage in the months and years to come.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister was asked—

Child Care

1. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): What steps she is taking to encourage those responsible for economic development and regeneration to include child care provision in their strategy. [25582]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The women and equality unit, my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment and the Regions and I have raised this issue directly with the chairs of the regional development agencies. They are currently discussing the best way in which RDAs can support child care provision.

Caroline Flint: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. In my constituency, there is a very large brownfield site at the old RAF Finningley that we hope will become a regional airport. Tomorrow, I shall visit the Flying Start day nursery, which provides child care resources for employees of the 35 companies that are based there already. However, neither the RDA nor objective 1 status has helped the child care situation, and guidance is needed in two ways. First, where there is funding for facilitating or creating employment, the people who oversee that funding must recognise that child care is an important element. Secondly, deprived communities often benefit from community-based funding, and although a brownfield site may not be situated in a deprived community, it may provide employment opportunities for people from those communities. Does my right hon. Friend therefore agree that more lateral thinking and creativity are needed in those respects?

Ms Hewitt: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's expertise in this matter, and to her work in founding the all-party parliamentary group on child care. She makes an enormously important point whose relevance goes beyond her constituency. I want RDAs, councils and business partnerships to understand, when they plan new business sites, that providing for child care is as important as getting the transport links right. I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills the specific matter of funding for child care in disadvantaged communities.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): May I first welcome the fact that the Government have devoted parliamentary time specifically to questions on women's issues? When I attended the induction programme for child minders in the Solihull borough, I was struck by the fact that the application pack that had to be filled in comprised six booklets. That deters many people from applying. Along with the demise of play groups under

Labour, that has led to the fall in the number of child care places in many deprived areas. Does the Minister accept the need for more support and encouragement for community child-minding groups? They are crucial to the expansion of child care in such areas.

Ms Hewitt: I echo the hon. Lady's welcome for the introduction of this question session. If it is not exactly "Woman's Hour", it is at least women's 10 minutes. I also want to thank my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip, who ensured that this innovation happened.

The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) is right that community child-minding groups are enormously important. The Department's social enterprise unit, which I created, can help to promote them, as can the early-year child care partnerships that we have created around the country. However, I also point out that we have created new child care places already for more than three quarters of a million children. I hope that the hon. Lady will recognise that achievement and support us as we build on it.

Equal Pay

2. **Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford): What progress has been made on the Government's commitment to ensure equal pay reviews are carried out by March 2003. [25583]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Departments and agencies are at various stages of reviewing their pay systems. The Cabinet Office is about to issue comprehensive guidance to assist Departments and agencies in carrying out those reviews to ensure that our commitment is met.

Joan Ruddock: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. As someone who pressed for such a slot in 1997, I particularly welcome this dedicated Minister for Women's Question Time and hope that it will be extended.

Is my right hon. Friend aware of work carried out in the new Welsh Assembly? Its gender pay audit has discovered that a gap of as much as 10 per cent. exists between women's and men's pay in some posts. She may be aware that the Finance Minister has committed to find extra funds. Will she bring to the attention of Whitehall the information obtainable from the Welsh Assembly? In addition, will she talk speedily to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about how money can be made available if required to ensure that the civil service is brought into compliance with the Equal Pay Act 1970?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend has been a great champion for women, not least when she was Minister for Women. On the pay gap that continues to exist in the public sector, this week I have written to all my Cabinet colleagues asking them to co-ordinate and to bring together examples of best practice on equal pay and on flexible working in their Departments and agencies, so that we can do much better across the board. I note that already several Departments and agencies have included proposals to reduce the pay gap in their settlement for the current year. I will certainly pick up the point that she makes about the work in the Welsh Assembly.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I add my welcome to the 10 minutes, but with a slight note of caution because I notice that a number of questions have been withdrawn. If we have a very narrow focus for women, we are not doing the job properly.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must speak to the question.

Sandra Gidley: I come to my question now, Mr. Speaker.

The equal opportunities task force has recommended that there be a legal liability on employers to audit staff pay to highlight any gender discrepancies and to remedy the situation. Will the Minister commit to introduce such legislation and if so when?

Ms Hewitt: In the private sector, it is much better, within the legal framework that we have got and that we are strengthening, to spread the use of pay audits by means of promoting best practice, which we are doing, particularly through the fair pay champions and the Castle awards. That is better than introducing another statutory requirement on business.

Flexible Working

3. **Ann McKechin** (Glasgow, Maryhill): How the Government intend to review the operation of the new statutory scheme on flexible working. [25584]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): We plan to carry out surveys of employers and employees before the legislation on flexible working is implemented to provide a baseline against which to judge changes. We will then repeat the surveys three years after the legislation has been implemented. We will monitor experience from day one through calls to helplines, tribunal cases and so on. That will give us the basis for deciding what further changes may be needed.

Ann McKechin: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. She will be aware of the appointment this week of the new permanent secretary at the Department for International Development—a male member of staff—on a flexible hours contract to allow him more access to his six-year-old daughter. Does she agree that that represents an excellent example of how flexible working can be incorporated in all levels of work, including senior management, and that the review should consider extending the benefits of flexible working to parents of children aged between six and 10?

Ms Hewitt: We will examine that specific question about the age of the child when we review the effectiveness of the new law but fundamentally it is about achieving a massive culture change within business and the public sector. I agree with what my hon. Friend has said about Suma Chakrabarti's appointment as permanent secretary at DFID. Within my own Department, I have created a partnership group of management and the work force to look at how we can do more to change our working culture. I look forward to the time when we have the first pair of job-sharing Ministers in government.

Equal Pay

4. **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): What steps she is taking to encourage equal pay for women. [25586]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government have taken a number of steps already to improve levels of pay for women, including the introduction of the national minimum wage, which has benefited around 1 million women. The Employment Bill that is now going through the House will provide improved maternity rights to help ensure that more women return to their original jobs, and will strengthen the Equal Pay Act 1970 with the introduction of equal pay questionnaires.

Julie Morgan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that she is aware that NOP research on equal pay, conducted for the Equal Opportunities Commission, showed that 93 per cent. thought that their pay structures were fair, but that only a third had actually checked whether they were fair. How can we overcome such problems, and how confident is my right hon. Friend that employers will check their pay systems for fairness voluntarily?

Ms Hewitt: The research to which my hon. Friend refers, as well as research that has been carried out in government and in the EOC, makes it clear that the causes of unequal pay are complex. Such research includes the fact that many women spend some of their working life in part-time employment, usually trading lower pay for the hours that they want. All the steps that we are taking to promote flexible working, as well as making it easier for women to obtain information about the pay structure in their firms, will also help to close the pay gap. I was campaigning for equal pay 30 years ago, and I do not want my daughter's generation to have to carry on doing that in 10 or 20 years.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 21 January—Second Reading of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill.

Tuesday 22 January—Opposition Day [8th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate entitled "Failings in the Public Services" on an Opposition motion.

Wednesday 23 January—Remaining stages of the International Development Bill *[Lords]*.

Thursday 24 January—Motion to take note of the outstanding reports of the Public Accounts Committee to which the Government have replied. Details have been given in the *Official Report*, Thursday 10 January 2002, columns 673-75.

Friday 25 January—Private Members' Bills.

Provisional business for the following week will be:

Monday 28 January—Remaining stages of the Civil Defence (Grant) Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock.

Tuesday 29 January—Opposition Day [9th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

Wednesday 30 January—Motion on the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2002-3.

Motion on the Local Government (Finance) Report 2002-3.

Thursday 31 January—Remaining stages of the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill [Lords].

Motion on the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas) (England) Regulations 2001.

Motion to approve the Administration Committee Report on the reopening of the Line of Route.

Friday 1 February—Debate on implementing the Learning Disability White Paper on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for the beginning of February will be:

Thursday 7 February—Debate on Child Health and Maternity.

Thursday 14 February—Debate on the report from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on relocation following paramilitary intimidation.

The House will wish to know that on Wednesday 23 January 2002, there will be a debate relating to the Barcelona Process and assistance to Palestinian Society in European Standing Committee B. *[Relevant European Union documents: 11381/00, Reinvigorating the Barcelona Process; 14778/00 Assistance to Palestinian Society; Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 28-vii (2001-02); HC 23-xxvii and HC 23-xxix(1999-02).]*

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving us the business. Will he confirm that it is the Government's intention to hold the annual St. David's day debate in the usual way? If so, will he—as soon as possible, please—give us the date when that debate will take place? He will understand that the Opposition are very keen to hold that debate, as we have many points to make in it, so it would help not only us but, I am sure, the whole House if we could have the date as early as possible.

You, Mr. Speaker, will recall, because you take a close interest in such matters, that the Public Administration Committee, in its excellent report of last December on the ministerial code, stated on page viii, paragraph (f):

> "We recommend that when the Ministerial Code is next revised the spirit of the original wording should be restored in respect of announcements of important Government policy."

The Government reply stated:

> "The Government accepts this recommendation. It is an important principle that when the House is sitting, announcements of Government policy should be made, in the first instance, in Parliament."

Then just last week, the Deputy Prime Minister, no less, said:

> "in response to a recommendation from the Public Administration Committee, the Government have agreed to amend paragraph 27 of the code, which now requires that all announcements of Government policy should be made in the first instance in Parliament."

The Deputy Prime Minister, with all the weight and majesty of his office and his personality, then said:

> "I am sure that the House will welcome that."—*[Official Report*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 533.]

Against that background, Mr. Speaker, are you not as disturbed as I am that the Secretary of State for Health, having said outside the House that his statement was the most important policy statement that he had made during his tenure of office, then went and made it outside the House and had to be summoned here by virtue of the fact that you, Mr. Speaker, granted a private notice question?

Mr. Speaker: Order. It looks as though the right hon. Gentleman is drawing the occupant of the Chair into his argument. His questions should be addressed to the Leader of the House, not to me.

Mr. Forth: Oh, I do apologise, Mr. Speaker, for giving you the credit—I will try not to do that again.

The point is a very serious one, is it not? The Committee has made a statement; the Deputy Prime Minister, no less, has agreed that the Committee was correct and made a commitment on behalf of the Government that something would happen; but then we find that we have to use devices to get Ministers to come here and do what the Government said they should do in any case. Even worse than that, apparently that mysterious person "a No. 10 spokesman" said at the briefing yesterday that he thought it impossible for all statements to be made in the House. We need clarification of that.

The Deputy Prime Minister said what he said in good faith. The Health Secretary was dodging and weaving outside the House and had to be brought in here. Now we

[Mr. Forth]

find that No. 10 is effectively calling the shots and saying, "None of this matters; pay no attention to it; its all irrelevant trivia." We must get to the bottom of this, and we must get it sorted out, otherwise the only interpretation that we can place on it is that the Government are holding the House in complete contempt.

May I finally ask the Leader of the House whether he will make time for some clarification of a very important matter indeed that came up during Prime Minister's questions? Yesterday, in referring to the Saville inquiry, the Prime Minister said:

> "The cost of the inquiry is £52 million."

However, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) said that he believed that that could not possibly be the real total. He said:

> "The cost is already more than £14.5 million to the Ministry of Defence".—[*Official Report*, 16 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 289-92.]

He went on to say that he thought that the inquiry's real, true total cost right across government was greatly in excess of £52 million. Is it not time that the House had an opportunity to get the full picture and, indeed, to express its view on it? Whatever the figure is—whether it is "as little as £52 million", as the Prime Minister seemed to imply, or much more—when will we get the chance to say whether we think that it represents value for money; whether it is a proper use of public funds; and what the view of the House of Commons is on the matter? Will the Leader of the House please arrange for a very early opportunity for that matter to be explored and debated?

Mr. Cook: May I first congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on attempting to speak for Wales? That is a bit rich given the nature of the Conservative representation from Wales. When we have such a debate, of course, the Conservative party's position at the Dispatch Box will be occupied by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). I know that Wales is a country of valleys, but that is really not a satisfactory basis on which to claim to speak for Wales. Yes, I am sure that we will have the traditional debate when the time comes, and it will demonstrate once again the extent to which the Conservative party does not have support in and cannot speak for Wales.

On the issue of the announcements of Government policy, in the speech that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made on Tuesday, he was taking forward announcements that had already been made in the course of the 10-year plan. Indeed, the Conservative party normally complains that we keep making the same statement too often. My right hon. Friend had already made that statement once. He came to the House, and he answered perfectly adequately on that occasion. May I say in defence of my right hon. Friend that he will have debated health matters in the Chamber on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, which reflects the priority that the Labour party attaches to health?

May I also gently point out to the right hon. Gentleman that, if he wants to encourage Ministers always to announce policy first in the House of Commons, he could have set an example last Thursday when we debated the White Paper on Lords reform. He was invited several times by my hon. Friends and me to announce the Opposition's policy, but he refused to do so. However, on Sunday, we discovered that they had a fully formed policy which was disclosed courtesy of *The Sunday Telegraph*, not the most pluralist of vehicles by which we can inquire into that policy. *[Interruption.]* Well, the right hon. Gentleman is not a Minister, and we will do our best to make sure that he never is.

On the Saville inquiry, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was asked about its cost and he gave a perfectly correct, precise and accurate reply. The cost of the inquiry is met by the Northern Ireland Office and it is precisely the figure quoted by my right hon. Friend. Of course, parties to the inquiry and those supporting those giving evidence will have their owns costs on top of that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Of course, they will, and no one has ever denied that, but that is not the cost of the inquiry. *[Laughter.]* Well, on that basis, every time we have an inquiry and any organisation prepares itself for and gives evidence to it, it will register that as part of the cost.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) included in the costs Lord Saville's salary. If we had not had the public inquiry—whatever the Opposition might think about it—we would not have sacked Lord Saville. His salary would have continued to have been paid and would have continued to be a constant factor in public spending. As to the bottom line, there is a matter of public policy to be debated and I would very much welcome Opposition Members' views as to whether they believe that lawyers' fees are too high. However, I do not dispute the fact that we are right to have had the inquiry so that the full facts can be known and so that we can demonstrate to the people of Northern Ireland that we have nothing to hide.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Earlier today, we heard questions about the universal service provision of the Royal Mail, now Consignia. I met members of the east midlands region of the Communications Workers Union in Leicester last week and they are very concerned about the impact of Consignia's management, its clumsy industrial relations and the rate at which it is outsourcing many of its activities. Will my right hon. Friend find time to include in the parliamentary timetable as soon as possible a debate that examines the future of the postal service in the United Kingdom, and Consignia's record so far?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that we regard it as appropriate for the House to debate the management of Consignia given that that is a matter for the company and that we must maintain an appropriate distance from management decisions. However, I have already said to the House—I echo it again—that we were surprised at the manner of the announcement of the redundancies by the management of Consignia. We strongly urge them to enter into full consultations and dialogue with the work force about the financial challenges facing the industry.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Can the Leader of the House clear up some confusion about the likely date of the Whitsun recess? He will be aware that the Whit bank holiday has been moved this year to allow it to stand beside the Queen's golden jubilee. *[Interruption.]* I understand that some Conservative Members have already made holiday plans for the wrong week.

In his role as the protector of Back-Bench interests on both sides of the House, will the Leader of the House make representations to the Secretary of State for

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the chaos that is continuing in the correspondence section in her Department? I received in November an answer to a letter that I had sent to the Department in September, but I then received almost the identical answer again just last week from the same Minister signing the same letter. That is rather excessive even if the letter is that much delayed. Clearly, the correspondence section is in chaos. I have already had letters sent to me marked "for the Minister's approval and signature", but without either the approval or signature of the Minister. Members on both sides of the House are suffering from this problem.

Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to consider Mr. Speaker's ruling after the 10 o'clock vote last night about the occupancy of the Opposition Front Bench and the use of the Dispatch Box? Is the Leader of the House aware that there are useful precedents for the representatives of the main third party in the House to speak from the Dispatch Box? No less than former Prime Ministers Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Asquith did so long after they ceased to lead the Opposition or Government parties? Would it not be for the convenience of the House, when the Liberal Democrats are leading a debate or are the only Opposition party present, for them to use the Dispatch Box so that there can be a genuine debate across the Floor of the House?

Mr. Cook: I am intrigued to hear that some hon. Members have arranged holidays for the Whit recess. I can only admire them for thinking that far ahead on such arrangements. However, I am not able to announce firm times for the Easter or Whit recesses at present. I hope to have made some progress on that when we meet again next Thursday, and I shall bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's point.

On DEFRA, the House is aware from previous exchanges of the massive increase in correspondence to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Ministers in that Department. Indeed, that correspondence has trebled over the past year. As a result, DEFRA is seeking to improve and increase the number of people working in the correspondence section. It is currently attracting additional staff and I hope that that will lead to an improvement. No one is trying to defend the response rate, which is, of course, a reflection of the very strong increase in interest in DEFRA matters over the past year.

On the subject of last night, far from studying Mr. Speaker's ruling, I was present to hear it, and a very entertaining and enjoyable sight it referred to too. I am sure that a good time was had by all. However, it would be unwise for me to comment on a matter that is within a Speaker's ruling.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is my right hon. Friend aware that despite the Prime Minister's responses to questions yesterday, there is still sizeable public disquiet over the transportation and incarceration of Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners? Can he arrange for a debate, hopefully based on access by British consular officials to those prisoners who are deemed to be British citizens, because that would help to calm public disquiet? It would also help to ensure that we cease to give comfort to those who want an expansion of international terrorism and who use scenes and statements that seem to bear out their argument that western powers have little respect for, or consideration of, Muslim lives, religion and human rights. [Hon. Members: "Heartbreaking!"] If you have a heart to break.

Mr. Cook: I do not think I will get involved in that exchange.

What will be of importance, although I cannot predict whether it will calm the disquiet, is the visit by the Red Cross to Guantanamo bay, which I understand will take place later today. I hope that that will provide clear, authoritative guidance on the state in which the prisoners are being kept and whether it is consistent with international humanitarian law.

On the general issue, I would only say that we did, of course, fight in Afghanistan to end terrorism and uphold the values of law and order and of decency and the right of everyone to lead a peaceful life. It is important that we treat those whom we capture in the process of that exercise in ways that are consistent with our principles.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Leader of the House will be aware of the joy felt by Conservative Members at the splendid innovation of having a Minister for Women and questions to her. He will also be aware that the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 says that there should be equality of both sexes, of which a significant minority are men. When will we have 10 minutes of questions to a Minister for Men?

Mr. Cook: I would not wish to detract from the hon. Gentleman's joy at the appointment of a Minister for Women. I can assure him that all the Ministers in this Government will be very happy to answer his questions about men.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is nigh on impossible for Ministers to give all new statements of policy? We had evidence of that in Question Time today when the Minister for Industry and Energy was going to announce a new Government policy of paying out lump sums of £2,000 to those miners who finished working way back in 1975. He was not able to deliver that statement because we did not reach question No. 10, which is a pity, so I thought that I had better make the statement on his behalf.

As that lump sum is a decent start in dividing up the pension surplus, I look forward to many more chunks being handed out to other categories of miners in the future. On a similar issue, will my right hon. Friend ask the Minister to come back to the House, when he has time, and ensure that all those colliery cleaners and those who work in the canteens get the money that they are owed from the settlement made by the previous Energy Minister?

Mr. Cook: I shall bear in mind the useful constitutional innovation provided by my hon. Friend in making the statement on behalf of the Minister for Industry and Energy. I welcome what my hon. Friend said about the additional funds that the Minister will make available to those who have the lowest pension from their days in the mines. That is a valuable and useful way in which to use the surplus, and one that I know the mining industry will welcome.

[Mr. Cook]

On the other matter that my hon. Friend raises, as he has done vigorously and repeatedly over the past few months, I cannot add to the answers that I have already given, which is that we have honourably settled with and paid all those who made a claim within the time set out in the legislation. It specifies that all claims have to be made within six months of leaving employment, and we have no latitude within the legislation to make payments to others.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Leader of the House will have seen the publicity this week surrounding the quashing by the Appeal Court of the verdict on Stephen Downing. Will he give consideration to the way in which Parliament may be informed of the lessons that need to be learned from this vast miscarriage of justice? Inquiries need to take place for the sake not only of Stephen Downing's family but of the surviving family of Wendy Sewell, who have suffered the devastation caused by the case being continually regurgitated in the national media. This is a very sad and moving case. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Government are able to learn all the lessons from this grave miscarriage of justice?

Mr. Cook: I think that the whole House echoes the sentiments expressed by the hon. Gentleman, and we fully recognise that there can be no more appalling injustice than to be imprisoned for as long as Stephen Downing has, knowing throughout that period that one is innocent. There has obviously been a serious miscarriage of justice in this case. I am sure that my colleagues at the Home Office will want to consider what lessons can be learned from it, and when they reach a conclusion they may well want to share it with the House. In the meantime, the urgent question will be that of compensation, and I doubt that they will be in a position to say anything until that is resolved.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): The Leader of the House will be aware that tomorrow is the last day for consultation on the revised proposals on congestion charging in London. Will he find time in the next couple of weeks for a debate on congestion charging in London? Is he aware that the charging zone goes right through Kennington in the heart of my constituency, and there has been no environmental audit of the proposals whatever? People are up in arms—fortunately not literally—and I urge my right hon. Friend to find time for a debate so that the Secretary of State can consider carefully whether now is the time to call in the Mayor's plans. In my view they will do nothing to ease the flow of traffic or to help pedestrians or indeed anyone who wants to get around London more easily.

Mr. Cook: I am glad that my hon. Friend has had the opportunity to ventilate an issue that is of concern to her constituents and to many other people in central London. Anybody who has taken a taxi lately must be well aware of the strength of feeling among taxi drivers on this question. It is, of course, primarily a matter for the Mayor of London and the Greater London Assembly, and I would be loth to enter into a situation in which we sought to override what is, in the first instance, their decision. However, I hope that in taking that decision they will bear in mind the importance of carrying with them the population of London, particularly central London, and will listen carefully to the results of consultation.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): One month ago I wrote to the Leader of the House concerning one of my constituents who happens to be the Opposition Deputy Leader in the other place. Unfortunately, he was taken ill in the other place and was left waiting two hours for an ambulance to arrive. In my letter I suggested that the Leader of the House give careful consideration to providing the Palace with proper medical facilities, with a doctor present at all times, and its own ambulance. Has he considered my letter, and does he think the subject worthy of a debate?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point, which I am sure is of close personal interest to all Members. I assure him that I will consider carefully the points that he has made and reply to him.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will recall that after the publication of the reports into the disturbances in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham last November, it was indicated that the Government were considering holding a debate on the important issues involved, which, with the proposals resulting from the reports, have implications that go far wider than the three places concerned. I recognise the difficulties experienced by my right hon. Friend in finding time for debates, but is he aware of any progress on that matter?

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the importance of that issue to my hon. Friend's constituency and the House, given the wider questions raised in the report. We shall certainly consider at what point in the Session it would be appropriate to find time for that important issue.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I draw to the attention of the Leader of the House early-day motion 678, on access to the facilities of the House:

[That this House notes that access to the facilities of the House has been granted to four Members who refuse to take the Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance; believes that the individuals concerned should be required to place an entry in the Register of Members' Interests and be subject to the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to lay a Resolution before the House to rectify matters immediately.]

As you will be aware, Mr. Speaker, a decision has already been taken to permit elected representatives of Sinn-Fein IRA to have access to the House, and nothing in the early-day motion seeks to deny that. However, many right hon. and hon. Members believe that all MPs who have access to the facilities of the House should be required to make an entry in the Register of Members' Interests; elected Sinn Fein-IRA representatives in the Northern Ireland Assembly already do so. Early-day motion 678 has the support of Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Scottish National party, Plaid Cymru and Unionist Members of Parliament. A letter has already been sent to the Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee which also has cross-party support. I appeal to the Leader of the House to consult him and lay a resolution before the House urgently to rectify the situation.

Mr. Cook: This was a matter that came up in our debate in the week before the House rose for the recess. A number of Members expressed strongly the sentiment that appears in the early-day motion to which the hon. Gentleman referred. As I said at the time, the present position is that the authorities of the House are committed to the resolution of the House which specifies that Members should make an entry in the Register within three months of taking their seat. It is open for debate whether that should be amended to be within three months of being elected to the House. I personally very much welcome any view that the Standards and Privileges Committee may wish to express to guide us on that point.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Will my right hon. Friend give consideration to a debate on regional devolution in England, given that at some point we are to have a White Paper on the subject. Does he agree that the issue should be aired as widely as possible to facilitate the Government's aim of consulting widely throughout the regions on what will be an important issue in future?

Mr. Cook: The Government are strongly committed to decentralisation to the regions, as well as encouraging regional identity and, wherever possible, regional decision making, which is why early this year we shall produce a regional White Paper. I am sure that when it is produced, it will attract much interest in the House and it may be appropriate at that point to make sure that it is adequately debated and aired in the House.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Can we have an early debate on the composition of Cabinet committees that shape Government policy? Is it not profoundly unsatisfactory that the Government's policy to deny the electorate the opportunity to choose substantial numbers of Members of the second Chamber should be shaped by two unelected Ministers, the Lord Chancellor and the Leader of the House of Lords, neither of whom has condescended to stand for election to public office and both of whom may be reasonably supposed to have a prejudice, not to say an interest, in denying the electorate a say in such important matters?

Mr. Cook: We had a full debate on that on Thursday, when a number of vigorous views were expressed. I said at the time that the Government will need and wish to reflect on the views expressed in the debates last week and in the response to the consultation White Paper. I am sure that the House will have opportunities in future to return to that matter. While it is important that the Lord Chancellor and my colleague the Leader of the House of Lords should necessarily play a full part in shaping the proposals, those proposals will be widely debated and shared in government and, I suspect, outside government.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that just before Christmas, the Minister for Housing and Planning produced a Green Paper that proposes several significant and wide-ranging changes to the planning system, which could in due course affect the lives of our constituents. Because of the conventions of the House, as it was a Green Paper rather than a White Paper, there was no requirement for a ministerial statement, so there has been no opportunity so far for the House to debate the matter or question Ministers on it. Will my right hon. Friend therefore find time in the near future, before the consultation period ends, for a debate on this important matter?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a matter which, as he is probably aware, has been raised on a number of occasions. It was raised several times last Thursday. I shall certainly undertake to draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions the expression of views and interest within the House. At some point it will be appropriate for these matters to come before the House. Apart from any other consideration, as I said last week, they cannot be taken forward without primary legislation. Whether we have yet reached the point at which it would be appropriate for a statement and an expression of policy in the light of consultation is not a matter that I can judge, but I am sure that at the appropriate time the House will have plenty of time to debate the matter.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Is the Leader of the House comfortable with the grossly escalating costs of the Saville inquiry? Is it not time that we had a proper debate? One must consider the costs of the Ministry of Defence, as those come out of taxpayers' money, and the figures are getting very large indeed. The right hon. Gentleman has presumably noted that the charge has been led, characteristically, by that great Government supporter Mr. Michael Mansfield and his fee charges.

Mr. Cook: On reading such stories, I have sometimes reflected on whether I have mis-spent my life and might have been better becoming a barrister. I am sure that the same thought has entered the mind of many people looking at the figures. There may be a debate about whether the rate of pay is appropriate, but I do not think that there is ground for a debate about the fact that it is important that we have a full public inquiry and bring the matter out into the open. On Thursdays I frequently hear demands from the Opposition for more public inquiries, not fewer. Next time they are minded to do that, perhaps they will reflect on today's exchanges.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I refer to the forthcoming convention on the future of Europe, and draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the recent report of the European Scrutiny Committee and its recommendations for the selection of the representative of this Parliament to that convention. Does my right hon. Friend agree that whatever the outcome of the discussions that are taking place about the selection of our representative, we must not lose sight of the important topics that will be discussed at the convention itself? As a central theme of the convention is to be enhancing the role of national Parliaments in European decision making, may we have an early debate in this place about how democratic accountability in European decision making can be enhanced through the scrutiny process? Finally, I renew my request for the House to take the lead in bringing non-governmental organisations and other organisations

[Roger Casale]

from civil society into the debate, to determine how this Parliament can play a role in reconnecting the European citizen with European decision making in the future.

Mr. Cook: On my hon. Friend's first point, there have been discussions between my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs about who should go forward to represent Parliament in the convention. I hope that those discussions will bear fruit in the near future, and that the names to come before the House will be agreed by consensus by both parties. That will have to be laid before the House and approved by the whole House, so the House can have a say.

On the other matter that my hon. Friend raises, I am well aware of the central feature of the review leading up to the next intergovernmental conference, which puts national Parliaments centre stage. I am aware of it because I played a part in making sure that that happened. We should be doing more to connect the national Parliaments with the debate and the decision making in Europe. As to our procedures in the House, the Scrutiny Committee is carrying out a review of procedures relating to European legislation and decisions, and I look forward to discussing that with the Committee when it has completed its report.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): May I tell the Leader of the House that I have recently received a number of representations from constituents who support a campaign to ensure that posthumous pardons are given to many of those who were shot for cowardice in the first world war, when it was apparent to just about every right-thinking person outside this House that they were guilty of no such thing? I am aware that this matter has come before the House on previous occasions, but I say to him that it is not an issue that will go away. Can we have an early opportunity to bring it back to the Floor of the House?

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of the strength of feeling of the relatives of those who were shot. I think that everybody in the House would express great sympathy with their position and concern about the action that was taken at the start of the last century. It is plain now, in retrospect, that many of those who were sentenced and executed at the time would never have been sentenced or executed under modern law or standards. However, as the hon. Gentleman will know from previous exchanges, there is a bona fide issue as to whether it is credible to apply a legal pardon posthumously in very different circumstances—including the state of the law—from those that applied at the time. Nor would this be the only occasion when we might be invited to do so. Therefore, what I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that he should offer comfort to relatives by [illegible]ing them of the very strong sympathy and regrets of all of us who are alive today about what happened. However, it is not really for us to make legal judgments by today's standards about what happened 100 years ago.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Leader of the House correctly said that there was strong interest in DEFRA matters. He will be aware that the first of the three reports that the Government commissioned following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease is to be published at the end of the month; that is, the report produced by Sir Donald Curry on the future of food and farming. First, can he give an assurance that the report's findings will first be reported to the House? Secondly, instead of allowing us to deal with the matter in the first instance merely through a statement, will he consider as a matter of urgency the possibility of having a debate on what will be the first of three very important reports that affect the fundamentals of the future of our farming industry?

Mr. Cook: I am advised that the answer to the right hon. Gentleman's first question is yes and that the report will be brought before the House. The appropriate time for a debate is a matter of judgment that we would have to consider in the round. I am not immediately persuaded that it would be sensible to have three separate debates on three separate reports, but I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Government and my DEFRA colleagues will be considering how we should best take the matter forward.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My right hon. Friend will have seen recent press reports on the damage caused by alcohol misuse. He will also be aware that the Government have long promised an alcohol strategy, although it has yet to emerge. Will he encourage Ministers to bring forward the Government's alcohol strategy at an early date? Even before that, will he make time for a debate on alcohol abuse on the Floor of the House? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Cook: May I say straight away that I would wish to rule myself out as the opening speaker in any such debate? None the less, my hon. Friend raises a serious issue that causes immense distress in the families of a number of our constituents. I shall certainly convey my hon. Friend's views to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and ensure that Ministers reflect upon the urgency and importance that he and many other hon. Members obviously attach to the question. I cannot promise a debate in advance of a strategy, but I am sure that my hon. Friends will consider how they can quickly take forward a response.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Given that the BBC's "The World at One" programme yesterday made the extraordinary decision to devote more than half its running time to concerns about the treatment of al-Qaeda prisoners, the Leader of the House may think that far too much time has already been spent on the issue. Nevertheless, I should like to join those of his Back Benchers who are calling for a statement from the Foreign Secretary on the treatment of al-Qaeda prisoners and the way in which they should be tried. Surely, such a statement would give the Foreign Secretary the opportunity to point out that, in past conflicts, people who engaged in the sort of outrageous terrorism of which the prisoners are accused were by no means and by no stretch of the imagination ever subject to the provisions of the Geneva convention. It would also enable him to point out to the House that it was as the result of trying such people in a civilian court after the attack on the World Trade Centre in 1993 that bin Laden was informed that his telephones were being listened to. If that had not happened, the later attack might not have succeeded. So, let us hear why it is that military tribunals are indeed a necessity.

Mr. Cook: It is plain that there are two views on the treatment of al-Qaeda prisoners. I advise hon. Members to wait until we have heard from the Red Cross, which is visiting today. It will be able to provide a clear statement about the matter and say whether it wishes to make representations about changes.

On the legal background, whether the prisoners are covered by the Geneva convention is not immediately germane. Requirements of international humanitarian law transcend the Geneva convention, and they have to be observed, even if the convention does not apply.

I am delighted to say that I have no responsibility for the content of "The World at One".

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Does my right hon. Friend know that coal-mining communities are well served by CISWO—the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation? In my constituency, it is setting up a one-stop shop with a wide range of services at the Mastin Moor miners' welfare. However, CISWO is currently in financial difficulties because there is no National Coal Board with which to negotiate to advance its financial position. Its difficulties will lead to considerable loss of important services in coal-mining communities.

Last week, I asked for a general debate on the coal industry. The matter that I have raised today could be included in such a debate. Other items, such as equal pay for women, compensation for vibration white finger, bronchitis and emphysema and the statement of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on the miners' pension scheme could be covered in an omnibus discussion on important matters for coal-mining communities.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the vigour with which he promotes and defends the interests of the coal-mining communities that he represents. A Thursday rarely passes without his raising them. That is a good example of Parliament being used for the proper function of articulating our constituents' interests. I am sure that my hon. Friend will ensure that the issue that he raises today is included in the discussion to which he referred. I shall give advance warning to my colleagues in the relevant Department.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House may know that people in Northern Ireland, especially Omagh, are worried about mixed messages on terrorism. The American authorities have banned funding of the Continuity IRA, which uses the alias the 32 County Sovereignty Committee. Is it not time for the Home Secretary to list that organisation? The legislation that was introduced after Omagh has not brought anyone before the courts in Northern Ireland, and the Continuity IRA continues.

Mr. Cook: I do not believe that there is anyone in the Northern Ireland Office, the Government or the House who does not regret that people have not been brought to court for the Omagh atrocity, which we all deeply deplore. I assure the hon. Gentleman that our security services vigorously pursue the Continuity IRA, the Real IRA or anyone engaged in terrorist activities. We will take any opportunity to bring to court those against whom we can bring a charge with sufficient evidence to secure a conviction.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I am sure that my right hon. Friend knows about the increasing number of women in prison. I learned through a response to a written parliamentary question earlier this week that 169 women from Wales are in prison in England because there is no women's prison in Wales. Will my right hon. Friend bring that to the Home Secretary's attention and ask him to use all the means at his disposal, not to build a prison in Wales but to reduce the number of women in custody by encouraging sentencing in the community? The devastating effect on families, especially children, could thus be avoided.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to say that it will not be necessary to draw this to the attention of the Home Secretary, because I know that he is well aware of the rapid rise in the number of women in prisons across England and Wales. He is also vigorously involved in the review of sentencing. He has said that he wants to bring sense to sentencing. Serious sentences are applied to those who have committed serious offences, but those who have not, and who can be treated in other ways, should be so treated.

In fairness to my right hon. and hon. Friends and to everyone involved in the system, it must be said that there has been a rapid rise in the number of women offenders. That is reflected in the statistics to which my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) referred. They are not simply a result of sentencing policy; they are also a reflection of the number of offenders. There is, unfortunately, no short-term, easy solution to the problem of increased demand for places for women in prison. It is, however, an issue to which the Home Office attaches high priority, and to which it will respond over time.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Leader of the House sought to raise to an art form his disingenuousness in his original response to my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House. Does he not recognise that most of us realise that Ministers constantly bypassing the House and making statements to the media first, rather than to the House, is a tactic to which we all expected the Government to return, the minute the wheels started to fall off? Regarding the Saville inquiry, does he not realise that, in a constituency such as mine, in which many members of the Parachute Regiment and their relatives live, I doubt that a single constituent thinks that any public money should have been spent on this ludicrous inquiry? It was a craven act of appeasement by the Government to terrorists, and it should have been stopped long ago.

Mr. Cook: I do not honestly see that anyone interested in the affairs of Northern Ireland should be afraid of our bringing out into the open what may have happened on that occasion; nor do I believe that anyone in the United Kingdom would wish to create the appearance that we have anything to hide.

[Mr. Cook]

On the hon. Gentleman's other point, he said—if I apprehended him correctly—that I had out-performed myself in my disingenuousness. I shall try to continue to set new standards of clarity and fact in the House.

Mr. Forth: Starting now?

Mr. Cook: Starting right now. Before I came into the Chamber, I asked for the comparative figure for statements made to the House in the last five years of the Conservative Government and the first five years of this one. I shall try to express these statistics clearly so that the hon. Gentleman can follow them. We have made more than 60 more statements in our first five years than the Conservatives made in their last five years. I therefore decline to take any lectures from them on the importance of accountability to the House.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will be aware of a recent judgment by the Law Lords to the effect that term-time workers in schools are not allowed to claim jobseeker's allowance during the three months of the year in which they are not employed and, therefore, not earning. Unusually, the Law Lords made it clear that they foresaw a change in the law being necessary, and recommended such a change to allow those workers to claim that benefit. Like many hon. Members, I have constituents who are caught in this trap. Is there any chance that the appropriate Minister could make a statement to the House to set out just where the Government see this going?

Mr. Cook: The rule, if I recall it rightly, that those leaving school cannot claim benefit until September is of long standing. If the Law Lords have made a ruling on it, I am confident that my hon. Friends at the Department will be considering its implications, and I will advise them to write directly to my hon. Friend.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Further to the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the Secretary of State for Education and Skills made a major speech outside the House this week on an apparent change in the Government's policy on school exclusions, ironically at a time when the Standing Committee on the Education Bill—of which I am a member—has been discussing that same issue. Will the Leader of the House tell me when the Secretary of State will come to the House to make a statement about that policy change?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman has just confirmed that this issue has been debated in the Standing Committee, and it will continue to be debated as the Bill proceeds through the House. I anticipate our having a very full period of time in which to consider the Bill on Report, when it will be open to the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member to table an amendment or a new clause that could ventilate this or any other part of education policy. I would say to the House that we have to get real on this issue. Cabinet Ministers have made speeches outside the House from time immemorial, and sometimes that has taken forward the development of Government policy. The ministerial code rightly and properly places an obligation on Cabinet Ministers and others to bring serious developments in Government policy to the House. However, if every single development in Government policy came to the House, we would be debating nothing else—certainly not Opposition motions.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): May I remind my right hon. Friend that Holocaust Memorial Day is approaching? Will he consider how the House and individual Members may better support such commemorative events?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend draws attention to a very important approaching date—and the commemoration was of course introduced by this Government. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make a speech on the day to mark its significance and I am sure that hon. Members will consider how they can best do likewise in their constituencies.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Will the Leader of the House arrange an early debate on backstabbing in the Government? He will have seen the comments of one of his Cabinet colleagues:

> "Unlike David Blunkett, who bought time at the Home Office by dumping on what Jack Straw had done, Steve hasn't taken the knife to Prescott's legacy—and that is maybe what he should do."

Will the Leader of the House support that incredibly helpful advice from his Cabinet colleague to help the beleaguered Transport Secretary?

Mr. Cook: Perhaps the House requires a debate on backstabbing in the Conservative party. [HON. MEMBERS: "There isn't any."] I am interested to hear that, because the shadow Chief Secretary says that the Conservative party is seen as

> "racist, sexist, homophobic and anti-youth".

That goes further than even I would dare, but I do not dissent from his conclusion that the Conservative party is in a worse state than ever.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May we have an early debate on the cost of public inquiries? The recently published planning Green Paper includes specific Government proposals to prevent public inquiries from dragging on for years at great public expense. If that is now Government policy on public inquiries, why have they allowed the Saville inquiry into Bloody Sunday to be granted a blank cheque?

Mr. Cook: Because it is not a planning inquiry.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Given recent comments by former military chiefs that the armed forces are dangerously overstretched, particularly following the Afghanistan deployment, and given that British military reservists are being compulsorily called up for first time since the Suez crisis, does the Leader of the House accept that this country must either increase the defence budget or reduce its commitments to ensure that no damage is done to our fighting capability and that lives are not unnecessarily put at risk?

Mr. Cook: It is important to ensure that our armed forces can carry out the tasks that we give them and that those tasks can be carried out without putting unnecessary and unreasonable strain on family commitments. It would be much easier for us to achieve that had the Conservative Government not cut 30 battalions from the military. I would like to hear how the hon. Gentleman would square any commitment to increase our military capability in terms of numbers, equipment and capacity with the commitment made today by his leader that the Conservatives' first priority is cutting tax.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): The Leader of the House will be aware of a situation in the Somerset and Avon area over the past few days—a gentleman has induced young girls to remove their clothing. The police are unable to pursue the matter because a loophole in the law precludes them from doing so. The White Paper "Setting the Boundaries: Reforming the Law on Sex Offences", published in July 2000, proposes to bring the loophole under control. Will the House have a chance to introduce that proposal as quickly as possible and close the loophole before other children are put at risk?

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers and I share the sense of surprise and puzzlement of all Members that the incident does not constitute an offence. He will be aware that a sex offences review is under way. We attach high priority to it and we shall bring its conclusions before the House at the earliest opportunity. In the light of recent events, the review will want to consider this particular point.

Bristol Royal Infirmary

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

1.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I hoped that we could have the debate earlier, in November, but, as some Members know, we had to consider emergency legislation dealing with human reproduction cloning at that time. Nevertheless, I trust that today's debate will give the House an opportunity to take a step back from the normal yah-boo politics of health—an opportunity for a more considered response to events at the Bristol royal infirmary that I believe people will come to see as a turning point for the national health service and a catalyst for change.

We are publishing today, to coincide with the debate, my Department's response to the report of the Kennedy inquiry. I should acknowledge at the outset that whatever is said here today, and indeed whatever was said in the report, will inevitably be of little comfort to the families of children who died or were damaged at Bristol. I have met the parents more than once, and I only hope that the action we are taking will help to assure them that we have all learned the lessons of what went wrong.

Sir Ian Kennedy and his team did an outstanding job, and I want to record my thanks to them for producing a report that I consider fundamentally important to the future development of the national health service.

The Kennedy inquiry into the care and management of children receiving complex heart treatment at the infirmary between 1984 and 1995 was established by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). Examining events at the infirmary between those dates, the report recognises that much has changed since then—not least at the infirmary itself, where, as I learned when I went there recently, cardiac care for both children and adults is now among the best in the country.

It is important to put the Kennedy report in context. Overwhelmingly, despite the real problems that undoubtedly exist in the NHS, patients receive good care and staff do a brilliant job. It is worth reminding people that the NHS is not full of bad doctors; it is full of good ones—people who are doing their best for patients, sometimes in difficult circumstances.

The report, however—in my view, at least—provides a searing analysis of the failings in organisation and culture that were prevalent not only in Bristol but throughout the NHS during those years. In brief, they were a failure to put patients at the centre of care, a failure of communication, a lack of leadership, paternalism, and what the report calls a "club culture", in which people got on in their careers by not rocking the boat. No standards were laid down against which performance in the NHS and quality of care could be measured. That was compounded by a decades-long underfunding of NHS services that is only now beginning to be put right.

Those broader organisational failings were most manifest in the specialist children's services. At the infirmary, and undoubtedly elsewhere in the NHS, children's services were last in line when it came to the allocation of resources. The report estimates that at Bristol all those factors—no single factor was responsible—conspired to bring about the unnecessary deaths of between 30 and 35 children.

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

As those who read the report may conclude, perhaps the greatest tragedy of all is that concerns were raised in and indeed outside the hospital about standards of care in paediatric cardiac surgery. Many people knew what was happening, but no one acted. The fact that it took a whistleblower, Dr. Stephen Bolsin, to bring the problems to the fore is perhaps the most serious indictment of the culture prevailing at that time.

The fault at Bristol, however, lay not with bad people, wrong though a few senior managers and senior clinicians were to act as they did. Underlying the whole Bristol tragedy was a much more profound structural and cultural problem—that of an NHS ultimately more geared to its own needs than to those of its patients, in which the question of accountability was confused in regard to services, professionals and patients.

I think most people would conclude today that a different relationship is needed between patients and services. When we published the NHS plan 18 months ago we tried to paint a different picture of the future of health care in our country, in which patients—and their safety—always come first; in which patients are in the driving seat and able to make informed choices about their care; in which there is a new culture of trust, not blame, in the NHS, with lines of accountability that are clear and a willingness to learn from mistakes; and in which the NHS is decentralised within a clear public service ethos, defined NHS principles and a framework of tough national standards which are regulated independently.

We endorse the Kennedy report's vision for the future of the NHS, but no one should underestimate the challenge involved in delivering it. As the report recognises, the NHS today is a very different health service. The report acknowledges that the underfunding that was such a feature of the NHS then is beginning to be addressed now. More significant for the longer term, the events at Bristol have spurred the Government and the medical profession to work together to put in place new standards and structures to improve the quality of care. As the Kennedy report says:

> "Recent developments give cause for optimism. These include statutory responsibility for the quality of health care, the development of clinical guidelines through the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, and the monitoring of performance through the Commission for Health Improvement."

The report welcomes the establishment of the national patient safety agency to run a single reporting system for all adverse health events, wherever they occur in the NHS. The report welcomes annual appraisal and revalidation for doctors, and recognises that a new contract for hospital consultants is being negotiated and that joint training for health professionals is being introduced. Many of those changes, and other reforms contained in the NHS plan, are welcomed or endorsed by the Kennedy report.

As the report highlights, however, further action still is needed if we are to prevent another tragedy on the scale of Bristol. The Government's response to the Kennedy report that we have published today addresses the 198 recommendations he made. Many we have accepted either directly or in principle, and work is under way to implement them. In a minority of areas we have chosen to adopt a different solution to that proposed by the inquiry panel. In essence, our response to Kennedy falls into two parts. The first includes the organisational and cultural changes needed to put the patient at the centre of the NHS. The second involves the changes needed to assure quality and secure improvements in services.

The reforms that are about putting patients centre stage involve giving patients more information, more power and more choice. The NHS at the time of the events in Bristol lived in the shadow of its own history: it was an organisation for which Government provided limited resources and in which doctors were left in charge of providing limited services, and patients—frankly speaking—were expected to be grateful for the limits of what they received. In today's world, most people would conclude that that will no longer do. People today expect services to respond to their needs—and rightly so. They want services that they can trust and that offer faster, higher-quality care. Increasingly, they want to make informed choices about how to be treated, where to be treated and by whom.

Those changes require a new culture of openness in the NHS. The days have gone when parts of the NHS could behave as if they were a secret society. In the end, the NHS does not belong to anyone other than the public and patients it serves. A service designed around the needs of patients has to give more power to its patients. As Kennedy said, the patients voice should be

> "on the inside rather than on the outside."

So reforms are being introduced to give patients a greater role and a stronger say in the NHS, with patients forums in every trust, patients electing patients onto trust boards, and the results of surveys of patients helping to determine the ratings and therefore the resources that trusts receive. The balance of power is shifting—decisively, I hope—in favour of the patient.

Kennedy describes the relationship between services and patients in the Bristol era as

> "based on a paternalistic approach to families and to the care and support they needed."

Today's relationship between professionals and patients should be a partnership in which patients have a responsibility to keep healthy, treat professionals respectfully and use services wisely, but have a right to be involved in decisions about their care. That is why new procedures for informed consent are now coming into place, and they will need to be underpinned by a better patient focus in the education of future generations of clinicians. I hope that, increasingly, doctors, nurses, therapists and other clinicians will be trained together to learn the values of patient involvement and the need for better patient communication.

Professionals have the right to be valued by Government and patients and to exercise their skills and judgment for the benefit of patients. They have a responsibility to participate in audit and clinical governance, to work not on their own but as part of a team and to treat patients with respect and dignity.

The Kennedy report says:

> "the culture in Bristol was not one which encouraged openness and honesty in the exchange of information between and amongst healthcare professionals and between them and families."

Patients today have a right to know about their treatment and care. We are already publishing more information than has ever been published before about the NHS, whether that is local health service performance or specific data on mortality rates. We need to publish more, not less, information for the benefit of patients.

In the light of the Kennedy report, it is clear to me that such information should not be published by Government but should be published independently. That is why we have accepted the inquiry recommendation to establish the office for information on health care performance within the Commission for Health Improvement.

As the Kennedy report makes clear, there was no shortage of data about clinical outcomes at Bristol. The problem was that no one was responsible for analysing them or acting on them. The new office within the CHI will address that fundamental faultline.

There was another problem: parents and families did not have access to data at Bristol. The Kennedy report calls for that failure to be addressed through the publication of information on the performance of individual hospitals and consultant units. Open publication is the right thing to do. For data on surgical outcomes to be published, of course, they need to be robust, rigorous and risk-adjusted. They also need to command the confidence not just of patients, but of surgeons themselves.

The events at Bristol have, I believe, fundamentally changed the view of the medical profession about the publication of outcome data. There was a time when the very idea was regarded as unacceptable. Today, it is the profession itself that is leading the drive towards more open publication.

The cardiac surgeons are in the vanguard here. For example, the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons has published the results of coronary surgery for heart units in the UK and, within the last week, has extended this information to include the results of aortic valve operations over the last three years.

I am pleased to say that, following discussions, the society has agreed to go further still. We have now reached agreement that, from April 2004, 30-day mortality rates for every cardiac surgeon in England will be made public. This goes further than the Kennedy report recommendations. It means that, for the first time, patients themselves will be able to see the clinical outcomes that heart surgeons are achieving. We have of course to guard against defensive medicine. That is why the society itself will be involved in publishing this data, alongside the new office for information on health care performance, to ensure that the data systems are properly resourced and that the data themselves are credible and properly risk-adjusted and take rolling averages over a number of years.

This is just the first step to publishing more information on individual consultant outcomes over time.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the data that are to be published will include paediatric cardiac surgery?

Mr. Milburn: We are in further discussions with the British Paediatric Association. By the summer, I expect that details on individual units will be published by the association in order to make that information more available. Over time, more data will be published about individual consultant outcomes, as I shall describe later.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's emphasis that the data must be valid and must enjoy the confidence of clinicians, and his stress on the consequential need to avoid defensive medicine. Does he accept that previous performance league tables lacked the data on patients' preoperative state produced, with the Department's co-operation, by Dr. Foster, and that they fell short of some of the welcome requirements that he has set out today?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, of course, but I want to make a couple of important caveats. First, I have told the House, and the Select Committee on Health when I have appeared before it, that we are never going to have perfect data. There is no such thing, and we should be clear about that. All the data that we publish, whenever we publish them, should come with the appropriate health warning.

Secondly, we will never get better data until we have the courage to publish. Only then will people begin to realise that the data have some significance. That is beginning to happen already with the organisational data that we are publishing on NHS trusts. Trusts are beginning to realise that the assessments that are made have consequences. That is as it should be, as organisations doing well differ from those doing consistently badly.

I do not mean to say that the same principles apply to individual surgeons, but in my time as a Health Minister I have witnessed the remarkable change that has taken place in the NHS and in the medical profession. There is a real recognition that the old order to which the Kennedy report in so many ways looks back has changed fundamentally. That change must continue, and we need to drive it forward.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Secretary of State spoke of the publication of data on the NHS by the new office for information. However, will the office be responsible for acting on the data, or will that fall to the Commission for Health Improvement? Also, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that not only should action be taken on performance failure identified through the data, but that referral should be improved as a way of driving standards up? Does he agree with the report that paediatrics should be more widely available as a specialisation in general practice in order to ensure a greater awareness of good referral for children's services?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman's second point is absolutely fundamental, and my speech will touch on the centrality of improving standards in children's services, in both primary and secondary care. Sometimes there is a debate about whether primary or secondary care is the more important, but we must improve the standards in all the services available for children and their families. We have some proposals for doing just that.

As for the relationship between analysis and action with regard to information, the beauty of Kennedy's recommendation that an office be established within the existing inspectorate which will have overall responsibility for overseeing standards of care is that that provides an opportunity to achieve precisely those linkages that were missing when the tragedies in Bristol took place.

People were analysing data at that time. Lots of people had access to data, but no individual or organisation had the responsibility for doing anything about what was found. Terrible tragedies occurred as a result.

[Mr. Milburn]

It is important that we learn the lessons, and the office will have an important role to play in analysing the data and feeding information back to the service. The CHI will also have an important role, but I stress again that I believe we will secure lasting improvements in the NHS only if the analysis and dissemination of information is done in conjunction with the people who perform the operations.

I do not perform operations, and neither does the CHI. The people who do are among the most skilled in our country, and they should be among the most valued.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I share the emphasis that the right hon. Gentleman places on that issue. I have just two questions. First, he talked about data and defensive medicine. Is it not possible that some people involved may protect their reputations instead of giving the best service to their patient—in other words, if there is a risk, they will not take it? Medical science has been advanced by those who, using their skills, took risks and helped people. Secondly, are we training and encouraging enough paediatric specialists?

Mr. Milburn: On the second point, I hope that we are training a lot more but we have shortages, as the hon. Gentleman and I are painfully aware. I think that we can deal with that over time. It is worth remembering that the numbers coming through medical schools, training and so forth are a sign of optimism.

The hon. Gentleman's first point is very important. I have discussed that matter at length with Mr. Bruce Keogh from the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons. He put to me a sensible proposal, which we will need to discuss with the new office within the commission. We cannot have a situation in which open publication of data means that the surgeons who take on the highest-risk cases feel as if they will be penalised—that they will end up bottom of the league table in *The Times*. The proposal that we have discussed—obviously, we will need to refine it—is that we publish two sets of information: one to try to identify standard cases, so that we get some evenness and a benchmark; the other on the overall performance of the surgeon. Of course, that will be risk-adjusted and so on.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a strong and credible science behind that. In parts of the United States of America—New York state and elsewhere—that sort of information has been published for many years. I think that we can do better than them, and the society does too. There are some safeguards that we can put in place, but I come back to the fundamental point, which is twofold. First, patients have a right to know. Secondly, surgeons and doctors have a right to be involved in the process of patients knowing. That is the way we intend to take it forward.

Dr. Evan Harris: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: May I move on for a moment?

As I said, we are working with the medical profession to extend the number and range of specialties where information on both the consultant's and the unit's comparative performance can be published. In each case we will work closely with the royal colleges and other professional groups to build on national audit work already in train.

That is a courageous step on the part of heart surgeons and the society that represents them. I believe that it is the right step. It will tackle one of the deficiencies that lies at the centre of the Bristol tragedy—patients and parents were kept in the dark about the care and treatment that they were likely to receive. With the safeguards that I have described in place, open publication will not just make for a more open health service but will help to raise standards in all parts of the NHS.

It will certainly help to empower patients and help them to make informed choices about their care. As the House is aware, from July this year heart patients who have waited six months for their surgery will be able to choose between waiting longer locally or travelling further to be treated quickly in another hospital. As capacity expands, choice can grow. Choice will fundamentally change the balance of power in the health service. In the crudest of terms, hospitals will no longer choose patients—patients will choose hospitals. That is a fundamental change in accountabilities, whereby the patient is in the driving seat and the NHS looks outwards to patients rather than upwards to Government or even inwards to itself.

That brings me to the other element of our response to the Kennedy report—

Dr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: Or perhaps not.

Dr. Harris: May I quickly raise two points with the right hon. Gentleman? First, as regards the six-month limit, is he prepared to introduce safeguards so that hospitals do not try to rush people in within six months at the expense of more urgent cardiac cases where delays of between three weeks and six months have been experienced? I have raised that point with cardiac surgeons.

Secondly, I am so pleased to hear the right hon. Gentleman's qualifications about league tables. With hindsight, does he think that performance league tables for hospitals should be subject to caveats and quality controls similar to those he wants for surgeons' data?

Mr. Milburn: Sometimes I wonder why I bother to try, but let me try once again with the hon. Gentleman—just to test my patience.

I have told the hon. Gentleman on innumerable occasions that when we published the first set of what he calls "league tables" for NHS trusts I said—as I have said on every subsequent occasion—those data were far from perfect. They are far from perfect. However, we have to start somewhere. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not saying on behalf of the Liberals that the Liberal party, of all parties, believes that the public do not have a right to know what is going on in their local health service. Of course they have a right to know, but caveats are attached to all such matters. However, we really must move to a very different relationship between public services and the public whom they serve.

I was about to say—

Dr. Harris: What about the six-month limit?

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that reminder. As regards the six-month limit, urgent or emergency cases must always come first in the NHS. However, if capacity is going begging in other parts of the NHS, or even in the private sector, which could be used for the benefit of NHS patients who face a serious operation such as heart surgery, we should use it. No one will be dragooned into exercising choice. By definition, choice is a matter of individual volition. Individuals will be able to choose—and rightly so. If that means that we will be able to reduce waiting times for people who, as everyone agrees, are waiting too long for treatment at present, it is a sensible course.

The other element of our response to the Kennedy report is to address what it rightly identifies as the confused system of accountability that existed for standards, regulation and management in the NHS. The report sums that up well:

> "We cannot say that the external system for assuring and monitoring the quality of care was inadequate. There was, in truth, no such system."

For all those reasons, we have established a clear national framework within which local NHS services can operate. When we came to office in 1997 there was an absence of national standards and no means of implementing them. There was no means of spreading good practice or of eliminating bad practice. There was no national evaluation of new treatments and certainly no independent external inspection of local services. As Kennedy rightly pointed out, that lack of clear standards and clear lines of accountability underpinned the whole Bristol tragedy.

It is easy to forget how far the national health service has come in only four and a half years. There are new national standards for services—for cancer, mental health, care of the elderly and coronary heart disease. There is greater transparency in local service performance. There is a new legal duty of quality and a new system of clinical governance to enshrine improvements throughout the NHS. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence evaluates new treatments. For the first time, the NHS has an independent inspectorate—the Commission for Health Improvement. With the NHS modernisation agency, there are now new systems for when things go wrong and more help to learn from what goes right.

Within that strong national framework, greater devolution to local NHS services can take place. However, Kennedy recommends that we go further still. There are five recommendations in particular that we will take forward.

First, we agree with the thinking behind the inquiry's recommendations on the separation of inspection functions from the overall management of the service. As devolution takes hold in the NHS, the Department of Health will move from a day-to-day management role to a more strategic one. It will set overall direction and ensure that there are proper arrangements for management, standard setting, inspection, improvement and accountability.

Secondly, inspection will be strengthened and made more independent. Through the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, the Commission for Health Improvement will have a new function of inspecting individual NHS trusts and other providers that offer NHS care against a set of agreed and published criteria. Where the commission finds evidence of unacceptably poor services, it will be able to recommend that special measures are taken. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) asked about that a moment ago. In future, the commission will also make an annual report to Parliament on its overall findings on the quality of services provided to NHS patients—a further mark of its independence.

Thirdly, there will be greater co-ordination among those organisations responsible for assuring the quality of care in the NHS. That will necessitate closer working and, over time, organisational integration between the CHI, the social services inspectorate, the National Care Standards Commission and the Audit Commission, so that health and social care services are subject to a common set of standards, irrespective of whether they are provided by public, private or voluntary organisations. In the meantime, I confirm that we will establish a new non-statutory council for the quality of health care to bring those organisations together with other relevant organisations, such as the national patient safety agency, the National Clinical Assessment Authority and, of course, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Fourthly, there will be reforms to professional self-regulation. Kennedy says that it should be organised in such a way that it provides adequate and transparent safeguards for the patient. Through the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, which is currently before Parliament, we are actioning the Kennedy recommendation that there should be a new body—a council for the regulation of health care professions—to ensure that the individual regulatory bodies, such as the General Medical Council and so on, act in a more consistent way. I can also tell the House today that in the spring we will publish the Government's proposals for the reform of the GMC alongside its own radical proposal for the revalidation of doctors. As a minimum, reform will need to secure a GMC that is smaller, with much greater public and patient involvement, with faster, more transparent procedures and with meaningful accountability to the public and the health service.

Fifthly, we will strengthen the system for reporting and analysing adverse clinical events and so-called near misses. The national patient safety agency that we have established is currently testing how such information can best be gathered and fed back to the NHS. The aim is to have a national system in place this year. Among other changes, we will establish a confidential telephone helpline, as recommended by Kennedy, to allow staff and patients to report problems and mistakes.

Those changes, alongside others in the Government's response today, will strengthen the national framework for standards within which NHS care should be provided, so that patients everywhere receive high-quality care. There is one important caveat to all this, however. No one can guarantee, even with the best standards system, that mistakes will not occur. Medicine is not a perfect science; it is a human science. Even the best doctors can make the worst mistakes. Our task therefore is not to pretend that we can somehow eradicate every error; our job is to ensure that systems are in place to detect errors, to minimise them and, perhaps most important, to learn from them.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): In the spirit of the Kennedy report, and given that liability in most of those cases was agreed as long ago as 1998, what pressure—as a part of clearing up this appalling episode—will the right

[Mr. Hugo Swire]

hon. Gentleman now be prepared to apply to the NHS litigation authority to settle outstanding cases such as that of my constituents Jim and Bronwen Stewart's son, Ian, as soon as possible?

Mr. Milburn: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that pressure, as he describes it, has been applied. Indeed, when I met the Bristol heart children's action group, I told the chairman, Mr. Steve Parker, whom he will know, that I would try to facilitate a discussion between Mr. Parker and Mr. Stephen Walker, who leads the litigation authority. That meeting took place on 12 December. As the hon. Gentleman knows, a substantial number of cases have been settled and £1.8 million has been paid out thus far in damages. A small number of cases are still outstanding and the litigation authority will try to speed those through as quickly as it can. However, some cases are not in the hands of the litigation authority but in those of the claimants' lawyers. It is for those lawyers to try to be as speedy and co-operative as I believe the litigation authority is.

I was saying that, to minimise and learn from the errors, we need to develop a more open culture in the NHS and certainly move beyond any culture of blame. Anyone who has read the Kennedy report will find its tone, given the seriousness of the issues that it addresses, very refreshing.

I have asked the chief medical officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, to assess the feasibility of implementing a controversial Kennedy recommendation, but one that needs serious consideration. Staff who report an adverse incident promptly should be immune from disciplinary action other than, of course, if they have committed a criminal act. We shall assess the feasibility of being able to do that. That is also why we are considering reforms to the current system of clinical negligence that Kennedy says

"institutionalises the notion of blame."

As the House is aware, the chief medical officer is considering proposals for radical reform here with a view to publication of a White Paper on this subject later this year.

There is one final point. Lest we forget, the tragedy at Bristol was a failure in services for children. Too many children were failed by a system that was supposed to keep them well, make them well and keep them from harm. Improvements are now coming through. At a national level, they are being overseen by Professor Al Aynsley Green, the Nuffield professor of child health at Great Ormond Street hospital, who I have appointed as national clinical director for children. At a local level, each primary care trust and NHS trust will have a senior member of staff taking responsibility for improving children's health. By the end of this year, there will be new national standards for the care of children in hospital. Those standards will be in place for the first time.

Thankfully, few of us in the House have experienced the tragedy that the Bristol parents have faced. That said, I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I say that that does not diminish in any way the determination of us all to learn the lessons and change the system that let those families and children down so very badly.

Some of the reforms necessary to do that are already in place; some are being put in place through legislation at this time; and some, as I have outlined this afternoon, will require further reforms in the future. Legislative change takes time and cultural change takes longer, but no one should be in any doubt that the reforms required to open up the NHS, to make it more accountable to its patients, to strengthen regulation and to raise standards are now under way.

There can be no greater loss for any parent than the tragedies that parents faced at Bristol. There can be no greater lasting legacy than that we learn the lessons, reform the structures and change the health service so that it is better able to ensure that what happened then is not repeated again.

2.4 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): For me, this is an issue not only of national concern but of great local importance. That goes for all those Members on both sides of the House who represent seats in and around Bristol. It is worth pointing out that all of them—Front and Back Benchers—are present for this debate.

The tragic events of recent weeks that we all witnessed on our televisions and read about in the newspapers will have brought home to those of us in the House in a very personal way the sadness and devastation involved in the loss of a child. So much worse it must be for parents who know or believe that it could have been avoided. It is with the greatest admiration that we look at the parents involved in the Bristol scandal and see not a driving emotion for revenge, but a determination to ensure that it cannot happen again.

It is also worth pointing out that life has not been easy for health professionals in Bristol recently. When I worked as a junior doctor in a bone marrow transplant unit, I learned early on that I did not have what it would take to work with sick young people, many of whom would die from the trauma involved. The people who do that show a special courage in their care for patients. The good recent results in Bristol, to which the Secretary of State alluded, should be a major boost for them.

Bristol has an excellent medical school that produces excellent doctors, and high-quality postgraduate education that produces top-quality medical personnel. I am sure that all hon. Members with constituents who work as health professionals in Bristol will want to pay tribute to those who overwhelmingly act with only one motive—to improve the care for all their patients.

Naturally, we welcome much of what is in the Government's response to the Kennedy report, and when we have time we will consider some of the issues in greater detail. We have been especially pleased with not only what the Secretary of State said today, but with what the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), said during the passage of the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill about the Government's understanding of the need to move towards a single regulator for health care.

We very much welcome the strengthening of the Commission for Health Improvement. We always thought it ridiculous that when the Government negotiated the concordat with the private sector there was one body to investigate and regulate the private sector and one for the NHS. I think that it is nonsense to have two inspectorates when NHS patients can be treated in the two different systems. The assurances that the Minister of State gave the other night were most welcome, and I hope that they will be transferred to proposals in legislation, which would certainly have Conservative support.

The Secretary of State will receive even more support if that single inspectorate is strengthened further and given a public health role. The improvements in mortality and morbidity have come about because of public health issues. It is worrying that we have falling immunisation rates and a rising incidence of infectious diseases and sexually transmitted diseases. We want a body that can take concerted action, across departments. If the attitude of the Minister of State in our debates in Committee and the House the other night is anything to go by, there is a good chance that we can get agreement on both sides of the House on a substantially improved and strengthened body. That would be to everyone's benefit.

There is no doubt that the Secretary of State was right when he said that information is the key to what Professor Kennedy wants. Those of us who have been involved in what happened in Bristol are all too aware that although there was an absence of information available publicly, a great deal was available to doctors in the know in the locality. It is interesting to see the referral patterns of those who were treated in Bristol. I hope that the publication of information will ensure that that problem does not happen again.

Questions arise from what the Government say in their response to the report. They state that more information will be

"provided to patients on how local health services compare with others"

and that there will be

"greater choice for patients over where they are treated".

We need more details on exactly what information patients will get. Will it include aspects of primary care and issues that go beyond that into the community? How will it be made available? Where will it be available—in libraries, surgeries or on the internet? Who will decide what local information should be made available, and who will decide what information—if any—should be withheld? Exactly how will patient choice be rolled out in accordance with the information that will be available?

We are interested in some specific details. The Secretary of State talked about publishing information on 30-day mortality rates. As he said, that opens up a range of other issues. He is right to say that the medical profession itself has been leading the debate. Its openness and willingness to contemplate the publication and wider use of data differs from past attitudes. Even during my medical training, information was still regarded as something that the profession owned. There has been a huge cultural shift, for which we should all be very grateful.

I completely agree that information is, in itself, a good thing, and incomplete information is better than no information at all. Only fools and knaves fear information, and if it is incomplete, our job is to try to make it complete, not to try to withhold it. If information is to be meaningful, however, we must have certain assurances about what it will contain. It must be comprehensive and it must take into account the clinical background of those involved and the sort of units in which doctors will practise.

Recently, a case came to light concerning a hospital that was to have one of its stars withheld because its neonatal death rate was too high, until it was pointed out to inspectors that the hospital is the regional centre to which difficult cases are sent. That demonstrates our need to have complete information in the appropriate context before we can decide on its usefulness.

Information must include the value-added data that make it much more useful to patients. Of course, patients must be able to understand it, and the majority of them are not statisticians. It is difficult to look at tables of information. It needs to be presented in a way that is accessible and, therefore, useful to patients. It is no use if it benefits only those who understand the complexities of statistics.

Dr. Evan Harris: I agree with what the hon. Gentleman just said, but before that he said that the publication of incomplete data was always better than a total absence of published information. However, in his example, which concerned a star rating based on inappropriate data, the information was misleading and its publication might have damaged morale and led people to avoid using the best unit for the most difficult cases. Would not that have been worse than having no data published?

Dr. Fox: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but to say that it is better to have no information is to move in completely the wrong direction. If information is incomplete, one must explain why it should be improved and point out how that could be done. That gives the professions a chance to respond. Of course, it is better to have full information, but withholding information because it is incomplete cannot be beneficial in a health care system where consumers are increasingly well informed and, indeed, desire to be better informed. I find it strange that a party that used to be liberal wants to withhold any data. It seems that it has been left behind in this debate.

We are interested in what the Government said in their response about consent. Fully engaging patients in consent is one of the most important ways in which information is usefully imparted to patients in the health care process. Perhaps when the Minister of State responds to the debate he will give us more details about how the Government intend to develop that. Will we have standardised consent forms so that patients everywhere and in every sector will receive the same information about the procedures that they may undergo, about what will happen to them after an operation and about any likely risk? If so, how will those forms be drawn up?

It is worth pointing out that the system has improved markedly in recent years, with far better information given to patients who have consented to medical and surgical procedures. I hope that the Government, in making improvements to the consent process, will welcome the big improvement in professional experience and, not least, the involvement of the royal colleges. We must, however, accept that there are limitations to what we can achieve. It is far easier to get fully informed consent for elective surgical and medical procedures than it ever will be for emergency procedures. We must not throw the baby out with the bath water.

We must also make sure that patients are fully informed about experimental procedures. I believe that patients understand the need for innovation and, very often, if they are given full information, they will agree to be involved

[Dr. Fox]

in experimental procedures. What they find completely unacceptable, as will the House, is being kept in the dark about the real reason for such procedures. We have to achieve a balance to ensure that we are not putting at a disadvantage those who are carrying out valuable clinical trials, because that might impede the development of quality medicine.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there have been improvements in the past few years. In my area and, I have heard, in other areas, consultants are now much more likely to write directly to patients, rather than to their GP, who will receive a copy, setting out the precise details of the proposed operation. The patient therefore has a written record from the consultant, which is surely to be welcomed.

Dr. Fox: Of course, that is to be welcomed. There is extremely good practice by some doctors in some areas. That is not the problem; it is that such procedures are not followed throughout the health care system. Any attempt to improve practice in both the private sector and the NHS is to be greatly welcomed.

Naturally, we have strong reservations about parts of the Government's approach, including the abolition of community health councils and the establishment of patients forums and patient advocacy liaison services. In recent days, our arguments on those matters have been well rehearsed. For example, we believe that the abolition of CHCs is ill thought out, expensive and vindictive. There is no reason for us to repeat those arguments today.

We are, however, concerned about one or two specific matters that I should like the Minister of State to address. The first relates to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. The Government response refers to

> "NHS bodies being directed to fund treatments recommended by NICE from January 2002"—

which we already knew about—but goes on to say that

> "NICE guidance will no longer need the approval of the Secretary of State for Health before dissemination".

Who will make the decisions about affordability, and where is the accountability in the system? That seems to go against the earlier assurances given by Ministers on that front. Urgent clarification by the Minister of State would be very welcome.

It is rather unclear what is meant by some of the statements in the Government's response on the future training of health professionals. For example, it says that the Government are

> "supporting people from non-traditional backgrounds to move into medicine."

What does that mean? To whom is it intended to apply? What will it mean in practice? What does the response mean when it refers to

> "greater public involvement in the selection of those entering training as health care professionals"?

I am not entirely clear about what the Government intend by that. It would be useful if the Minister of State could clarify that.

I would also welcome clarification, which I thought the Secretary of State was going to give us, of the Government's plans for information. The Government response says that by summer 2002 there will be

> "guidelines about sharing information with patients and parents of young children".

Details on those points would help us all to avoid any unnecessary confusion in the debate.

We look forward to the Government's plans for the reform of the GMC. The Secretary of State was right to say that Bristol acted as a catalyst to that reform, but it was, in any case, well under way. I welcome Professor Kennedy's positive approach to the concept of the maintenance of professional self-regulation. He says:

> "For each group of healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses and midwives, the professions allied to medicine and managers) there should be one body charged with overseeing all aspects relating to the regulation of professional life: education, registration, training, CPD, revalidation and discipline."

He says that for doctors that body should be the GMC. I am glad that the Government have not listened to the voices of those who would have taken them in another direction.

I hope that when the plans are published there will be a clear separation of the disciplinary and investigatory aspects of the GMC. I suggest that it would be very useful if the Government included time limits for investigations, or at least for those conducted under normal procedures. There is a serious problem with lengthy investigations undermining professional self-confidence, removing staff unnecessarily from the NHS and costing a lot of money.

The Secretary of State alluded to the issue of clinical negligence. Professor Kennedy was bold in his assessment and suggested remedies. His report says that the clinical negligence system

> "should be replaced by an alternative system for compensating those patients who suffer harm arising out of treatment from the NHS."

He went on to suggest that an expert group be established to advise on the matter and that every effort be made to create

> "an open and non-punitive environment in which it is safe to report and admit sentinel events."

The National Audit Office report "Handling clinical negligence claims in England", published last May, estimated that on 31 March 2000 there were outstanding clinical negligence claims to the value of £2.6 billion. It estimated that a further £1.3 billion would be required to meet likely settlements for claims expected to arise from incidents that have occurred, making a total of almost £4 billion in outstanding claims. It showed that while 75 per cent. of publicly funded claims were unsuccessful, the total charge to the NHS for settling claims had risen sevenfold since 1995–96. In 1999–2000, 65 per cent. of settlements below £50,000 involved legal and other costs involved in settling claims that exceeded the damages awarded. Cerebral palsy and brain damage cases accounted for 80 per cent. of claims by value and 26 per cent. by number.

In 1999-2000, the average time from claim to payment of damages of £10,000 was five and a half years, which is not satisfactory. The debate has centred on medical practitioners and patients, and the effect on them of such a slow process. There is concern that the rise in litigation and its formal nature may adversely affect medical practitioners in their work and relationships. I have first-hand knowledge of patients and doctors who have been devastated by the slowness of the process, and it has to be tackled.

The disproportionate amount of money spent on legal costs and the costs of settlement in smaller-value cases deprive the system of resources that could better be used to compensate patients or more widely deployed in the NHS. Many patients would like remedies other than compensation. The National Audit Office pointed out that a package of measures may be necessary to satisfy patients, perhaps including an apology, an explanation, access to remedial treatment, counselling, meetings with medical staff to explore what went wrong, an explanation of action taken to prevent it from happening again, and the provision of support. How many of those measures are missing in the sorry and tragic saga in Bristol?

We therefore welcome this debate and have issued our own consultation document, which has received a good welcome and thoughtful responses. I hope that the House can take a consensual view of what measures we need to introduce in this complicated area. We cannot allow the compensation culture or, even worse, the blame culture, to swamp our medical systems. Health spending is for health services, not lawyers.

We must still make a full remedy available to those who have been harmed in the health care system, which is why we find it hard to agree with Professor Kennedy's recommendation that we abolish the right to sue for medical negligence. We believe that that goes too far, but we are interested in conciliation, mediation and tribunal methods of achieving that goal. We are also worried about no-fault compensation, given the experiences of other countries, but we maintain an open mind on that.

Naturally, we agree with much of the Government's response and join them in thanking Professor Kennedy and his team for all their work. Many further issues have been raised and no doubt we shall consider them in detail in forthcoming legislation. There will be an inherent tension between inspection bodies and setting guidelines and standards on the one hand and what the Government describe in the report as the "freedom to innovate" on the other. All other countries suffer that tension, and we shall be no exception. Over time, we shall want to look in detail at the Government's responses and shall want to co-operate constructively, where we can, in the legislation that will flow from the report.

Finally, producing better and safer care is the best tribute that the House can pay to those who suffered so much in the Bristol tragedy.

2.25 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I very much welcome the Government's considered response to the Kennedy report and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the progress that has already been made in implementing many of its important proposals.

Basically, the report spells out two things: what happened in Bristol and what needs to be done to prevent it from happening again anywhere else in this country. I congratulate all those involved in conducting the public inquiry, which has been extremely thorough and intellectually rigorous. That covers both aspects of the inquiry—the historic inquiry into what happened and the forward look at how best to avoid it in future.

I congratulate in particular Professor Ian Kennedy—now Sir Ian Kennedy—on the way in which he conducted the inquiry. When he was recommended to me, I knew that he was a great scholar and intellect. When I met him, I discovered that in addition he was questing and awkward, in the best sense of the word. I got the clear impression that he was extremely humane and understanding, so I was pleased to have the opportunity to ask him to chair the inquiry. My hopes and expectations, and those of everyone involved, were exceeded. He therefore deserves great congratulations on his contribution, not just to sorting out what happened in Bristol, but to future changes and improvements in people's treatment in the national health service.

After years of representations by concerned professionals and parents whose children had died or suffered brain damage, for a long time nothing was done—there was no response. It was 1997 before the General Medical Council finally started to investigate what had happened in Bristol, although concerns had been expressed in the mid-1980s.

In early May 1998, before the GMC concluded its inquiries, I met the Bristol heart children's action group, which represented parents whose children had died or suffered brain damage. I was deeply impressed, and deeply depressed, by the grief that the parents had suffered. I was deeply impressed and depressed by their dissatisfaction with the way in which they had been treated before, during and after what had happened to their children. I was deeply impressed and depressed by their disillusion with the personal, clinical, professional and management arrangements surrounding what had happened to their precious children: their children had been failed, and they had been failed. I explained that once the GMC had concluded its deliberations I would set up an inquiry.

The first time I met the group, we discussed the form that the inquiry should take, as there were various alternatives. I gave them a memorandum produced by Sir Cecil Clothier QC, the former ombudsman, which set out the merits, as he saw them, of a private inquiry with a public report, on the lines of the Nurse Allitt inquiry that he had carried out. I suggested that the parents should discuss the various alternatives with their colleagues and lawyers, and that they should then come back and meet me again.

I reflected on what the parents had said and its significance, and within minutes of their leaving my room I concluded that the only proper response was to establish a public inquiry with full statutory powers—that, in the circumstances, only that would suffice. Preparations started before I met the parents again and before the GMC came to its final conclusions.

Considerable pressure, one way or another, was brought to bear on me not to hold any inquiry at all, and certainly not a great big public inquiry, because of all the problems that it might cause. As a measure of the change that has occurred since then, I do not believe that any of those who tried to persuade me not to proceed would want to do that now. I am pleased that the culture in the NHS and the profession has changed and things have moved on.

By the time the General Medical Council announced its disciplinary decisions, in the middle of June 1998, I could announce the establishment of the public inquiry and the appointment of Professor Ian Kennedy to chair it.

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

The report confirms in detail what seemed fairly obvious in 1998 from a distance: there had been failures at every level—by individuals and of the system.

Surgeons had let down the children. The local NHS management had let down the children and their parents. The national health service advisory machinery on clinical standards, such as it was, had let down the children and the parents. NHS regional management had failed. NHS national management had let them down. Sadly, the professional bodies, including the royal colleges, had also failed to tackle this difficult problem.

It was not just a question of technical failure. There was an enormous failure of attitude, and a failure to take the right approach to patients and parents. They had been let down by the NHS and the professions, who were there only to serve them. It was not a question of failure against new, more rigorous and demanding criteria. It was a failure against Florence Nightingale's century-old immortal question, "Who is in charge here?" The answer was, "Nobody." Everybody was responsible, so nobody was responsible.

In terms of clinical standards, it must be recognised that at that time the NHS, as an organisation, was letting down patients and the professions. The professions were trying to set, monitor and raise clinical standards, but that was not working well, partly because of some of the professional attitudes spelled out in the inquiry report, and partly because within professional organisations and between professional organisations there was no clear definition of responsibility for identifying things when they went wrong, and for doing something about it.

Most of all, the NHS as an organisation made little or no contribution to the setting, monitoring and raising of standards of treatment and care. That had become blindingly obvious to me within a few weeks of becoming Secretary of State. That was why, even before the Bristol inquiry was established, we published a White Paper in December 1997 that was intended to assist the professions in what they were trying to do by way of improving standards. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence was established to set standards.

A duty of clinical governance was being imposed on the boards of NHS trusts. It is difficult to believe that for 50 years the NHS had operated a management system in which senior management had no responsibility for the clinical standards of the organisation that they were supposedly managing. All they had was a duty to break even at the end of the financial year—a duty that they frequently failed to discharge. They had no duty in relation to clinical standards, so they were given that duty. The Commission for Health Improvement was set up to make sure, through a process of inspection, checking and advice, that standards were met.

All doctors, we said, would be required to be subject to external clinical audit. National service frameworks were established to cover heart disease, cancer, the treatment of older people, mental health and diabetes. Patients and GPs, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State observed, were to be given information about the success rates of treatment in their local hospitals.

The medical profession was already moving to introduce the concept of revalidation, so that every effort could be made to ensure that doctors were up to date in their knowledge and continually updated themselves. That was a difficult concept for the medical profession to take on, but members of the professions were doing that and continue to do so.

As my right hon. Friend pointed out, there have been further developments since the Bristol inquiry was established. One of the most important was the work by the then new chief medical officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, who started to consider how the NHS could learn from things that had gone wrong, and to apply to the NHS the approach of the aviation industry. The aviation industry has never sought to learn just from crashes; it has also always tried to learn from near-misses.

In the NHS there was hardly a process of learning from the crashes, and no process of gathering information and learning from the near-misses. Eventually, Professor Donaldson produced his report entitled "An Organisation with a Memory", and now my right hon. Friend has proceeded with the establishment of the national patient safety agency, which will help the professionals learn from things that have gone wrong, not just in their hospital or their unit, and not just from their own mistakes. They will be able to learn from the problems and mistakes of other professionals, and to identify procedures that appear to be intrinsically dangerous and should be avoided, or procedures that could be improved by minor changes.

Such developments have been endorsed by the report of the inquiry. In most cases the report recommends that the functions of the bodies that I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have set up should be extended, their powers strengthened and their independence enhanced. I am sure that we all want that to happen. I am glad that there now seems to be a consensus in the House about the establishment of the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, as well as the introduction of other proposals that some people described at one stage as time and resource-consuming bureaucracy. All those changes were intended to help NHS professionals to make it easier to do their jobs as well as they would like. That is what they want and why they took up their professions in the first place. They are entitled to demand from us a system that helps them to carry out their professional tasks and does not hinder them.

A huge range of issues were raised in the report. I should like to concentrate on two of them. First, a major change in attitude is required in the medical profession. I think that it is already under way. Secondly—this may be more difficult—a change in public attitude and a major change in the law are required. First, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, there must be a much more open approach to patients and they must be more involved in decision making. Part of that openness concerns personal relations between professionals and patients, but another part of it is the publication of data, in relation to which there are dilemmas and difficulties. It is no use anyone pretending that there are simple, easy and quick solutions to the problem. Indeed, I do not think that anyone is suggesting that; at least, I have not heard anyone do so.

If one is a dedicated professional, the crucial issue is that the data should reflect the truth. The simplest truth is this: "When I did this operation, did the patient live or die?" That is a plain simple fact. Oddly enough, previously, and during the time in which I have been a Member of the House of Commons, NHS data did not distinguish between deaths and discharges. It was only as a result of pressure exerted by me and others that that distinction began to be made. The difference between death and discharge is simple and straightforward, and involves no element of judgment. The minute that we start trying properly to make allowances for the advanced—or otherwise—nature of the condition being dealt with, or for the general health of the patient being operated on, some elements of judgment come into the data.

We will have to allow that to happen, but it is crucial that it is done fairly. If the process is unfair to the professional, it is bound to mislead patients; it cannot do otherwise. Unfair data would do no one any good. They would undermine confidence and give false impressions of the brilliance of some and the inadequacies of others. If an impression is false, it is worse than useless. None the less, we must try to make a start, and the profession, including cardiac surgeons, has gone far in that regard. The extent to which professional bodies have taken on the problem and are addressing the dilemma, however difficult it may be for their individual members—after all, those are the people whom they represent—is commendable. They have carried progress on the matter a long way and they need our encouragement. Provided that they are willing to publish the data, we are going down the right road.

Then we come to the question of the personal involvement of patients in decisions affecting their treatment or that of their children. There must be greater understanding in the profession, or at least in some of it, about how patients and parents feel. Some people at least are lagging behind and must make a greater effort to put themselves in the position of the confused and not especially well-informed patient. If the patient is a child, those in the profession must try to imagine themselves in the perturbing and deeply disturbing circumstances of the parent. There is a difference between our concern for our own health, however good or bad it is, and our anxiety about the health of our children. Many people are fairly cavalier about their health, but I know no one who is cavalier about the health of their child, so a different approach is needed when dealing with parents—a more concerned and understanding approach than in respect of adults.

That is part of the professional task, and the majority of people in the profession are now involving patients more and are doing their best. Some of the most distinguished and well-known surgeons and physicians in this country are well known not only because of their success rate, which can be demonstrated by any data, but because they involve the patients, who get to love them because of that involvement. That is good for patients. It makes them feel better, improves the success rate and gives everyone greater satisfaction.

Again, I point out that we must recognise the difficulties. It is difficult for professionals who hope that they know what they are talking about in a very difficult sphere to explain the complexities of what is happening to someone who does not have their long experience and medical education. It is difficult to try to talk about the risks and odds that are involved. We cannot expect people to do that task easily without it having been included in their medical and nursing education and training. We must ensure that it is included. Imagine the difficulty for the doctor or nurse who is trying, as an individual human being, to say to a parent, "The child that you have brought into the world and who you dote on has a 60 per cent. chance of dying—even if my operation is a success." Imagine saying to a parent after an operation, "Although your child is still alive, I don't think that I've succeeded and I think that he will die", and then saying later, "I've failed; he died." We must recognise that that is not an easy task and provide all the encouragement, help and training that is necessary to give people the ability to cope with those huge stresses, on top of carrying out a complex, difficult, demanding and lengthy operation. It is not easy, and we must try to help.

On public attitudes and the law, I believe that everyone understands that the patient may die if a surgeon gets something wrong. Equally, everybody understands that, if a surgeon gets things right, a life may be saved. I regret to say that, in our blame culture, there is a tendency to lose sight of the fact that the patient can die even if the surgeon gets things right. In recent times, there has been a massive increase across the board in the number of people who look for somebody to blame when something goes wrong and assume that someone must be at fault. People were at fault in the Bristol case. That is clear beyond any doubt, but it is not always so. We must therefore encourage doctors, nurses and other professionals to draw attention voluntarily to the things that go wrong and not to be frightened about being sued or damaging their career because they tell the truth.

That must happen not only because, as the shadow Health Secretary pointed out, failure to do so is expensive but, more important, fear of telling the truth is bad for patients. The national patient safety agency will not work if people are frightened to report things that have gone wrong. The threat of litigation could put them off.

Nowadays, doctors are told to tell all, come clean and apologise, and that many people will be satisfied. That would be best for patients, and many would be satisfied. However, doctors who pick up their cars from the hospital car park, drive down the road and bump another car are told, "You shouldn't admit that it was your fault or your insurers and everyone else will be after you." We are asking people in the clinical professions to do something that is contrary to the culture outside the hospital. We must therefore tackle the culture not only in the hospital but outside it.

I had a slogan: keep doctors out of courts and lawyers out of hospitals. I once made the unseemly suggestion that the only place for a lawyer in a hospital was on the operating table. Apart from visiting, that still broadly applies. We must change the law and take seriously what happens outside the hospital if we are to improve what happens inside it. I strongly support the report's recommendation 119 to replace the current inadequate, slow, unsatisfactory, grotesquely expensive and lawyers' pocket and handbag-lining system of dealing with clinical negligence.

The system's main fault is that it is bad for patients' safety. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that patients and their safety must come first in the NHS. They must also come first in our legal system. I welcome the chief medical officer's work in bringing people together to try to find a compensation system that is fair to those who have suffered but does not damage others who will be treated in future. When the Government present their proposals and we consider them, we should revert to the point that patients and their safety must be the top priority.

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

I have always felt strongly that we must resist the compensation culture that the United States would wish us to accept. Professor Kennedy also feels strongly about that. Unless we tackle the problem, it will undermine the impact of the inquiry's proposals, the changes that have already been made in the health service and the professions, and those that are in the pipeline.

I shall not attempt to cover other aspects of the report, but revert to what happened in Bristol. The performance of surgeons in operations on children's hearts in the Bristol royal infirmary was, to put it at its mildest, not as good as it should have been. Anxieties were expressed in the professions as early as 1984. In 1987, anxiety was expressed in the news media. From the time of his appointment in 1988, Dr. Stephen Bolsin, the consultant anaesthetist, expressed concern. Over the years, his anxieties grew, as did his efforts to get others to take them seriously.

For seven years, there was no outside investigation of the Bristol unit's performance. The representations that were made and the anxieties that were expressed at that time take up no fewer than 97 paragraphs in the inquiry report and are described as "confusion" and "muddle". Individuals and systems failed. Failings by individuals do not excuse system failures; system failures do not excuse those of individuals. The General Medical Council found individual doctors guilty of professional negligence. The inquiry found the system under which they worked equally if not more guilty.

Sir Ian Kennedy's foreword to the report summarises what happened in stark and simple terms, which I shall quote:

> "There were failings both of organisations and of people. Some children and their parents were failed. Some parents suffered the loss of a child when it should not have happened. A tragedy took place. But it was a tragedy born of high hopes and ambitions, and peopled by dedicated, hard-working people. The hopes were too high; the ambitions too ambitious. Bristol simply overreached itself. Many patients, children and adults benefited; too many children did not. Too many children died."

We must all hope that the steps that have been taken to change the system, the changes that are already in the pipeline and the additional changes that the Secretary of State has endorsed today, all of which reflect the lessons from Bristol, will ensure that nothing as bad and on such a scale happens again. However, even the changes pose a dilemma. The new structures will produce many reports of minor failures that are observed early. The professions and the NHS may find their reputation undermined as a result of the publication of reports that are the product of the effort to improve clinical standards. All of us who want a better health service, including those in the news media, must bear that in mind. However, the improvements are the least that we owe the parents whose children suffered death or brain damage.

That brings me back to my first meeting with the representatives of the parents in early May 1998 when they made clear their wish for an inquiry that would put on record for them what had happened in Bristol. It was as important to them that the inquiry proposed ways in which to ensure that other children and parents did not suffer as they had suffered. That meeting took place 10 years after Dr. Stephen Bolsin first expressed anxiety about what was going on.

As the representatives of the Bristol parents got up to leave my office, one of the mothers asked, "Mr. Dobson, do you mind if I kiss you?" I replied, "Not at all. I like being kissed." She kissed me and I asked her whether she minded telling me why she wanted to do that. She replied that I was the first person in an official position to sit down and listen to what she and her fellow sufferers had to say. For 10 years, nobody had listened. That must never happen again.

2.59 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who started and ended his contribution in a suitable tone, while the middle was packed with suitable content. I agree with almost everything that he said. He should also be applauded for choosing Sir Ian Kennedy to run the inquiry and for giving the Kennedy committee the freedom of a wide-ranging inquiry. He had the option of establishing a narrow inquiry, which might have limited potential damage and only implicitly criticised the direction that Governments, including that of whom he was a member, had traditionally taken. He made a brave move that has been amply rewarded, both in terms of the subjects covered in the recommendations of the Kennedy report and of the acceptance by the Government of many of the recommendations.

I would like to read from the synopsis at the beginning of the Kennedy report, to set the context for some points that I shall make later about the culture of blame. Professor Kennedy states:

> "The story of the paediatric cardiac surgical service in Bristol is not an account of bad people. Nor is it an account of people who did not care, nor of people who wilfully harmed patients.
>
> It is an account of people who cared greatly about human suffering, and were dedicated and well-motivated. Sadly, some lacked insight and their behaviour was flawed. Many failed to communicate with each other, and to work together effectively for the interests of their patients. There was a lack of leadership, and of teamwork.
>
> It is an account of healthcare professionals working in Bristol who were victims of a combination of circumstances which owed as much to general failings in the NHS at the time as to any individual failing. Despite their manifest good intentions and long hours of dedicated work, there were failures on occasion in the care provided to very sick children.
>
> It is an account of a service offering paediatric open-heart surgery which was split between two sites, and had no dedicated paediatric intensive care beds, no full-time paediatric cardiac surgeon and too few paediatrically trained nurses.
>
> It is an account of a time when there was no agreed means of assessing the quality of care. There were no standards for evaluating performance. There was confusion throughout the NHS as to who was responsible for monitoring the quality of care.
>
> It is an account of a hospital where there was a 'club culture'; an imbalance of power, with too much control in the hands of a few individuals.
>
> It is an account in which vulnerable children were not a priority, either in Bristol or throughout the NHS.
>
> And it is an account of a system of hospital care which was poorly organised. It was beset with uncertainty as to how to get things done, such that when concerns were raised, it took years for them to be taken seriously."

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras highlighted that last point, and many of the others, in his speech.

I am grateful to the Minister of State for the briefing that I received this morning on the Government's general approach, and for the opportunity to see this very lengthy report about an hour before the start of the debate. Making a statement, followed by questions, a few days after everyone had had the chance to read the wide-ranging proposals in the Government's report might have been a more appropriate way of dealing with this matter. Debating the matter now makes it difficult to give due credit to the Government for some of their proposals—although I shall try—or to give adequate scrutiny to some others.

Nevertheless, from what I understand of the Government's proposals, many of their responses to the recommendations are welcome. They will stand as a testimony to the people who campaigned for something to be done, including parents and Members of Parliament from the Bristol area who are here today, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), who cannot be here today. He, too, pressed for an inquiry into this matter. If there is broad agreement on the Government's response, the children involved will not have died in vain, because steps will be taken to prevent—to the best of our ability—such things happening again.

The report is clear that there must be not only adequate resources but honesty about the amount of resources available, and about what can be delivered by means of those resources. Professor Kennedy sets out, in paragraph 29 of chapter 4, how one might imagine that a Government would be elected, and would put the resources in place, and that would be that. He states:

> "On this reasoning, resource allocation in the public sector is the product of a compact between public and government.
>
> This approach would suggest that a service can never accurately be said to be underfunded since, within a relatively short timescale, its funding is regularly adjusted to reflect the prevailing political compact. On this approach also, it is idle to talk of a 'proper level of funding' or the 'necessary level of resources', since there is no absolute or proper level. There is only a political choice which, by reflecting the will of the electorate is, by that fact, the proper choice."

He goes on to make this important point:

> "To the extent that this describes the political reality of how resources are allocated to the NHS, it is an approach with a flaw at its centre. If the government of the day opts for X resources to fund a public service and then represents that service as being able to provide services which in fact cost X plus Y, then it immediately becomes possible to use the term 'underfunding'. And this has been the history of the NHS in the period in which we are interested and beyond."

He says "and beyond", because this still applies.

The report continues:

> "Governments of the day have made claims for the NHS which were not capable of being met on the resources made available. The public has been led to believe that the NHS could meet their legitimate needs, whereas it is patently clear that it could not. Healthcare professionals, doctors, nurses, managers, and others, have been caught between the growing disillusion of the public on the one hand and the tendency of governments to point to them as scapegoats for a failing service on the other.
>
> Of course, if governments had claimed that the service delivered by the NHS should be judged on the basis of a comparison with a moderately successful Second World country, no complaint could be raised. But the NHS was"—

and I would say "is"—

> "repeatedly represented as a comprehensive service which met all the needs of all the public. Patently it did not do so."

I would say that it patently still does not do so. That is why we must have an ordered debate on the priorities required. It is no good saying that the resources are in place, when clearly they are not sufficient to meet a particular need. I have said before that the resources that the Government started to put in, not when they came to power but in 2000, represent the sort of increases that we need. Indeed, the Kennedy report recognises that. In paragraph 36, on page 58, it states:

> "In 2000, at last, the present government acknowledged this gap between claim and reality in the NHS. A significant boost in funding was announced."

We know that that will take years to come through in terms of increased numbers of staff, because of the time that it takes to train them, and questions must also be asked of the Government about those missing three years. Nevertheless, Kennedy does a valuable job in pointing out that the claims of politicians can sometimes create expectations that cannot be met. That can create a gap between the public estimation of the NHS and the reality, and the people working in the NHS often get clobbered as a result.

There is much in the Kennedy report about the culture of blame, and the Government often use such words in defence of their own policies. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was right to draw attention to the explicit terms in which the report talks about the culture of blame and the unwillingness to admit mistakes, both of which have arisen as a consequence partly of the club culture and partly of clinical negligence. The report states:

> "Clinical negligence litigation, as a barrier to openness, should be abolished."

It goes on to stress that the NHS

> "must promote openness and preparedness to acknowledge errors and learn lessons."

It also states:

> "clinical negligence is part of the culture of blame. It should be abolished."

It recommends the introduction of

> "an alternative administrative system of compensating those who suffer harm arising from medical care."

That means no-fault compensation, a policy that my party endorses, although we recognise that there might be cost implications. The cost might be greater than the amount saved in legal fees, but it might be less. We are pleased to hear that the Government have not ruled the policy out. The chief medical officer still has to report on it, and we look forward to reading the White Paper.

The lobby representing people who make a living—not unreasonably, in their view—on the basis of clinical negligence is strong, and I hope that the Government will be strong enough to resist it. It has a point to make, but reporting errors and swift compensation for patients are important. I am not sure whether the Conservatives endorsed that system when they raised concerns about the matter. Perhaps that may be clarified from the Conservative Front Bench.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I am happy to let the hon. Gentleman see our consultation paper on the subject. I am a lawyer, but I do not do personal injury work and never have and I do not practise. I shall be fair to the world of the law, if I may. Does he acknowledge that Lord Woolf considered the clinical negligence claims procedures and proposed some good

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

reforms that are just beginning to bite and that are speeding up claims? Furthermore, Lord Justice Otton has made proposals, which I do not agree with, that are not hugely dissimilar to those of the Liberal Democrats, so it would be wrong to suggest that lawyers are not considering these subjects intelligently.

Dr. Harris: I am happy to accept that and do not seek to scapegoat lawyers for lobbying in their interests. However, I hope that the Government resist that lobby and look beyond it, although I am not convinced that they will.

There is more to dealing with a culture of blame than no-fault compensation. There is the problem of what awaits doctors who might report their own errors and shortcomings and, perhaps more relevantly, what might await the friends of doctors or other health care professionals if they report that clinician. Something must be done about the quintuple jeopardy facing health care professionals.

In the event of an error being made despite there being no hint of malice and no previous history of negligence, doctors may face, first, a criminal prosecution then, when that is concluded, possible prosecution and trial by the General Medical Council. They may then be dragged through the courts and, in parallel, face disciplinary proceedings from their employer. Many such proceedings are rightly conducted in public so that there is accountability. Nevertheless, it is unique that those four areas of jeopardy may be played out in the full glare of publicity. People might be tempted not to reveal their error or report on their friends and colleagues who may be subjected to a long drawn-out process.

The fifth jeopardy is trial by media. The accused are urged by their legal advisers to make no comment, but those making the accusations have the right to do so in the media. For legal reasons and reasons of professional confidentiality, which must still be respected by the doctor or health care professional accused, they cannot be rebutted. That major problem is nowhere more apparent than in the scenes outside the GMC when someone accused of malpractice, but in certain cases not found guilty of gross professional misconduct, must run the gauntlet of the press and media. Indeed, the accusers, sometimes encouraged by the media, may throw fruit and insults at such a person who leaves the GMC by the front entrance.

Such proceedings may be necessary, but we must recognise that they represent a huge disincentive for people to report their friends and colleagues. The accused cannot answer back. I hope that the Government will at least recognise that the problem exists, although they are not directly responsible for it. Perhaps some thought will be given to the matter. Of course, health care professionals must run the gauntlet of another jeopardy—the danger of politicians naming and shaming them while proceedings are still going on.

To a certain extent, a culture of blame is encouraged by the Government when they list hospitals as failing. I shall return to that when we discuss the quality of data on which judgments should be made. There is always a temptation for politicians, especially when they are held accountable for failings in the service, to shift responsibility to a few who happen to be at the bottom of a league table. I understand that temptation, but if the league table is not based on adequate data that measure the right things in the right way, it will lead to unfairness and encourage a blame culture.

The Society of Clinical Psychologists has long campaigned for suspended doctors, the majority of whom are eventually reinstated. However, the long drawn-out nature of investigations of conduct means that they cost the NHS a huge amount. Indeed, the Secretary of State raised that as a matter of concern in opposition. Something must be done to restore such people to the NHS as soon as possible if they are deemed fit to practise and it should not be deprived of their work for too long.

The Government response recognises the need to merge the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Care Standards Commission. We welcome that. I do not criticise the Government for indecisiveness when they change their mind and we have requested that they do so. That would be unfair, so I commend them on their change of heart, although regrettably it is too late to include it in the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, which has just left the House. That deals with reform of the Commission for Health Improvement and it could have been used as a vehicle for making that change. However, there will have to be further legislation, which pleases me as little as it pleases Government business managers.

Mr. Heald: The Lords could do it.

Dr. Harris: I understand that Members of this House may consider that unsatisfactory, as we could deal with those matters only when debating Lords amendments rather than during our two key scrutiny stages. Perhaps the Minister will clarify whether legislation has been drafted to deal with this welcome change of approach. All parties would like such timely legislation to be introduced, because the National Care Standards Commission is about to be abolished or involved in a merger even though it has just been established. That is not good for those who work for it or, indeed, work to it.

There is a significant question as to the independence of the new Commission for Health Improvement, which I raised on Report and in Committee with the same Minister who sits patiently on the Front Bench, and I raise it briefly again. It is not right that the Government talk in terms of completely independent scrutiny of the performance of hospitals and staff when they themselves lay down for the commission the criteria by which those hospitals will be judged.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that, if the data are poor or the criteria wrong, the performance indicators and tables may be unhelpful. I welcome those remarks. Indeed, as I believe and as he said, in those circumstances they may be worse than having no data at all, as they are poor for morale and they mislead patients.

The report refers to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) drew our attention to it. Paragraph 17 says:

> "NICE guidance will no longer need the approval of the Secretary of State before dissemination".

The Liberal Democrats have raised concerns about the fact that NICE is asked to judge affordability, which is no job for a group of pharmacological academics or clinicians because that wholly depends on the resources in the NHS. The scheme's one saving grace was that the Department of Health and Ministers would have had to approve publishing affordability advice to the NHS, although it appears that that is no longer the case. What may be seen as a move towards greater independence might be a move towards shedding responsibility for finance and resources issues, which lie fairly and squarely with the Government.

There is a further concern about NHS bodies being directed to fund treatments recommended by NICE from January 2002. That would be satisfactory if sufficient and extra funds were available and clearly identified for funding those treatments. I believe, however, that in many cases, because there is not enough money to fund such treatments, other areas will have to be de-funded and de-prioritised. I am not sure that we want the tyranny of the appraised, as it were, that such an approach involves. I ask the Government to reconsider.

The Kennedy report speaks of the danger of a wrong approach to priorities. I do not think that the Government have responded adequately to that either. Page 81, which refers to a discussion of the role of the Department of Health, quotes Professor Sir George Alberti, president of the Royal College of Physicians since 1997, as telling the inquiry that the Department's focus appeared at the time

> "to be more on throughput and waiting lists than on outcome or quality of care"

and that the

> "guidance given in the area of audit was a reflection of this".

The professor is quoted as saying:

> "They were not interested in results; they were interested in as many people passing through the system as possible for as low a cost as possible . . . commercial considerations did seem to enter into it rather strongly."

The report goes on to criticise initiatives such as those on waiting lists.

The present Government are falling into the same trap. I am thinking of their waiting-list initiative—which, thank goodness, they have abandoned—and their waiting-time initiative. If the Minister checks, he will find that I have never criticised the Government for the existence of a few "long waiters", extending beyond 15 or 18 months. I agree that that is an unacceptably long time for people to wait, but clinical priority should establish which patients are in most urgent need. The Government should tell hospitals that what is unacceptable is not a delay of a few weeks in treatment but the distortion of clinical priorities, which does not aid patient care, in respect of stable patients who have to wait longer than 15 months—a figure that is soon to be 12 months, then six months.

The Kennedy report describes prioritisation on the basis of numbers, rather than the clinical needs of patients, as being part of the culture in Bristol. I urge the Government to think again about the adoption of maximum waiting-time targets as the be-all and end-all of the waiting-time initiative. A better measure would be the average wait per patient, which would avoid the clinical distortions resulting from long waiters' becoming more clinically urgent than critical patients.

The Government have announced that hospitals will lose the funds following patients who choose to go elsewhere after waiting six months for a heart operation. That will put pressure on hospitals to treat people whose waiting time is approaching six months, so that they do not lose the contract—the service agreement or the custom, as the new NHS has it. I fear that, as I believe has already happened, more urgent cases will be delayed within the six months so that cases due to be dealt with in seven months can be brought forward.

The Kennedy report talks a great deal about consent, and the Government should be applauded for their careful deliberation in that regard. They published model guidelines on consent in November, and have worked closely with the British Medical Association and other interested parties to ensure that they are implemented. I declare an interest as a member of the BMA's medical ethics committee, which has considered the issue regularly. Having done so, let me say that the BMA should also be applauded for its work on the consent guidelines toolkit.

Consent is not a simple matter. It is not a question of a signature on a piece of paper but an ongoing process, which continues throughout the management of a patient. The lack of informed consent at Bristol is one aspect of the problem, but similar aspects arose at Alder Hey. It will take a long time to change the culture—or, rather, two cultures. Some patients say "Whatever you tell me, doctor, I will be satisfied". Meanwhile, some doctors think that they know best. Nevertheless, I think that the change has already begun, and that the Government's deliberative approach will enable more progress to be made, not least in medical education. The importance of obtaining a valid consent rather than merely a signature is rightly being emphasised.

Before the hon. Member for Woodspring left the Chamber, I said that I wished to take up his—in my view—inappropriate response to my concern about the quality of data. He has not returned from the pressing media interview that called him away, and I am sorry that, once again, the Secretary of State cannot hear my response to his criticisms.

My point was that it was wrong to assume that all information put in the public domain entitled "Performance of hospitals" or "Performance tables" was desirable. Such data might be flawed; they might be incomplete to the extent that they were misleading, and would have negative effects on either the morale or the appropriate conduct of those being measured. I repeat that my party wants the public to be given more information, but that the information must be as complete as possible, although it will never be entirely complete. It must also be judged by means of peer review, rather than politically, for it to be of more help than harm.

I do not think that that has yet been established, which is why I was so pleased that the Secretary of State recognised the potential drawbacks of data. I pointed out to him that the Department of Health had co-operated with an earlier data set, which I think failed to take the difficulty of operations into account. It did take demography into account, and, through "Jarmanisation", specified the appropriate measures to adjust to the population that it served; but it had no data relating to the difficulty involved in some cases, and the complications affecting patients before operations.

Mr. Heald: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously saying that the medical profession should be able to veto information? I believe that Professor Kennedy said that

[Mr. Heald]

that was part of the problem at Bristol. Surely, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will see that it just is not right.

Dr. Harris: I am merely saying that the data should be scrutinised. It would have to be decided whether they should be scrutinised by the medical profession alone or by an independent body—not a dependent body that would have to jump when the Government set criteria.

The Secretary of State acknowledged the drawbacks. That is why I was so pleased to learn of the basis on which the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons will work with the Department of Health to produce data. I believe that the medical profession—like the hon. Member for Woodspring, I do not speak for it—is willing to produce such data, as it does in journals all the time. But the idea that publishing data is the only way in which to establish whether they are any good flies in the face of a scientific approach.

The Government should say, as indeed they have, that they want to see performance data. They should agree with the responsible bodies—which I think should be the CHI and, in the case of medical data, the relevant royal college—the criteria, and the adjustments needed to ensure that they are valid. They should then establish a peer review system, which should involve not just the medical profession but data analysts and experts and, indeed, members of the public—who have been left out of the equation—before the publication of data that could be misleading.

The hon. Member for Woodspring made the point himself. He said that data had been published leading to the removal of staff from a hospital on the basis of a poor neonatal mortality rate, although the hospital was a regional centre taking the more difficult cases. The publication of such data certainly leads to more information in the public domain—hurray for that—but it damages the morale of people working hard with difficult cases, and makes the public tend to avoid the best units because they appear to have produced the worst results.

As I told the hon. Member for Woodspring before he left, I thought his response dishonourable when he said that expressing such legitimate concerns—he was echoed to an extent by the Secretary of State, who cannot resist making such glib party political points—

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to call an hon. Member dishonourable?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): That is not really a point of order. The hon. Gentleman has, of course, raised it with the Member concerned.

Dr. Harris: Let me make it clear that I said that I thought it dishonourable—a dishonourable thing to do—to say, when legitimate concerns are being expressed about the quality of data, that the Liberal Democrats therefore do not want information to be published. I did not think that I had used the words referred to, but I am certainly happy to consider the hon. Member for Woodspring honourable. I am saying that to say such a thing is dishonourable, and wrong. I believe that people will be more willing to co-operate with the publication of information if they have assurances of the sort given by the Secretary of State in his opening remarks about the need to ensure that it is appropriate.

Mr. Swire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way on what is obviously a matter of great interest to the Liberal Democrats, as is evidenced by their presence in the Chamber. Does he think that the publication of data would have been helpful in cases such as the one before the General Medical Council today, concerning Dr. John Brennan and Dr. Graham Urquhart and the cancer tragedy in Devon?

Dr. Harris: I do not have the details of the case. Given what I have already said about the quintuple and even sextuple jeopardy that doctors face, I question whether it is right for a politician—whether or not he or she is in full command of the facts—to pass comment. We need to learn from cases in which people have been found negligent and in which suppression of data is involved, but I advise the hon. Gentleman to await the report on the case before urging the Government to act as quickly as possible.

Mr. Swire: To clarify that point, the charges against those two doctors have been proved. We are waiting this afternoon for the ruling of the General Medical Council on what will happen to them.

Dr. Harris: In that case, we should await the ruling. It appears that we do not have long to wait.

The Government's response to the Kennedy report contains many recommendations that are welcome, but I ask the Minister to consider allowing us a further opportunity to discuss the issue when we have had a chance to digest the report and some of the other initiatives that daily issue forth from the Department of Health. My central concern is that it is no good for the Government to defend all their reforms by saying, as the Secretary of State appeared to do at one point, that we need to get rid of the old order. As with the slaughter of the first born, any crazy idea could be justified, given the nature of the Kennedy report and the serious concerns that it expresses about what happened.

The Government must justify every one of their proposals on its merits, and in many cases they have done so. However, getting rid of a culture of blame will not be achieved by just saying the words. It will mean ensuring that politicians from all parties do not seek to scapegoat—on the basis of inadequate information—those who work hard in a system that does not have the resources to deliver what politicians have been guilty of encouraging the public to believe can be delivered. With that caveat, I warmly welcome many of the recommendations in the Government's response.

3.32 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Bristol—and especially the parents of those children who died or suffered brain damage during that difficult time—has waited a long time for good to come out of that tragedy. The Kennedy report was welcomed for both the quality and the quantity of its recommendations. After the Secretary of State's speech today, and once we have had time to study the report in more detail, I am sure that the Government's response to it will also be warmly welcomed.

The Secretary of State widely endorsed the recommendations in the Kennedy report. The tenor of his speech was one of willingness to learn and to recognise the difficulties and the dangers of what had happened in the past. That is all part of moving forward and bringing some good out of the tragedy.

I am also sure that the parents would wish once again to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). I am sorry that he has had to leave the debate temporarily, but I want him to know that the parents have not forgotten their first meeting with him in May 1998. I met some of them after they had been to see him. They told me that at last they had some hope for the future. As he recorded, they were glad that for the first time someone in authority had listened and appeared to be willing to take them seriously and share their pain. I thank him for that and also for the thoughtful and thought-provoking speech that he made this afternoon.

I doubt whether even my right hon. Friend recognised, at the time when he set the report in motion, just how important it would be, not only for Bristol but for the whole of the NHS. Some of the parents, however, realised that something momentous had to happen—a change in the culture—to ensure that what had happened to them did not happen again. That is why they put so much tenacity, determination, love and thoughtfulness into their struggle. They acted with such dignity in all that they did that I wish to pay tribute to them.

I also wish to acknowledge the work of colleagues, some of whom I know regret that they are unable to be present in the Chamber for this debate. My hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, South (Dawn Primarolo) and for Bristol, East (Jean Corston), as well as the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), tabled questions in the 1990s—and in one case in the late 1980s—and sought to represent their constituents involved in the issue.

The parents have also set up a new charity, Constructive Dialogue for Clinical Accountability—the CDCA—and I shall mention later some of the work that it has done. Its work corresponds closely with the Kennedy recommendations and the Government's proposals in seeking recognition for patients' contributions, alongside those of the professionals, to the future of the NHS.

I also wish to thank both medical and administrative staff of the Bristol royal infirmary who, since the tragedy, have worked to restore trust between patients and the medical staff. The staff have borne the brunt of much of the criticism, but the quality of treatment, especially in cardiac surgery, has now reached a very high level. That is due to their commitment and hard work.

In the Minister's response to the debate, I would be grateful if he could respond to a poor article in the Bristol *Evening Post* that concluded, from the faults at the BRI and the Secretary of State's comments earlier this week about the future for failing hospitals, that the hospital was to be taken over by private administrators. Those conclusions were simplistic in the extreme, and I would be grateful for the Minister's comments.

The Secretary of State, in his foreword to the Government's response, says that bringing about the changes that the Government seek in the NHS will require "time and commitment". I assure him of the commitment of the staff at the BRI and, in the time that has been available, they have done great things.

It is not appropriate this afternoon to deal in detail with the 198 recommendations and the Government's response to them. However, as other hon. Members have done, I wish to draw out some of the underlying themes that are so important but which involve more intangible aspects that are more difficult to monitor but essential if we are to achieve the change in culture. The need for openness and accountability is a thread that runs through the report and that ran, today, through the Secretary of State's speech. The summary of the report states:

> "Openness and transparency are as crucial to the development of trust between healthcare professional and patient, as they are to the trust between the NHS and the public."

We are now working at both levels, and we want greater openness between patients and professionals. In this case, there was a lack of openness—of which we have seen evidence—between the parent and the professional. We also need the wider trust between the NHS and the public to be re-established.

The fragmentation of the NHS and the establishment of competing trusts was not helpful in establishing the kind of trust that is essential—as opposed to the organisational kind of trust—to monitoring within the NHS. We need monitoring, and we need national standards for that monitoring of clinicians and managers. We have seen the disastrous consequences in Bristol where, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said, there was a breakdown not only with systems but with individuals. When the two came together in Bristol, there was a culture of secrecy that is now being tackled.

Results in Bristol are now speaking for themselves. We have seen new data, although we have heard questions today about whether they are detailed enough. However, we have to start producing data, and those of the associate parliamentary health forum—as well as the work of Dr. Foster that was published recently in *The Times*—show that Bristol is doing remarkably well in cardiac performance. Bristol has the lowest standardised mortality ratio in the country, taking into account all forms of heart surgery.

The teams concerned need to be congratulated on publishing the data. They are the first cardiac unit to recognise the importance of publication, and they have done it of their own volition. That is something important to come out of events at Bristol. The beginning of a solution to the tragedy is for those clinicians in the cardiac unit to say, "This is what we have to do to raise standards. We have to work as a team."

I recognise that it is not just a question of the data. The data have been produced because the doctors and clinicians at Bristol have recognised their importance. They have worked together as a team, and have been willing to publish. They have seen the importance of that and they are now getting praise for it. It is not undermining their credibility, but enhancing it in Bristol, the country and this House. I want to applaud that, and it is recognised on both sides of the House.

Confidence is returning and a report by the Department of Health's review team on paediatric and congenital cardiac services is very encouraging. In summary, it states

[Valerie Davey]

that the Bristol unit can be "proud" of what it has achieved, that its "high quality clinical outcomes" were to be applauded, and that:

> "The concept of close continued work with parents and families is obviously of vital importance to consolidate the improving confidence in the Unit."

Following the anguish of Bristol, I trust that people will now look to Bristol and to the BRI for good practice that they can follow to improve their services, too.

I endorse the Government's work to establish national terms of reference. Many of us—certainly people of my generation—find it almost impossible to believe that those national standards were not in place when we took our families to hospital. We were vulnerable, and yet we put our trust—rightly, I am glad to say, in almost all cases—in clinicians without national monitoring. My constituents and I now seek such monitoring in terms of what we mean by a national health service.

The second important theme concerns the regulation of professionals. I congratulate the Government on proposing the Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals. That was directly recommended in the report and must be an important step in the right direction. Part of that body's responsibility is for education, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). We look to that body to bring people into the medical profession from a far wider base.

At Bristol, we have recognised that, in some cases, medical schools have not drawn as widely as they should from the general public. We need people to bring wider experience to the medical profession; that would be useful. The report pointed that out, and I am sure that the medical department at Bristol university will be aware of that and will begin to tackle it.

I want to recognise the part played by Stephen Bolsin. It is perhaps not well known that he is in Australia now and has written about the benefits of a new electronic personal professional monitoring scheme that trainee anaesthetists are using. That scheme is bringing greater clarity and openness to the system, and it makes us realise that the impact of Bristol—which resulted, sadly, in the professor having to leave Bristol for Australia—is causing international ripples around the world.

Thirdly, the need for child-centred facilities has been mentioned. It is clear that the care of the child in most families is central and unquestioned. The fact that it was not central in the health service has raised eyebrows and caused deep concerns. With the establishment of the children's hospital in Bristol, we have far greater provision than anything available in the 1980s and early 1990s.

We need to scrutinise Kennedy carefully, as well as the Government's response. There is real dialogue in Bristol about whether we centre everything for children in the children's hospital—meaning that all other disciplines must be around that hospital—or whether we emphasise the in-depth departmental provision for, say, burns or neurosurgery. There is a genuine and open debate in cities such as Bristol as to where we locate children's services. There is no debate about the quality of those services and their prioritisation within the NHS in every city and district. How that is done is part of an ongoing debate. No one should expect the Government's response today to be the final determining factor in the development of a quality NHS.

Mr. Lansley: On that point, the hon. Lady and her colleagues from Bristol have experience of the opening of the new children's hospital last year. On reflection, what is her view of this matter? The Kennedy report looked at the concentration of paediatric services in a children's hospital, co-located alongside other acute district general hospitals that could provide specialties that could not frequently be expected to be available in a children's hospital. The treatment of burns might be one sort of treatment that a children's hospital could not be expected to maintain full-time and would have to be co-located. Bristol has moved to that point; in Cambridge, we do not have such a service and we look to a children's hospital in London. What is her experience of that in Bristol? Would she prefer that, or would she prefer something different from the current system?

Valerie Davey: The hon. Gentleman asks questions to which I do not pretend to have the answers. I checked, and the Kennedy report speaks about operating such a service alongside a district general hospital. In Bristol, we have some regional capacity. Do we therefore take that phrase to refer to regional acute services? The debate continues. There is a lot of history to the location of the children's hospital in Bristol. The hospital is well served by the equivalent of district general hospital capacity, but what about the regional level of capacity?

I welcome the comments of other hon. Members today. I do not have the answer to the question, and we have not always received a unanimous response from clinicians and professionals on the matter. The question is a huge one. The Department needs to consider it carefully when it gives advice. I shall scrutinise its response to Kennedy very carefully.

I am sorry not to have an answer, but I do not apologise. It is beyond any hon. Member to offer a definitive response.

My final point has to do with focusing on the patient, and putting the patient at the centre of the health service. That strategy is informing the Government's approach to the NHS, and should also inform the public debate, as I said earlier.

That may sound strange, as one would expect the public to have understood the notion that patients are central to the health service already. However, as a matter of custom and practice, people have always deferred to the medical profession. The questioning by parents, especially in Bristol, has given us all a new approach, and set out a new agenda for the NHS that we need to follow.

The clear presentation of information by the cardiac surgeons in Bristol is a good beginning, but we must still listen to parents. The now established charity Constructive Dialogue for Clinical Accountability is made up of parents, the public and clinicians, and their aim is to ensure better dialogue. They want to make sure that communication between health care professionals and patients is developed. The charity believes that parental contribution and input to children's health care should be recognised as having a value equal to the contribution of professionals.

The charity issued a press release today that highlights the section of the Kennedy report that suggests that the NHS must work with people, and that it must celebrate its successes and make known its shortcomings.

It is invidious to name individual parents, but Maria Shortis and Trevor Jones have worked hard for many years to establish the CDCA. Although they are getting increasingly professional, they used lay terms to tell me that clinicians are not gods.

"Clinicians make mistakes," they said, "and we need to recognise that. It is no good them telling parents that all will be well, when it may not be." They told me that parents need to be treated as mature people. Obviously, they are concerned about their children, but they want the truth. Parents want to know what the probability is that an operation will succeed, but they understand about human error. That is their down-to-earth message. Thanks to some funding from the Department of Health, they have been holding training sessions around the country. They have taken on the GMC and the BMA, and have earned those organisations' reluctant respect.

Trevor Jones wants health funding money to go to doctors, not lawyers, as he put it. That blunt point has been echoed in the Chamber today. He does not want large sums to be diverted into medical negligence actions.

Interestingly, Trevor Jones made a link with the need for better provisions for informed consent. He said that truly informed consent requires better understanding. If clinicians took the time to talk in a mature fashion to parents about an operation's likely outcome, parents would have more trust, there would be far less litigation and money would be spent properly in the NHS.

I assure Ministers that the CDCA will not be entirely content with the response from the Government today. It will welcome what has been said, but its campaign continues. Its press release speaks about accountability and independent regulation, the adequate funding of quality services and active patient partnership. Then comes the sting in the tail: if the Department of Health is in charge, to whom is it accountable? Questions as pertinent and difficult as that will go on being asked.

I am convinced, from my experience with the Bristol cardiac unit, that lessons have been learned and acted on. However, the words of the Kennedy report still resonate with me, as they do with other hon. Members. We cannot guarantee that similar events are not happening elsewhere as we speak. I want to ensure that the lessons learned by the Bristol cardiac surgeons are learned by all similar departments in the rest of the country, and that professionals in every other discipline learn those lessons and act on them.

The culture of secrecy and of the patronising attitude to patients has begun to be dispelled in Bristol. I am sure, given what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said today, that the major task of ridding the whole NHS of that culture has been begun and is already, in part, in hand. All of us now must ensure that the process is taken forward nationally, throughout the NHS.

3.57 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey). Clearly, she and other colleagues have put an enormous amount of time, energy and effort into supporting the work of the parents who suffered the tragedies at Bristol royal infirmary over the years. They have tried to keep the issues to the fore and ensure that they have been followed up. It is to the credit of everyone involved, including the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), that we can debate these matters today with the benefit of a report that is both comprehensive and challenging.

In addition, I hope that hon. Members who have lived with these problems for many years will agree that we must today make sure that hon. Members who have only read about them in the Kennedy report think about the report's conclusions as they affect parts of the country other than Bristol. The lessons have to be learned by people in other parts of the country and they have to be acted on. In that way, the hope is that we can prevent the repetition elsewhere of the tragedies that took place in Bristol. We can do that by systemic change in the NHS and by promoting awareness and additional openness in the service. In that way, we can ensure that the accountability rightly described by the hon. Member for Bristol, West is being exercised by those who bear that responsibility. Members of Parliament to a large extent share in that responsibility. I am therefore pleased to have the opportunity to think about those issues from the other side of the country, as it were—from Cambridge. We are being challenged to think about how they will affect us and the configuration of our services for children.

Several hon. Members have said that it is challenging to try to deal with the range of issues as there are so many. There are 198 recommendations, which makes it challenging to try to respond to the report, and indeed to embrace the Government's response and to comment on it. I shall not attempt to do that across the board but focus on just one area.

When reading the report, one of the issues that sprang out at me was its criticism of the lack of priority that has been given to children's health services over many years. Today, rightly, the Secretary of State and others have focused on the lessons than can be learned for the NHS as a whole in terms of accountability, professional regulation, consent for treatment, inspection of the service and so on, but underlying all that is the fact that the tragedies occurred in respect of children's health services. It seems that one of the reasons why they occurred was because a relative lack of priority was given to children's health services, which were not integrated and managed in a way that would have inhibited the lack of performance. They were too often seen to be at the periphery of the professional practice of a hospital.

Chapter 29 of the Kennedy report sets the matter out clearly. It paints a stark picture:

> "it is a remarkable feature of children's healthcare services that, over a period of 40 years, successive independent reports have made the same or similar recommendations."

It mentions the Platt report of 1959 and the Court report of 1976. It does not go through them all in detail but elsewhere one can find references to the national confidential inquiry into peri-operative deaths in 1989, the 1991 guidance issued by the Department on children and young people in hospital care, the 1993 Audit Commission report, and a range of reports in the run-up to the 1997 general election, including one on hospital services by the Select Committee on Health and the Government's response to it.

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

Throughout that period, a series of reports often made similar remarks. They talked about the need for a child-centred approach to children's health care services; about recognising the difficulties for children of being treated away from their families; about a holistic view of the needs of children; about the given level of expertise required to deal with specialist factors associated with children; and about not treating children as a by-product of the professional expertise of treating adults—children are not simply a small version of adults when it comes to medical practice. The reports also talked about the need for minimal hospitalisation—it should happen only when absolutely necessary. There must therefore be a different approach to the relationship between hospital care and community care.

The Kennedy report says in chapter 29, paragraph 14:

> "had the principles set out in the DoH's 1991 guidelines and the Audit Commission's report been implemented in Bristol, a good number of the shortcomings in care would have been addressed much earlier."

What we learn from that is that it is not sufficient to publish reports. It is not sufficient even to publish Government responses to reports. They may be more comprehensive and compelling, but they must be turned into action. There must be delivery in response. There must be delivery in relation to children's health services and an increased priority for those services within the NHS if we are to avoid a new, but different form of tragedy occurring somewhere else because of a lack of specialist expertise and a lack of integration of health care services for children.

Several issues arise from that. Specific recommendations arising from the Kennedy report concern the future configuration of children's hospital and health care services. At the moment, it is difficult to see precisely how the Government will respond to those. There are relatively few instances where the Government's response rejects what the Kennedy report has said but there are some. The Secretary of State rightly focused on what he is accepting in the Kennedy report—the recommendations on introducing strengthened inspection procedures and the role of the Commission for Health Improvement—but he might have gone on to say that he is rejecting the Kennedy report's recommendations in relation to validation and revalidation of children's hospital services.

According to the Government's response, if I characterise it correctly, to accept those recommendations would run the risk of losing capacity in the NHS for the delivery of services for children because of the failure to validate or revalidate a particular service. I am uncertain about that line of argument.

It seems that there is an interesting difference in the mind of Ministers. They say that we should not have validation or revalidation of services because if the answer is that a service is not good enough, quality standards will not be met, the service will not be able to be offered and patients will suffer because of the lack of that service for the time being. Therefore, we must have an inspection system whereby the Commission for Health Improvement has strengthened powers to the point where it can call for special measures to be taken in order to remedy problems straight away. What are those special measures and how swiftly can one act on the commission's findings? If it is not very swiftly, by implication services provided to children will not be of sufficient quality and will not meet the necessary level of validation.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I am reluctant to interrupt a good and thoughtful speech, but I take the opportunity to clear up any confusion in the hon. Gentleman's mind. Clearly, the Department will not turn a blind eye to services that we know are unsafe. We will not hesitate to take necessary action. If that means closing a particular service when the evidence is clear that it is not safe, of course we shall do that. We will not expose children to unsafe medical practice at any time it is drawn to our attention.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the Minister. It would not have occurred to me that Ministers would turn a blind eye. Perhaps I should explain where my concern lies. It seems that one can take two attitudes in relation to services of that kind. One can say that services must meet a high standard before they can be offered. On the other hand, one can say that if services do not meet a minimum standard, they cannot be provided.

Often, inspection will find many quibbles. Inevitably, there is a large area that falls below a minimum standard, which means that the service cannot be offered. That service will have to show a path back towards a higher level comparatively, but there is a big gap between that and the point in a validation or revalidation system that demonstrates that one has met a certain measure of quality in order to provide a service in the first place.

The issue is brought into sharp focus in the validation of services that are not supranational or specialist. As the Minister will know, the Kennedy report sets out clearly the particular concern about hospitals across the country providing a specialist service when they did not have the necessary level of throughput. The issue then is whether validation is the better route. Is it better to say to non-specialist hospitals or those that do not have the necessary level of throughput of activity to deliver high clinical outcomes, "You cannot pursue that kind of service unless you meet quality standards"? That is a validation system rather than an inspection system.

The two are not mutually contradictory. Of course, having validated the provision of a service, one continues to inspect it to ensure that it is being provided to a satisfactory standard. However, it is not necessarily right to conclude that the validation and revalidation of children's services is complementary and desirable—perhaps especially as we want services with specified throughput rates in order to achieve safe clinical outcomes.

I raise that issue because I realise that to a certain extent Ministers are still thinking about it. Although on the face of it, the recommendations have been rejected, the configuration of services remains to be determined. National service frameworks must be completed this year because their shape will affect what flows from them.

As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Bristol, West, we need to consider the proper configuration of services because the lead times can be long. In Cambridge, Addenbrooke's hospital—one of the country's leading hospitals—is considering the shape of clinical services at and around the site for 2020. For example, it is not currently the intention of the Addenbrooke's NHS trust board or the related health authorities to provide a children's hospital at Cambridge. That is because, although in every other respect Cambridge would be a satisfactory place in which to provide such a service, the catchment area comprises about 4 million people. I understand that the figure for Bristol is about 5 million. Cambridge is 56 miles from Great Ormond Street hospital, which is in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, but Bristol is 119 miles from Great Ormond Street. Presumably, the distance to Birmingham is somewhat less.

One might conclude from the above that there are implied criteria for the continuation and strengthening of a children's service at Bristol that would not apply to Cambridge. There are criteria as regards the number and location of units throughout the country that provide children's services in a specialised children's hospital. However, I am not clear about those criteria; nor am I clear about how the Bristol royal children's hospital has responded to them or whether it has used different criteria from Cambridge.

Cambridge is precisely the right place for a children's hospital: it has a teaching hospital, it has nurse education, and it has not only a district general hospital but the regional capacities for many services. That relates to a point made by the hon. Member for Bristol, West. In the time frame under consideration—up to 2020—Papworth hospital may come alongside Addenbrooke's as an independent hospital NHS trust providing cardiothoracic services. The Rosie—a maternity hospital—is part of the Addenbrooke's trust, so we have expertise in neo-natal intensive care and the associated paediatric services.

One could easily conclude that Addenbrooke's was precisely the type of medical campus on which one would want to site a children's hospital. The development of children's services in the NHS would point to that conclusion. However, people at Addenbrooke's and in the NHS have not reached that conclusion and are not working towards that end. Why are they not doing so? Have implied criteria already been established for the configuration of services? If there are no such criteria, we need to draw them up soon—in the course of setting out the national service frameworks—to decide whether we need to make changes.

Otherwise, in a few years, hospitals such as Addenbrooke's will offer paediatric services in a range of specialities but those services will not be grouped together in a dedicated children's hospital. That would give rise to the problems that were mentioned earlier. The peripherality and fragmentation of children's hospital services may be continuing throughout the country because we have not thought quickly or clearly enough about the desirability of reconfiguring hospital services and of creating additional children's hospitals.

In the past, hospital services for children have—because of the relatively small number of children who have to undergo certain operations and procedures—been located in quite distant units. The Kennedy report made it clear that fewer centres result in greater competence and better clinical outcomes. The report points out that for certain conditions, such as congenital heart disease, there may be a case for having only two units in the country that provide those services.

By implication, therefore, children and their parents and families will have to attend hospitals at a great distance from their homes. That will result in considerable costs for those families and there will also be effects on the general health of the children. Many charities can offer help; for example, the Sick Children's Trust offers families long-term support when children spend a long period in a hospital that is some distance from their home.

The report made some recommendations about travel support for children and their families, but the broadening of such support was not accepted by the Government, although their response today seems to suggest that they are willing to consider further steps to improve such support in due course. Perhaps the Minister can comment on that in his response to the debate. One of the ways that children's health care services differ from adult services is the complete dependence of children on their families. There are consequences for their health when they are sent to distant hospitals and we need to recognise that.

I thank the Secretary of State for his introduction to the debate. One important point is that we should not only publish data but should recognise that they will show us the difference in performance and clinical outcomes between different hospitals.

The Secretary of State talked about cardiac surgery. I have previously raised with Ministers the need to assess clinical outcomes in tertiary hospitals. For example, the Papworth hospital, as a cardiothoracic institute, has extremely good clinical outcomes. The publication of additional data will show that there is every reason for such institutes not to be merged into district general hospitals. That might make sense in terms of co-location but the clinical excellence provided by a separate institute with a clear focus would be lost.

If hospitals such as Papworth and Addenbrooke's can live alongside one another as two hospitals on one site retaining their tertiary expertise, that will be to the overall advantage of the health service. However, we must recognise the better clinical outcomes in tertiary hospitals, so I welcome the publication of data that would enable us to do that.

Much rests on the effectiveness of the Commission for Health Improvement. I have no way of knowing how good the commission will be in undertaking its task. It has been examining paediatric services at Addenbrooke's and it is also visiting Papworth. I have every confidence in both hospitals and await the commission's findings. Ministers should consider how much rests on the CHI. As we have learned only too painfully from the events at Bristol, we have to discover where things are going wrong and rectify them. We must also keep an open mind as to whether there are new ways of ensuring that services are correctly configured and provided to a high standard.

4.19 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): The dominant emotion that I, like other hon. Members, felt, and still feel, in preparing for this debate and on re-reading the Kennedy report was one of deep sadness at the events that led to children unnecessarily dying or being damaged and deep sorrow for the parents who had to endure not only that experience with their children, but many years of trying to get to the bottom of the tragedy's causes.

Unlike in many debates in the Chamber, I feel desperately sad about the situation, and I am sure that that is true of every other Member. I also feel anger because,

[Mr. Roger Berry]

as has been said already, concerns were being expressed about the situation at the Bristol royal infirmary as early as 1984. This debate is taking place 18 years after those initial concerns were expressed.

In case there was ever any doubt about the importance of reform in the NHS, or the importance of the Kennedy report and the Government's response to it, I refer to the fact that, almost unbelievably, 18 years after initial concerns were expressed, we are debating the issue today. That cannot be other than entirely unsatisfactory.

Alongside the sadness that I feel for the children affected and their parents, I would also express, as other hon. Members have, my admiration for the parents who have consistently pursued over the years their campaign for a full and proper public inquiry.

I should like to congratulate, first and foremost, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). As he and other hon. Members intimated when we discussed the statement made in July, it was not as though establishing a full public inquiry was without its difficulties. Inevitably, some people will always wish to resist such a course of action. I should certainly like to express my great admiration for his decision to hold a proper, full public inquiry. It was the right decision to take; the tragedy is that it was not taken much earlier.

I join other hon. Members in thanking Sir Ian Kennedy and his colleagues for an extensive report, which took a fair amount of time to produce. Many hon. Members—my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) was one—asked when we could have the report and see the outcome. I am sure that we would all agree that while the report took some time to produce, it is not only extensive in terms of the number of recommendations and pages; but a seminal document on the way in which we run our NHS, so it was well worth waiting for.

To complete my thanks, I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health for his statement this afternoon and for the Government's response to the Kennedy report. Inevitably, as the Government's response was available only a short time before this debate commenced, and although speed-reading courses are very effective these days, we need more time to digest some of the detail. However, the summary of the Government's response makes it clear that they are acting positively on virtually all the key recommendations. I thank my right hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Department of Health for the way in which they have dealt with this matter.

The Kennedy report is entitled "Learning from Bristol", and I want to take up a point made by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). I have resided in Bristol for a very long time and am aware of events at the Bristol royal infirmary, but a substantial part of the report deals with the lessons for the future—lessons for the whole NHS. The report could just as easily been on events in another hospital in the United Kingdom, so we should acknowledge that it is as much about general failings in the NHS at that time as it is about individual failings in Bristol.

I want to make four brief points, the first of which relates to the need for standards to evaluate performance and assess the quality of care. Again, like my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West, I was surprised to discover when I was first elected to the House almost 10 years ago that there were no well laid down standards or procedures for assessing the quality of care.

I was born in the year that the NHS was set up—within a few days—and I owe a lot to the NHS, not least being here today, but it had never occurred to me that throughout the 1980s and early 1990s there was no regime to establish standards for evaluating performance or basic procedures for assessing the quality of care. As I picked up the picture as a Member, I found it astonishing that we did not have such a framework, and I was certainly reminded of that when I read Sir Ian Kennedy's report.

As all hon. Members know, the report reveals that, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were no national standards and monitoring was virtually non-existent. I was shocked by this comment in the Kennedy report:

> "We cannot say that the external system for assuring and monitoring the quality of care was inadequate. There was in truth, no such system."

I shall not quote the report extensively, but it went to say that that was

> "when there was no agreed means of assessing the quality of care. There were no standards for evaluating performance. There was confusion throughout the NHS as to who was responsible for monitoring the quality of care."

Much progress has been made in recent years. The Kennedy report indicates areas where things can be improved, but we now have clinical guidelines, through NICE, national service frameworks, the CHI and much more. Kennedy states in his report that that gives rise for optimism and provides it as the basis for recommendations about improvements, but I simply make the point that I cannot have been the only citizen in Bristol, or elsewhere, who in the early 1990s and before did not realise that there was a problem of the kind that Kennedy analyses. That revelation will have come as a great shock to the vast majority of people. People need to know not only that such systems are in place, but what standards of clinical care patients are entitled to; indeed, they have a right to know that.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the changes to regulation, inspection and audit that have taken place in the NHS over the past 10, 15 or 20 years. Does he agree that those changes have been features of our national life in general and that institutions other than the NHS have changed in that way? Such change is not unique to the NHS.

Mr. Berry: That is a fair point, although there is a certain importance in relation to the NHS—life and death—that is perhaps not always attached to other areas of life.

Dr. Murrison: That is a good point. Of course, the NHS is crucial—I know, I have worked in it. Other areas of our national life are, arguably, just as important—in particular, health and safety, and there has been a great deal of improvement in the way in which health and safety issues pervade life in this country. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman might like to reflect on them, because they are also matters of life and death.

Mr. Berry: I am always delighted when Opposition Members support improved regulation for matters such as health and safety. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, but we are debating the Kennedy report and the point that I wish to stress is how welcome it is that we now expect in the NHS the use of national standards and monitoring in a way that did not occur at the time of Sir Ian Kennedy's report.

My second point is about the importance of open reporting. It may seem an obvious point, but let us not forget that the actions of Dr. Stephen Bolsin as a whistleblower led to the suspension of heart surgery at Bristol in 1995. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. It is not easy to speak out in such circumstances but, fortunately, I have never felt under the pressure that he must have been under. It is not easy to speak out and challenge authority, not least when one's job may be on the line. In his case, it clearly was.

Stephen Bolsin spoke out, made himself deeply unpopular and put his employment prospects at severe risk. We must give credit where it is due. As other Members have said, the Kennedy report refers to the time when there was a club culture and

"an imbalance of power, with too much control in the hands of a few individuals."

It is important that the club culture and the situation in which Stephen Bolsin found himself never occur again. It is important to be reassured that, should anyone else find him or herself in that position, they will be protected by current arrangements in a way that Stephen Bolsin was not. I invite my right hon. Friend the Minister to assure the House that that will be the case.

The other issue is the way in which the clinical negligence system acts as a disincentive to open reporting. How does one reconcile increased openness in the NHS with the threat of legal action? Members have referred to recommendation 119, in which Kennedy recommended the abolition of the clinical negligence system and its replacement with an alternative system for compensating those patients who suffer harm as a result of NHS treatment.

I know that it is a controversial issue, but I urge the Government to consider the recommendation sympathetically, and I believe that they are doing so. Yes, litigation takes time, people may have to wait ages for an outcome and there are the costs that have been mentioned, but I am sure that most people would prefer money to go to the NHS rather than in legal fees. There is no guarantee, under a litigation system, that those who suffer harm as the result of NHS treatment will receive compensation. Many people decide not to pursue litigation because of the emotional stress and the costs involved.

The key point is that the current arrangements can discourage openness and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras rightly said, that is probably bad for patients because they do not know what is going on. There are serious disadvantages with a litigation culture, so I welcome the Government's commitment—and their response today—to reforming the system of clinical negligence compensation. I look forward to the White Paper that will be produced in the near future.

My third point is about the need for a properly funded NHS. Kennedy, in his account of the situation at Bristol royal infirmary between 1984 and 1985, described it as

"a service offering paediatric open-heart surgery which was split between two sites, and had no dedicated paediatric intensive care beds, no full-time paediatric cardiac surgeon and too few paediatrically trained nurses."

There is still the need for increased capacity at the Bristol royal infirmary and elsewhere in the NHS, and there is still a need for more doctors and nurses, notwithstanding the very welcome measures that the Government have taken in recent years, but the point about a properly funded NHS provides an important lesson that we need to learn: we cannot expect a top-class NHS unless we are willing to pay for it.

My final point is to echo comments that have been made about the BRI today. It must have been difficult in recent years for people at the BRI to work as effectively and as enthusiastically as they have done in the aftermath of these events. I cannot imagine the pressures that they faced in those circumstances. Therefore, I wish to pay tribute to the contribution of the staff at the BRI today. The nurses, doctors, managers and everyone else have had the onerous responsibility of achieving change since the tragic events took place.

Today's survival rates for children's heart surgery at Bristol are now among the best in the country. We need to recognise that that has been achieved in difficult circumstances, which is a tribute to the staff currently working at the BRI.

We must learn the lessons from Bristol, but the Kennedy report and the Government response are not just about the BRI; they are about the NHS as a whole.

4.36 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): The Kennedy report is a magisterial tome, particularly the 530-page version. I prefer the slim volume but, like most hon. Members here today, I have ploughed my way through the big brother. It is to be thoroughly commended. I welcome it wholeheartedly.

It is a great shame that the Government did not produce their response earlier. However, those of us who sat on the Committee considering the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill will recognise certain strands that have been reflected in the Bill.

It is good to see that so many people involved with the Bristol royal infirmary—Members for constituencies in Bristol and the surrounding area—are present. We must recognise that the BRI is a tertiary centre that draws from a wide area. Many Labour and Conservative Members—although, sadly, not many Liberal Democrats—have been involved in the debate.

I declare an interest in that I trained at Bristol. I have the highest regard for the BRI, which turns out first-rate doctors. This is a sensitive report that acknowledges that. It does not resort to the blame culture in which politicians of all persuasions at times indulge. It does not subscribe to the cult of the easy target. Where politicians have, on occasions, been insensitive, Kennedy has trodden warily.

The report begins by laying down what most of us who have dealings with the BRI know to be true—that it is full of dedicated staff doing the very best that they can under difficult circumstances. I expect that, like many here, I struggled with the volume on first reading but, for me, the thrust was given not in the report, but by Professor Kennedy's subsequent newspaper statement when he was reported as saying:

"The report does not make a virtue of the number of people criticized and is at least as scathing about institutional failings in the NHS as it is about the deficiencies of individuals."

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

I recognise much of what was written from my time at Bristol. The report hints at a blokeish club culture. Although it does not explicitly state it, it hints at an atmosphere of bravado—the sort of thing that sadly attracts people who lack empathy to those specialties that are associated with high mortality and risk. I remember full well the towering and almost overweening self-confidence and arrogance of many surgical specialists at that time. Equally, however, I am struck by a new generation of doctors who seem to be in all respects different in outlook from those of the past, including the not-so-distant past.

My perception is that medical schools have, somewhat belatedly, realised that society has changed and that we demand a more conciliatory style of practitioner, with far better communication skills. The trend in our medical schools and in subsequent professional development has been towards enduring skills at the expense of more ephemeral learning of facts. It is a welcome development that has been driven by the profession and not by Government. We should pay tribute to the hard work that has been put in. I submit that that hard work will bear far more fruit than the Government's attempts at reform, no matter how well meaning.

Despite my up-beat assessment, I counsel caution. In July, *The Times* asked Professor Kennedy:

> "Could Bristol happen again? Could it be happening right now?",

to which he replied, "Yes." In *The Guardian* in the same month, he basically said, "There but for the grace of God go any number of bits of the NHS." The problems that he found were not unique to Bristol; it just so happens that they manifested themselves first in Bristol.

Indeed, if we require proof of that we need only refer to the investigation by the Commission for Health Improvement into St. George's, Tooting that was published just four months ago. It concluded that the deaths of eight out of 11 heart transplant patients over a 10-month period at that hospital could not be explained away by chance. The report revealed that not only did surgeons and managers choose their patients inappropriately for transplant, but that the unit was infested with rats and cockroaches, which is disgusting.

I wish to dwell on communication because it is axiomatic that doctors have been bad at it, and this report is certainly witness to that fact. I think that all are agreed that we need to ensure that patients have more time with doctors. Indeed, that is an important aim of the current negotiations to develop the new contract for GPs and consultants. Five minutes for the patient is simply not good enough and I know very well that it is dangerous, both for patients and practitioners.

The British Medical Association's board of medical education is doing well in promoting communication and learning skills for doctors, but at the end of the day the key factor is time available for the patient. I fear that the Government must take a large portion of the blame for failing to recognise that for every bright idea, initiative or stipulation that they impose on practitioners, there is an opportunity cost—less time and poorer communication with patients.

On Tuesday, during the debate on the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, the Minister of State dismissed the second tracker survey because it covered events in the last three months of 2000. He said that it was an historical document because it reflected a situation that was 12 months old. The events recorded in this report are at least six or seven years old and we must not suppose that what applied then applies now.

The report paints a grim picture of mismanagement and institutional failure at the BRI and extrapolates its assessment to the NHS as a whole, but we do countless professionals, whose dedication to patients puts many of us to shame, a grave disservice if we fail to register the improvements that have been made since 1995 and to recognise that many of the problems unearthed at Bristol originate much further back in the history of the NHS.

4.44 pm

Dr. Doug Naysmith (Bristol, North-West): Like other hon. Members, I want to thank a number of people who contributed to the report and the Government's worthwhile response: first, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who described the circumstances in which he made the brave decision to establish a public inquiry to which we have the opportunity to respond; secondly, Sir Ian Kennedy, who chaired what must be one of the most thorough public inquiries ever, which presented sensible recommendations that are also clear, concise and easy to understand; thirdly, the parents of the children involved, who not only had their individual tragedies to contend with, but their individual grief to bear once more as the inquiry began and many of their stories came into the public domain again.

I rarely agree with my neighbouring Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), but I did today when he drew attention to the burden that has been placed on the staff at the United Bristol Healthcare NHS trust hospitals. There has been an unwarranted focus on them simply because they have been close to the eye of the storm. Similar comments apply to the current senior management and senior board members at the UBHT, who were not in post at the time of the tragedies and have coped admirably with their additional unwanted tasks.

Perhaps the most important result of the Kennedy report, and the Government's response to it, has been the recognition that the concerns of so many people in the national health service were ignored or pushed under the table for years. No appropriate action was taken on the very poor results of paediatric heart surgery for far too long. Although bits of information were available over a period of years, they were not acted on.

There are many disturbing comments in the report. It talks of a lack of leadership and teamwork, a hospital that was permeated by a "club culture" and the lack of open discussion. It was a place where review was difficult and, perhaps most tellingly of all,

> "vulnerable children were not a priority".

There was no means of assessing the outcomes of treatment. Indeed, there were no agreed standards to measure local results against. That surely contributed to parents being told the national success and failure rates for such operations, rather than being given the Bristol figures. Had those been available to parents, it is hard not to ask how many children might have been saved if their operations had been carried out elsewhere. Parents who wanted to do their best for their very sick children were let down by the very people they trusted to help them.

To make matters worse, the report criticises the way in which parents were given details of the operations to be performed on their children. For example, it mentions details that were written on scraps of paper and that when children died as a result of the operation, some of their parents were told of that in an unsympathetic manner, with little help or advice being offered. This rigorous inquiry was therefore welcome, however painful it must have been for those involved.

The Kennedy report made 198 recommendations, and I believe that the great majority have now been, or are beginning to be, addressed. Today the Secretary of State brought us up to date with the progress. The major point about the dreadful happenings at the BRI and the children's hospital is that they highlighted several areas of health care and clinical practice that were not uncommon at that time. Bristol was not the only place where systemic factors led to inadequate services remaining undetected for too long. It may be true that there was an uncommon conjunction of bad practice in one place at that particular time, but elements of the Bristol situation were certainly present elsewhere.

I know that as a result of the scandal being brought to light and the subsequent inquiry, the BRI and hospitals throughout the country have changed, or are beginning to change, auditing and assessment techniques and, at least as importantly, their approach to patients. The result in Bristol has been a dramatic improvement in the quality of cardiac care for both children and adults.

I want to quote from a recent report by a Department of Health review team, to which there has already been a reference today. The team is examining every children's heart service in Britain. On clinical excellence in Bristol it says:

> "The Trust has strengthened the Clinical Team during the last 3 to 7 years by appointing additional Consultants in Medical Paediatric Cardiology and Intensive Care and the recruitment of two full time Paediatric Cardiac Surgeons. The Clinical outcomes for Cardiac Surgery are amongst the best in the UK. It has a strong Intensive Care Team and a well balanced service from ante-natal diagnosis to the care of adults with congenital heart disease."

On clinical governance, it says:

> "Audit practice and procedures appeared particularly strong and are coupled to the clinical governance system where it operates through the clinical directors on to Trust Board level. Again the principle of transparency was emphasised. The Cardiac Unit is the only unit in the United Kingdom which at present publishes its clinical outcomes on the internet."

That report clearly shows that much of what Kennedy recommended is not only sensible but achievable. That is why I welcome the Government's response to the Kennedy recommendations, including those that have been implemented and those on which announcements were made today.

4.51 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) began and ended his contribution with a moving tribute to the parents. My hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey), for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith) have all spoken, as constituency Members, of their admiration for the parents. Of course nothing can replace their terrible loss or assuage their grief, but I should like to associate myself with my hon. Friends' remarks about them.

As the Secretary of State said in opening the debate, much has changed since these terrible events. More money has gone into the NHS and more doctors are in the process of training. There have been organisational responses. There has been work to ensure that patients' needs are taken into account; national standards have been established, and there are mechanisms both to monitor and improve those standards. In addition, more information is being published for patients.

In many ways, the report is an historic document, dealing with what happened, but also providing an important and challenging map, as the Government response puts it. The Secretary of State indicated what steps have been taken; what steps are being taken in the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, which is before the House; and what will be done in future by, for example, the Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals.

My hon. Friends and others have paid tribute to Sir Ian Kennedy, and I should like to associate myself with those remarks. I should declare an interest here, because I was dean of one of the law schools at the university of London when Professor Kennedy was the dean at King's college, London. I know his work. He effectively pioneered the study of medical law in this country and, in many ways, the report is a testament to his accumulated knowledge and wisdom on the subject.

I want to address one particular aspect of the report, which falls under the heading of "Openness". At the very outset, on page 3, the report says that although from the late 1980s there was enough information about mortality rates for questions to be asked at the Bristol royal infirmary, the mindset to do so did not exist. The information was not available to the parents or the public, and the information that was given to them was confusing, partial and unclear. In an important passage, the report states:

> "Perhaps the most fundamental feature of a culture of safety is the need for the hospital to create an open and non-punitive environment in which it is safe for healthcare professionals to report adverse events, safe to admit error, safe to admit when things have almost gone wrong, and safe to explore the reasons why . . . Without a culture of safe reporting, it is impossible systematically to collect information about the incidence of adverse effects, especially errors."

That open and non-punitive environment did not exist at the time at the Bristol royal infirmary or more generally in the NHS. As my hon. Friends have said, the anaesthetist Dr. Bolsin blew the whistle. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his statement in July, and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood said this afternoon, we owe him a great deal.

The report recounts how Dr. Bolsin became concerned about outcomes of children's heart surgery in the late 1980s; how he raised his concerns with his colleagues and within the trust; and how open discussion was inhibited by the culture. We had first-hand testimony from the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), who described his experience of being trained at the Bristol royal infirmary. In particular, Dr. Bolsin was inhibited by the fact that his anxieties concerned Dr. Wisheart, one of the most senior and long-serving surgeons at Bristol. Wisheart's view was that the reason for the poor results at Bristol was the condition of the patients, rather than the care that was provided. The report summarises Dr. Bolsin's position:

> "The difficulties he encountered reveal both the territorial loyalties and boundaries within the culture of medicine and of the NHS, and also the realities of power and influence."

[Ross Cranston]

To promote a climate of openness and dialogue throughout the NHS, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, when a Minister of State in the Department in 1997, issued a letter, "Freedom of Speech in the NHS", in which he called on chairs of NHS trusts and health authorities to adopt good practice, enabling NHS staff to raise concerns about health care responsibly without fear of victimisation. He noted that there was a private Member's Bill to provide legal protection for whistleblowers; he indicated that it had Government support, but said that it was necessary to act straight away in advance of the legislation. I commend his actions in September 1997 in which he was no doubt supported by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

I must declare a second interest at this point, because before entering the House I succeeded Lord Borrie as the chair of trustees of the whistleblowers' charity Public Concern at Work, which promoted what became the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. That Act was ably steered through the House by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and, in brief, protects people who raise genuine concerns—in the context of the NHS, concerns about risks to patients or possibly financial malpractice—whether or not the information is confidential. It protects NHS workers who blow the whistle and have an honest and reasonable suspicion of malpractice. Disclosure is protected if made internally and to identified regulators if the whistleblower honestly and reasonably believes that the information is substantially true. In some cases, wider disclosures are protected.

As a result of the Public Interest Disclosure Act, the NHS executive issued circular No. 198 on 22 August 1999, reflecting the strong support of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Act's underlying policy. The circular noted that the NHS had had its share of incidents that could, and should, have been prevented, had staff felt able to raise their concerns about health care matters without being victimised. Clearly, what had happened at Bristol was one of the incidents contemplated by the circular, as the Kennedy inquiry had been established a year before by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

The circular required every NHS trust and authority to have in place local policies and procedures complying with the provisions of the 1998 Act. I hope that in his reply, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will lay out the steps taken to implement the circular. For completeness, I should say that the charity Public Concern at Work has done a great deal of work in the NHS to ensure that there are adequate whistleblowing procedures.

I return to the report, and in particular its consideration of the whistleblower, Dr. Bolsin, and of whistleblowing in general. I do not want my remarks to be misunderstood when I say that there is a flaw in the report. I am not criticising anyone for that flaw. It is inevitable in a task of such magnitude that not every issue will be given the same detailed consideration.

I look to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, in his reply to the debate, to confirm my understanding of the correct position. It is important for the future of the NHS and even more so for other parts of the public services, as so much has been done in the NHS since my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State's letter in 1997. It is important that whistleblowers such as Dr. Bolsin feel able to take action in relation to serious concerns, without fear of victimisation.

What does the report say? At page 162 it states that Dr. Bolsin would not have been protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 if that had been in force, despite the report's assessment that although his actions may not have been the wisest, his conduct was understandable and he was right to persist in raising his concerns. His good faith is not questioned in the report. Unfortunately, the report does not mention my right hon. Friend's 1997 letter or the 1999 circular.

The legal analysis underlying the report's conclusion about Dr. Bolsin is in annexe A. I apologise to the House if what I am about to say is unduly technical. All that the Act requires of whistleblowers such as Dr. Bolsin is that they reasonably believe—I emphasise those words—that the information tends to show—again, I emphasise those words—the concern, and that the disclosure is in good faith.

The report states at page 141 of annexe A, first, that it is not clear whether any of the disclosures would have been protected as reasonable, and secondly, that mixed motives, which it rightly says are easily attributable to whistleblowers, would deny protection under the good faith requirement.

With respect, both those points are wrong. The test that a person should reasonably believe that the information tends to show something is a very low threshold. To suggest that Dr. Bolsin would not have met it is surprising—I put it no higher than that. The report sets out his collection of data, which clearly must have led him reasonably to believe that his concerns were credible. There is no criticism of Dr. Bolsin in that regard. Although hindsight cannot be taken into account, it confirms his reasonable belief. Doctors have been struck off, and we have a massive report with more than 200 recommendations. Clearly, Dr. Bolsin reasonably believed that the information tended to establish his concerns about children's heart surgery.

As for the point about good faith, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will no doubt remember from his own legal studies that in English law, the test of good faith is basic: it is honesty. By contrast, good faith in the civil law and in some aspects of United States law is more demanding. It requires fair dealing. To suggest that mixed motives, which whistleblowers typically have, obliterate good faith is to misunderstand the distinction. Of course, if the dominant—I repeat—dominant motive of a whistleblower is mischief making or if it is ideological, that good faith would come into question. However, the mere existence of mixed motives in no way means that there is an absence of good faith.

I believe that a third aspect of the report is in error, in relation to the wider disclosure that Dr. Bolsin made to Dr. Phil Hammond, the GP and media commentator. The report focuses on whether a particular gateway was satisfied. In my view, another gateway was clearly satisfied, as Dr. Bolsin had raised matters internally but had got nowhere and could therefore raise them outside.

I have detained the House for too long. I believe that it is very clear that Dr. Bolsin would have been protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 if it had been in force at the time. The Act and the measures to implement it in the NHS, and more generally, have ensured a fundamental shift in culture since these terrible events occurred. I was especially pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announce acceptance of the report's recommendation on establishing a free confidential telephone line for the reporting of sentinel events. There is now a climate of greater openness and dialogue. Nothing in the report should dissuade people from expressing concerns because of a fear of victimisation. It is to the credit of Ministers that the culture has changed. The signal has now been given that speaking up about serious concerns is a safe alternative to silence.

5.6 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) made a good point about the protection that those who want to give information to the authorities require under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. I, too, will be interested to hear the Minister's response to that point. His contribution also shows that lawyers have their uses, as he gave us a fine technical legal analysis of the Act. Perhaps lawyers are not all bad. Have I made the declaration?

We welcome this debate, which has been a good one. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who opened for the Opposition, called for such a debate last year. We understood why it was not possible to hold it in November, but we welcome today's opportunity to consider the Government's response to the report. The debate has concentrated on the issues of information, openness and trust that are at the heart of what Professor Kennedy said in his report. I shall deal in a moment with some of those issues and the comments that have been made about them.

The debate has also been characterised by an understanding of the courage that has been shown by a number of people during the history of this dreadful situation. Of course, first among them are the parents, who have had to show great courage in tragic circumstances. It is hard to know how one would feel about losing a beloved child. There must be at least some comfort in the thought that something has come out of the tragedy. This is a very full, detailed report—I do not think that anybody could criticise it for not being fully comprehensive. The Government have listened and I pay tribute to them for that. The response that they have made today shows that they are taking the matter seriously, as they should. The courage of the doctors who deal with tiny babies and their surgery has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members, as has that of the former Secretary of State in initiating a public inquiry. So, the debate has brought out some of the good qualities in this dreadful situation as well as the bad ones, which we should not, of course, ignore.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring paid tribute to the parents' courage from the perspective of a constituency Member of Parliament from the Bristol area. Several hon. Members spoke from that perspective and agreed with his comments about the parents and doctors who have brought about change at Bristol.

My hon. Friend spoke about the importance of informing the choice that parents make. He posed a question, which I hope the Minister will answer. If comprehensive and balanced data show that a specific clinician in a specific hospital has a poor record, to what extent will it be possible for that to inform parents' choice? Will parents or patients be allowed to base choices about referrals on the data? If that cannot happen now, will it be possible in future?

My hon. Friend also mentioned consent and knowledge. He said that in some circumstances, informed consent was difficult to obtain—for example, in emergencies and when procedures are experimental. It would be helpful if the Minister could outline any proposals for handling emergencies and experimental procedures.

The Minister will be pleased to know that I shall not mention community health councils. However, if NICE produces guidance that has not been approved by the Minister, who makes the decision about affordability? It would be odd to leave it to NICE, given ministerial responsibility to the Treasury.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring made two other points. First, he referred to people from non-traditional backgrounds entering medicine and its allied professions. Will the Minister explain more fully what the Government have in mind? What would be the benefits? Secondly, hon. Members from all parties paid tribute to the General Medical Council, which has proposed reform and been prepared to meet the challenge of change. Do the Government have any proposals for speeding up investigations? Although the GMC should not be too hasty, a proper sense of speed is necessary for discipline and accountability as well as for the courts and dealing with clinical negligence.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made several important points. He was rightly given credit for choosing Professor Kennedy and for setting up a public inquiry. He said that there were failures at all levels and that one must always ask the Florence Nightingale question: "Who's in charge here?" He made important points about openness and the compensation culture. The extent to which the Government are prepared to move against the current arrangements on clinical negligence is not clear in the report. What is the Minister's thinking on recommendation 119?

The current system clearly has problems. As my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring said, it takes a long time to reach a result, and the legal costs often outweigh the compensation. However, most of us believe that there should be some form of legal redress in clear cases of negligence. We have ideas about moving more towards mediation, perhaps, or having a tribunal-based system, and about bringing informality into the system and trying to speed it up, building on the Woolf reforms, and so on. Is the Minister able to give us his view on this? It is important to avoid a compensation culture. I think that the Americans, if they had a choice, would probably not have the system that has developed in their country. Let us make sure that we do not have a compensation culture. Achieving that will not, however, be entirely straightforward, and it would be interesting to hear what the Minister has to say on the matter.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) felt strongly that we should not have a blame culture, and I agree with him. It was something of a non sequitur, however, for him then to say that the information that is published has to be strictly controlled by the medical profession. I accept that what the Society of

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

Cardiothoracic Surgeons has done is excellent and a good example of teamwork—that is obviously what we must aim for—but it would be wrong if the medical profession or anyone else had a veto on information being published. It is important that information should be placed in the public domain, even if it is not quite as complete as one might hope.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring and the Secretary of State were right to say that to suppress information is never helpful. If incomplete information comes into the public domain, there are always opportunities for people to put it right. My hon. Friend gave an example of information from a regional centre, where one might expect the more difficult cases to be dealt with, not being clearly labelled as having come from there. His example showed what happens when information is put out that is not completely accurate. It was put right, because people are not prepared to accept false information. To suppress information is not the answer.

The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) made an important speech about the doctors who have worked so hard to improve the situation at Bristol. She rightly concentrated, as did my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), on the importance of child-centred provision. Although the hon. Lady did not claim to have all the answers—that was very honest of her, and something that we all ought to do more often—the points with which she was wrestling were important ones. There is no doubt that Professor Kennedy felt that this was an area of great weakness, in that suggestions for improving child-centred provision have been ignored for 40 years. It would be helpful if the Minister were able to give us some idea of why the validation and revalidation of children's hospitals is not to be pursued, and why he feels that relying on the Commission for Health Improvement is an adequate response to the recommendation.

Clearly, there are issues about structure involved here, which my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire outlined. There are also issues about the quality of the provision. Having met nurses and others who deal with children in hospital, I know that they say, "It isn't good enough to have surgeons who normally treat adults treating children, because they do not really understand how to deal with a child." Very different kinds of clinical procedure are needed when dealing with a child. I understand, for example, that children recovering after an operation need particular care—more so than adults, although we also expect a high standard of care for adults. With children, there are different considerations, and it would be helpful if the Minister would amplify the extent to which that will be dealt with in terms of structures, standards and monitoring, as hon. Members have requested him to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring asked a question that I remember asking the Minister in Committee not so long ago: what are the special measures? If the Commission for Health Improvement produces a report stating that a situation is unsatisfactory, the Secretary of State obviously has some powers of intervention. I believe, however, that the measures being suggested go beyond those simple powers. Will the Minister tell us today what they are? Will he also say why the Government do not support the recommendation that travel costs and parental access should be more fully funded?

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) made four points. He was surprised and shocked that there were no clear standards of care when the incidents occurred and that monitoring and an agreed means of evaluation were not in place. He also made an important point about the culture change that has occurred. My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) was trained at Bristol royal infirmary and he explained that years ago there was a hierarchical culture and arrogant attitudes among some surgeons, although he strongly made the point that that has changed.

Society's attitudes are changing and we are moving from a culture in which we accepted hierarchies and that the surgeon or consultant was not to be challenged or questioned to one in which we accept that patients have a voice and that they are entitled to information. We also accept that citizens are to be empowered, and I welcome that. It is not as surprising as the hon. Member for Kingswood suggested that things were as they were, but it would be surprising if they remained that way. It is a good thing that citizens are becoming more able to make choices and be informed.

The hon. Gentleman also made a point about whistleblowing and noted that health funding is important to standards. It is easy to ignore the basic funding position or the basic background against which a doctor works, but we should not do so. Inadequate equipment and buildings, which the report refers to, make it difficult for a doctor to perform and it is difficult for those in charge of monitoring performance and ensuring that it is achieved to set a world-class standard when world-class tools are not available for the job. We must all consider that issue and I am sure that we shall debate it further.

I do not want to speak at great length and there is much for the Minister to respond to. This has been a serious debate of the highest quality and, rightly, there was none of the usual party political knockabout. The report and this issue are so important that descending to that would not have been a good thing. I look forward to the Minister's remarks.

5.23 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Anyone who heard the excellent speeches of right hon. and hon. Members will reach the same conclusion that I have reached: that this has been a thoughtful but sombre debate, which is entirely appropriate to the subject. It was genuinely illuminated by important insights into the tragedies at Bristol and the clear and obvious failures of individuals and the national health service. All Members rightly emphasised the need to learn the lessons from Bristol. I shall say more about that later, but, most positively, they rightly decided to look to the future—securing higher standards and better treatment and care, which we all want in the NHS.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) opened for the Opposition. I welcome his positive comments and his general support for the response that we are publishing today. He asked a number of specific questions. I shall try to deal with them, but in no particular order, as I have not arranged my notes in that way, although I may surprise him.

The hon. Gentleman began by asking what have become familiar questions about arrangements that we have established in statutes over the past two or three years relating to inspection arrangements for the NHS. He requested further and better particulars about how we intend to advance the commitment made today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to secure more organisational integration between inspectorates. I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming what my right hon. Friend said, and I thank the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) for doing the same.

The hon. Member for Woodspring was right to say that we must carefully consider these important issues. The changes in question would certainly require primary legislation. I agree with the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon that, given their importance, it would not be appropriate to try to make such amendments during the passage of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill in another place; that would deny Members of this place a proper opportunity to debate the Bill.

I am sure the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon understands, as I hope that the House does, that we are not in a position today to go into further detail about the proposed reforms, but, as I think I made clear on Tuesday, it is at the forefront of our mind that the NHS should have a set of arrangements for inspection of quality and performance monitoring that are as streamlined as we can make them, and the least bureaucratic possible. We want those arrangements to add value—not just to help the NHS to deliver high-quality services, but to inform the public better about the quality of those services. Those criteria will inform our thinking, and I am sure that Members will have many opportunities to debate them in more detail.

I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for recognising the importance of greater public access to information that is comprehensible and adds value. I shall return to that shortly, because several Members asked about it.

The hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about consent, and how we were proceeding with proposals to standardise consent procedures. As he will know, the Department published a standardised consent form last November. Its use will become a requirement throughout the NHS in April. He asked about the standardisation of information. We shall need to develop the issues with the professions, and with patient groups, but the model consent policy will require trusts to make patient information available locally and in a form that people can use—as tapes or pictorial material, as well as written leaflets. Trusts are also required to provide information on local advocacy groups.

Information needs to be tailored to reflect the provision of local organisations and services, and the procedures that a patient is undergoing. We want as much standardisation as we can get, along with as much customisation as we can get. Perhaps that is an example of the hon. Gentleman's failure to understand what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on Tuesday.

The hon. Gentleman asked an important question about the General Medical Council. He asked whether we were minded to seek ways of speeding the important process of investigating allegations relating to fitness to practise. The answer is that we are very much so minded: we will look sympathetically at proposals to speed the processes of the GMC and its various disciplinary committees, and to make them simpler. As we are currently discussing those issues with the GMC, however, I do not think that I can deliver more than my statements of general intent.

The hon. Member for Woodspring asked for more information about how we intended to move people from non-traditional backgrounds into medical careers. He and the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) seemed surprised that we want to pursue that objective, although I may have misinterpreted what was said.

The hon. Member for Westbury implied that all the progress that had been made was down to the medical profession—that, anyway, is how I interpreted his remarks. I must tell him, with respect, that I think that the Government have played an important role in introducing change.

Hon. Members asked how we intend to proceed. In accepting Kennedy's recommendation 78, we have acted against a background of action that has already begun. In 1999 and 2000, and in subsequent years, higher education institutions were asked to bid for extra places, and to demonstrate an active commitment to recruiting students from a broad range of social ethnic backgrounds to reflect the patterns of populations served by the NHS. Most of the successful institutions addressed the issue of broadening the socio-economic background of the intake in a number of ways. Those included reviewing their selection processes, promoting outreach schemes and creating new—or increasing the numbers on—pre-medical courses designed to broaden intakes. That is an important policy objective if we are to address some of the concerns that Professor Kennedy expresses in his report and that right hon. and hon. Members have raised on several occasions in the House.

The hon. Member for Woodspring raised several other points and I shall return to his comments later. I calculated that I was asked 49 separate questions during the debate and I shall try my best to answer all of them, but I cannot guarantee to do so. I shall certainly write to hon. Members about those that I do not cover.

Like everyone else who has spoken in this debate, I wish to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on his decision to establish the inquiry. It was his decision to appoint Professor Kennedy, who did a superb job, and to make it a public inquiry, which was undoubtedly the right decision.

My right hon. Friend raised two important issues. He spoke about the need for medical professionals to adopt a more open approach to patients, and he was right to say that that approach creates its own dilemmas. We need to approach the issue carefully, in consultation with health professionals and patients. I agree that information must be fair and not give a false impression. We will need to work with the health professionals and others to ensure that that happens.

My right hon. Friend also spoke about the importance of the way in which patients are treated. As he said, when they or their family or loved ones are ill in hospital they are often under great stress and feel great anxiety. I agree that the training of doctors, nurses and other health professionals has a role to play, and that issue is being pursued. He is also right to say that progress is being made; we wish to maintain that progress, even though it can be extremely difficult.

[Mr. John Hutton]

Yesterday, I presented some prizes at a writing competition for doctors that was organised by the BMA. It was not, as someone at the event suggested, sponsored by the pharmacists to see who could interpret the doctors' handwriting. Perhaps I should not have said that. The competition was designed to get doctors to write about what brought them into the medical profession and what motivates them to stay in what we all acknowledge is a highly pressurised and stressful environment. The entrants wrote some fabulous pieces on what made them want to become doctors, but the majority centred on the relationship with their patients, their care for their patients and their desire to improve the health of their patients. The points that my right hon. Friend made about the essential relationship between the doctor and other health professionals and the patient lie at the heart of many of Professor Kennedy's recommendations, which the Government have endorsed. That relationship is the key to making the NHS a better service for patients.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, the hon. Members for Oxford, West and Abingdon and for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) all expressed concerns about the law on medical negligence and how a fear of being sued must not deter doctors from being honest about failures or being clear about when things have gone wrong. Other hon. Members talked about the disincentives of the present scheme of tort-based clinical medical negligence law suits. That is addressed in recommendation 119, which deals with replacing the present system with a no-fault compensation scheme.

All that I can say on the issue, which has obviously been the subject of serious concern, is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that we will publish a White Paper that will consider all the issues in some detail. The way forward will be informed by the work that the chief medical officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, has already begun of talking to the professions, lawyers, patient groups and others, and by what Professor Kennedy has to say on that immensely complicated matter, which also raises human rights issues.

Dr. Fox: The Minister is right that the issue is complicated. None of us expects a simplistic solution, but can he give us a rough idea of when the Government might be able bring their proposals to the House?

Mr. Hutton: We will do it as quickly as we can and I hope that, in the not too distant future, we will have the White Paper. I cannot give a specific date—*[Interruption.]* That is what it says here, anyway. The hon. Member for Woodspring must understand that these are complicated issues. If we were to rush to produce an unsatisfactory White Paper, he would be the first to jump up and say that it was a rushed job. The seriousness of the issues raised today means that the most detailed consideration will be required before the White Paper is produced.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon made one of his usual speeches about the NHS and offered his prescription for what is wrong with it. He started where the Liberals always start—with resources. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is not here? Then this will not be nearly as much fun. *[Laughter.]* That is a great shame. I am sure that he will be listening through the monitors. If not, I shall send him a video of my remarks.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon spoke about resources, and made a perfectly fair criticism in that regard, but there are two points that I should make. First, Kennedy himself recognised and acknowledged the importance of the extra investment that the Government are making in the NHS. That is an important point to get on the record. Secondly, Professor Kennedy's report made it clear that the problems at Bristol were not caused by underfunding. He made it clear in paragraph 39 that that is not his view of the problems. That is not to say that there were not resource pressures at Bristol, but they were being experienced in every other hospital across the country at that time, and Bristol's performance was significantly poorer. The problems are clear and Professor Kennedy's analysis was specific.

I have dealt with the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon about recommendation 119, albeit perhaps not to his satisfaction. I welcome his support for the general direction in which we are travelling in relation to the reform of inspection, but I am disappointed, although I cannot say that I am surprised, by his comments on the CHI and the role of Ministers in setting priorities for the NHS. I have told him many times that that is a perfectly legitimate job for Ministers. It is Ministers' job to set priorities for the NHS—it is our responsibility to this House and the public at large.

I must take issue with the hon. Gentleman's view that there is any benefit or constitutional propriety in shuffling off that responsibility to the CHI, whose job is different—to inspect the NHS and to advise this House and Ministers about the quality of NHS care, not to supplant the proper role of Ministers in determining the overall priorities for the NHS.

We are making substantial extra resources available to support the introduction of the NICE guidelines. The hon. Gentleman took a rather cynical attitude to the issue of making more information available to patients—an issue to which we shall return in future. I was left in some doubt, however, about whether he was on the side of patients in this regard, and he needs to make up his mind about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) made an impressive speech, and I echo and endorse her praise for those who not only campaigned on behalf of patients caught up in the tragedy but worked tirelessly to support their families. She mentioned Maria Shortis and Trevor Jones, and I echo her support. She was right to reflect the commitment and professionalism of staff at the BRI, who will continue to dedicate themselves to the needs and interests of their patients.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the benefits of publishing more health care information. Along with the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), my hon. Friend raised the important issue of service reconfigurations affecting children in the NHS. The report makes a number of important recommendations in this regard. The hon. Gentleman referred to developments that are planned or under consideration in his constituency. He will know that we are committed to establishing a new national service framework for children's services across the NHS. It will be an important step forward in improving services along the lines that Kennedy would like. Everyone in the House who is concerned about the welfare of children would like to see that as well. The work is being led by Professor David Hall, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, and Jo Williams, the director of social services in Cheshire, with the support of a number of leading professionals in the field.

That is about all that I can say today about how the reconfiguration will be addressed. It will form part of the work of the external reference group, and ultimately it will be reflected in the national service framework.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West said that, although the Kennedy report made it clear where the responsibilities lay, she had been asked to whom the Department of Health was accountable. I can tell her that the Department is responsible to the country, the public and hon. Members. Long may that remain so: we are fully accountable, in this House and outside it, for our decisions. The country will be the final judge of our performance.

The hon. Gentleman made a considered speech, as always. He was right to look at the report's implications for other parts of the country and of the NHS. He focused on children's services in the NHS. As I said, matters to do with reconfiguration will be dealt with as part of the work on the national service framework.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that it will not be enough just to publish another report on improving those services. All of us know, from our experience in the House, in business or in government, that reports do not implement themselves. They need to be monitored and implemented. There will be a clear timetable for implementation of the national service framework, and that will form the benchmark for CHI inspections. We are under no illusions about the job that needs to be done, but I assure the House that this report will not gather dust on anyone's shelf.

I am grateful for the support that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire expressed for the families of sick children. He and other hon. Members asked about recommendation 142, which covers the hospital travel costs scheme. We have to make a difficult judgment on the matter. It is right that NHS resources are targeted on those whose need is greatest in regard to travel and support costs, but he will know that trusts use their general powers of discretion to provide a range of support facilities for patients and family members caught up in terrible events such as happened in Bristol.

Hon. Members will, like me, have visited hospitals where trusts make overnight accommodation available to parents and others and that provide a range of other services to support patients and families who have to travel with sick children. Again, long may that continue to happen, but we have to make a hard judgment about access to the travel costs scheme. We believe that help should be focused on those with the greatest need, but we will also do everything in our power to support the wider use of trusts' discretionary powers.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood about the importance of the report. I welcome his support for the Government's response. He was right to emphasise the need for national standards. He and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) raised concerns about the extent and scope of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 in relation to Dr. Stephen Bolsin.

We have corresponded with Public Concern at Work on the matter. In the light of Professor Kennedy's recommendations and conclusions in that regard, we have carefully looked again at the scope of the 1998 Act. We are completely satisfied that if the Act had been in force when Dr. Bolsin made his recommendations, it would have given him the necessary protection and cover, as it was designed to do.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North made a scholarly and learned speech, in which he referred very politely to my legal training—although I do not think that my training was quite as good as his. I can confirm to him, as I have to Guy Dehn at Public Concern at Work, that the legal advice that we have received supports that organisation's interpretation of the relevant sections of the 1998 Act. I am therefore satisfied that Dr. Bolsin would have been fully protected by the legislation. We will, of course, keep the matter under the closest scrutiny.

The hon. Member for Westbury rightly called the Kennedy report a magisterial tome, and welcomed both it and the Government's response. He described the report as sensitive and reflective, and he was right to do so. We certainly benefited from hearing his personal and professional observations about working at the Bristol royal infirmary. I welcome, too, his support for expanding recruitment to medical schools to a wider social range. That is the right thing to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith) described the recommendations as clear, concise and easy to understand. That is true. Like other Bristol Members, to whom I pay tribute, he emphasised the high quality of paediatric cardiac services at the BRI. Kennedy's recommendations were sensible and achievable. I agree with my hon. Friend in that regard.

I have referred already to the comments of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North, who rightly described the Kennedy report as an historic document. I am grateful for his support for the measures that we are taking.

Professor Kennedy's report on events at Bristol royal infirmary between 1984 and 1995 marks a seminal moment in the history of the NHS. It not only accurately identified the problems that existed at Bristol and across the NHS at that time—the lack of national standards, the absence of a proper system for monitoring and ensuring quality, the lack of information for patients, no effective role for the public in local health care services and inadequate regulation of both professions and services—but pointed the way forward in ensuring that the NHS learns from those events and improves its service to patients. We intend to make sure that that happens.

Mr. Lansley: I recognise that the Minister was asked to give answers to many questions and that he has not dealt with them all, but I draw his attention to the fact that I and my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) referred to the Government's rejection of a package of 10 recommendations in the Kennedy report on validation and revalidation of trusts providing children's services to build quality into the provision of services, rather than to seek to inspect them

[Mr. Lansley]

post hoc. The Minister may refer to that at the same time as he says that the Government are going in the right direction on inspection.

Mr. Hutton: I intend to refer to that, but the hon. Gentleman is wrong in his description of the difference between validation and inspection. It is wrong to say that the Government are concerned only about measuring quality, as it were, post hoc. We are building quality into services by, for example, establishing the new national standards contained in the national service frameworks and in a range of other measures, including NICE guidelines.

Under NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, CHI will have new powers to advise Ministers about a range of special measures that could be taken. The hon. Member for Woodspring asked what those special measures would be. We have been through that issue on many occasions. He is aware of the range of special measures, which could range from visits from the modernisation agency and, looking at practice and how it can be improved to taking more serious measures: for example, to curtailing the provision of a service if it is unsafe and is placing patients' lives at risk. It is wrong to say that in rejecting the recommendations on validation we have compromised the pursuit of high-quality services across the NHS. It is just a different mechanism for securing those quality improvements.

In identifying the problems and recommending solutions, we warmly welcome the fact that Professor Sir Ian Kennedy has given a broad welcome and endorsement for the NHS plan and the general direction of health service reform and investment that the Government have initiated since taking office in 1997.

The events at Bristol were, in the view of Professor Kennedy, a tragedy. No one can dispute that assessment. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear, the inquiry team estimated that between 1991 and 1995 alone, 30 to 35 more children under the age of one died after open-heart surgery at Bristol than might have been expected had the unit been typical of other paediatric cardiac surgery units in England at the time.

In five of the seven years between 1988 and 1994, the mortality rate at Bristol was roughly double that elsewhere in the NHS. As many hon. Members have observed, the warning signs were obvious but were neither acted on nor taken seriously enough. As Professor Kennedy makes clear, the failures were both structural and individual.

Too many children died as a result. In the view of the inquiry team, a third of all the children who underwent open-heart surgery at Bristol received less than adequate care. Those children and their families were let down by the very system that was supposed to protect and care for them. The emotional consequences of those failures are still being felt today by all the families involved, who have been devastated by the loss of those so young and vulnerable.

While acknowledging that grief and sense of loss, as we must do in the House today, it is important, as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon did, to record the view of the inquiry team:

> "The story of the paediatric cardiac surgical service in Bristol is not an account of bad people. Nor is it an account of people who did not care, nor of people who wilfully harmed patients. It is an account of people who cared greatly about human suffering, and were dedicated and well motivated."

However, as the report noted:

> "The system for delivering paediatric cardiac services in Bristol was frankly not up to the task".

The failures in Bristol were both within the hospital—in its organisation, culture and leadership—and in the wider NHS.

The report clearly identified failures on the part of key individuals involved, but crucial failures were also recognised on the part of the NHS itself effectively to monitor and set standards for the quality of care provided at Bristol—or indeed anywhere else in the NHS at that time—and to give a high enough priority to the needs of sick children.

As Sir Ian put it:

> "There were no agreed standards of care, and not only no external monitoring of clinical performance but no real mechanism for doing so."

That is a shattering critique of the NHS at that time. All those deficiencies must be addressed if the NHS is to remain a high-trust organisation. Patients trust that doctors, nurses and other front-line staff will take the highest possible care over their treatment—and rightly so, because in the vast majority of cases that trust is fully deserved.

The NHS is full of excellent professionals who do their best for their patients and provide very high standards of care. Nothing in the report detracts from that; but that trust must always be earned—it can never be taken for granted.

The Government's responsibility—working with the medical, nursing and other health-care professions—is to do all that we can to maintain that vital relationship of trust and confidence between patients and the NHS. It is in that crucial area that Professor Kennedy's report is so important and where its recommendations will, I believe, make such a useful contribution.

Of course, as many hon. Members have said today, and as my right hon. Friend also made clear, things can and do sometimes go wrong. All of us know that even the very best doctors and nurses can make mistakes. As the report rightly stresses, heart surgery at any age is a risky enterprise. The trust that must lie at the centre of the relationship between patients and the NHS can, first and foremost, be enhanced by ensuring that NHS services are built around the needs of patients, with safety at the top of our list of priorities—not as an add-on.

We must be able to demonstrate that the NHS can respond effectively to concerns raised by patients and the public; that people working in the NHS are encouraged and feel able to speak out when necessary, safe in the knowledge that someone will listen and will take their concerns seriously; and that reliable and independent inspection and regulation, using national standards as a benchmark, will back up all those essential safeguards.

The relationship between doctors and their patients must depend absolutely on the principle of informed consent, where the right information is provided to the patient, in the right way and at the right time to enable them and their family to come to the decision that is right for them.

Professor Kennedy makes a number of important recommendations in that area that we accept and fully endorse. The way in which patients and, in the case of young children, their parents, are treated by doctors and other key staff is of enormous importance in establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust and confidence. We are already taking action to improve the procedures for obtaining consent, and as our responses today make clear, they will fully reflect the principles outlined in the Kennedy report. There, as in other areas, important lessons have been learned from the events at Bristol.

In essence, the main features of the new NHS architecture suggested by Professor Kennedy in his report are: openness; clear standards; quality and safety built into every aspect of service delivery; a real partnership between patients and the health professions; and a service led by managers of the highest calibre who are provided with the right level of resources to do the job expected of them.

As my right hon. Friend made clear, we accept and share that broad analysis. That is why we have already begun the process of putting those new arrangements into effect. Significant progress has been made in that area since the terrible events at Bristol occurred.

Since 1997, we have taken action to establish new standard setting and inspection bodies: the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, both of which operate outside the Department of Health.

The new national patient safety agency and the National Clinical Assessment Authority will help to tackle the problem of poor performance wherever it is identified and help doctors to improve their clinical practice.

New national service frameworks—initially covering mental health, coronary heart disease, services for older people and diabetes—have laid out clear national standards for the first time. The frameworks will cover both long-term medical conditions and children's services in the near future. As I said earlier, the national service framework on children's services will help to address Professor Kennedy's specific concerns about further improvements in the standard of paediatric care in the NHS.

The modernisation agency is helping NHS organisations to improve their performance and to spread good practice across the NHS. There is more information available to the public than ever before about NHS performance both nationally and locally, backed up by a system of rewards for good performers and intervention when necessary where performance is not good enough.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has outlined how we intend to make further and better information available to the public on the performance of individual consultants and surgical teams. Those important steps will help to maintain the vital trust between doctors and patients and increase public information about the standard of health care available. That will represent significant gains for both patients and the NHS alike.

As Professor Kennedy acknowledged, the reforms will require a new relationship not just between patients, the public and the NHS; the relationship between the Government and the NHS itself needs to change so that it better reflects the society that we live in and the complexities of such a large and diverse organisation that now employs more than 1 million people and treats more than 20 million patients each year. The Government have already embarked on important changes in that regard, to which the Kennedy report adds further impetus.

My right hon. Friend has today set out the Government's view on the changing relationship between the NHS and the Department of Health. As the Government's response to the Kennedy report makes clear, the role of the Department is no longer to run the NHS as if it were a mid-20th century nationalised industry.

The proper balance needs to be struck between maximum operational responsibility for front-line service providers and the Department's responsibility to provide the accountability and the means—the resources and properly trained and supported staff—by which health care services of the highest possible quality and standard can be provided to patients.

As Kennedy makes clear and we have accepted in our response today, a key element will be to ensure that the highest priority is attached to improving the leadership and management of the NHS at every level. The new leadership centre, which we have established, together with the NHS university, which we are setting up, will play important roles in developing those vital skills. A new contractual framework for senior managers and a new national code of conduct will help to ensure that the highest standards are pursued at all times.

It is also the Department's responsibility to propose the overall framework of legislation and policy in which the service operates, and to do so in a way that reflects the need for flexibility, choice, quality and diversity in health care.

The Health Act 1999 and the Health and Social Care Act 2001 implemented important reforms. The NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill will also produce important further reforms, called for in the Kennedy Report, with the establishment of the new United Kingdom Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals and the office for health care information in the CHI, together with a stronger role for the public in decision making in the NHS.

We should not lose sight of the fact that those reforms are being implemented against the background of sustained and unprecedented public investment in the NHS, which will produce more doctors, nurses, therapists and other key staff, working in newer hospitals with better equipment and faster access to the latest technology.

In conclusion, it is our collective responsibility in the House to ensure that we learn the lessons of what happened at Bristol, and in the process see to it that we have an NHS fit for the new century. That will require the will to see through the necessary reforms and not to slow down the pace of change. It will need the necessary resources to be provided—yes, of course—to ensure that the improvements in quality, safety and capacity across the NHS take place. It will necessitate the active support of patients, public and NHS staff themselves.

I believe that all those key elements are in place. All of them will support the necessary change of culture in the NHS that Professor Kennedy rightly identified as being of fundamental importance. It is obviously true that none of us can turn back the clock. We cannot undo what was

[Mr. Hutton]

done to those children and their families, but we can take action to put right the obvious failures identified in the Kennedy report.

The action that the Government have already taken, together with the further measures that my right hon. Friend has announced today, will make a significant contribution to realising that objective. I hope that all Members from both sides of the House will support those reforms in order to ensure, as far as we possibly can, that the trauma and suffering of those children and their families will not be repeated in the future.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Incinerator Proposal, Capel

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

5.58 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a local issue this evening. I am also grateful that the Minister is here to respond. Having been in her position for a number of years in the past, I am well aware that she has probably had to delay her departure from London to her constituency, although I suspect that the weather here will be duplicated there. Having been a Minister with responsibility for planning and having responded to similar debates in the past, I am equally aware that, although I am dealing with a specific application and related issues, the hon. Lady can only respond in broad and non-specific terms. That, of course, is because the Secretary of State is in a quasi-judicial position in that the Capel incinerator application, although approved by Surrey county council, has been referred to him for consideration because it involves a departure from the local development plan.

Surrey county council has an adopted waste local plan. However, the plan was considered by the local planning inspector to be totally inadequate because of the lack of a locational strategy and the lack of identification of any sites whatever for waste-related development. Because of that, the local inspector urged the county council to carry out an immediate review of the plan. Quite rightly, the inspector's intention was that that would provide an opportunity for the proper consideration of alternative sites and pay regard to the need to locate waste-related development as close as possible to the waste's origin. The shorthand notation for that is the "proximity principle". That would also ensure that all communities in the county would have the opportunity to engage in the consideration and that the relative environmental impacts and benefits of a range of sites would be discussed so as to provide the most appropriate solutions. Neighbouring councils have done that, and West Sussex county council in involved in that procedure at the moment.

However, Surrey county council has dragged its heels. Only preparatory work has been carried out in preparation for a revised waste local plan. In the meantime, the county has charged ahead with a competitive tender procedure involving the private sector not only applying for the task but being required to supply the sites. Clearly, a contractor's priorities differ from those of a public waste authority. In this case, it is important that the role of the public waste authority is to go through the procedures as set out by the inspector.

Environmental issues, such as the proximity principle, were clearly low on the list of considerations to at least one contractor. In the event, the contract was won by Surrey Waste Management, which submitted two planning applications for energy-from-waste incinerators. In addition, a second firm, Thames Waste Management, which is not contracted to Surrey county council, submitted a third application.

The geographical location of all three applications appears to be related to the availability of access for the applicants and not to other environmental issues. Two applications by Surrey Waste Management, the chosen contractor for Surrey county council, were at Redhill in north-east Surrey and at Capel in the rural south. Thames Waste Management's application related to Slyfield, a site close to Guildford in central Surrey.

The interesting point to note is that the majority of the waste in Surrey is produced in the north-west and centre of Surrey, which means that both Surrey Waste Management's applications were at odds with the proximity principle. That also indicated the clear disadvantage involved in Surrey county council's assessment of the applications before its completion of a review of the waste local plan. In other words, in my opinion—and I hope eventually that of the Secretary of State—consideration of the applications was premature.

Broad issues were considered by officers before the committee meeting of the county council was held to consider all three applications. Considerable work was undertaken to produce a paper assessing need. After some months, this paper was produced for the committee—along with other papers—approximately a week before the meeting. Even a cursory study of the details suggested that there was little or no urgency. That impression was added to by the fact that Surrey county council's enthusiasm for recycling was muted to the degree that the bare minimum required by the Government was accepted as standard.

However, to everyone's great surprise, two or three days before the committee meeting, Surrey county council suddenly produced a completely new set of needs assessment statistics which—surprise, surprise—greatly enhanced its claimed case for urgency. As I am sure the Minister is aware, such an assessment of need is hardly an exact science. In fact, it is hardly a science; at best, it involves guesstimation.

However, given the Minister's background, she can imagine that this sudden change of statistics greatly disturbed the concerned public and clouded the issue. Furthermore, in this assessment, Surrey county council took no account of the fact that approval had recently been granted for a very large incinerator just over the northern Surrey border. The successful applicant, a firm called Grundons, is currently seeking waste sources to fuel this incinerator prior to building it. If indeed there were the urgency that the officers tried to impress on Surrey members, the utilisation of that incinerator would have been an obvious early choice. Incidentally, it would adhere much more closely to the proximity principle.

On 6 and 7 December last year, Surrey county council's planning committee considered those three applications. Having considerable experience of planning issues, I was somewhat surprised at the recommendation that the officers made to the committee, which it supported, although only narrowly in one instance. I must qualify that statement, however, as I undertook only a cursory assessment of two of the applications. The application from Surrey Waste Management, the council's contractor, for the Copyhold site near Redhill was refused. I believe that that was the correct decision. The thought of approving a large energy-from-waste incinerator site in the green belt was beyond even Surrey county council.

The second application, which I briefly looked at, was by Thames Waste for the Slyfield site near Guildford. That site has little or no environmental value in that it consists of sewage sludge ponds and a waste transfer station. From the point of view of the proximity principle, it has the advantage that it is very close to a main source of Surrey's waste. The primary reason for refusing the Slyfield application was the substantial scale of the plant and the fact that it would be detrimental to the visual amenities of a nearby section of the green belt.

I found that intriguing. It is my opinion, which is based on the drawings, that Thames Waste had gone to great lengths to disguise the normal hideous solid square-block building with a chimney sticking out—the appearance of most incinerators. It had produced a modern rounded building which, when viewed from the green belt in the distance, was vaguely reminiscent of a modern cathedral, but without the cross.

The current situation is that Thames Waste is in the process of assessing over the next few weeks whether to appeal or to re-submit a further application. Obviously it may choose to do nothing, but with the recent approval on appeal of the Portsmouth incinerator application, I feel that an appeal may well be successful.

Interestingly, Surrey county council required Thames Waste to produce an assessment of all three applications, based on the proximity principle. Its application at Guildford clearly followed the proximity principle most closely—certainly much more so than either of the other two applications. Anyone who is familiar with Surrey geography and the applications would recognise that that is a statement of the obvious.

However, in considering all three applications, Surrey county council officers advised the planning committee on totally different grounds. Their assessment of the proximity principle was that if the site was within Surrey's boundaries, the proximity principle was met. In my opinion, that is a cavalier approach, especially as the committee members to whom I have spoken were unaware of the results of the mileage assessment undertaken for the county by Thames Waste.

The third application was for a site at Capel. That application for recommendation for approval by the officers was confirmed narrowly by eight votes to six. However, as I have already explained, that application has been referred to the Secretary of State as a departure from the development plan. I believe that that particular application should be called in for a public inquiry and final determination by the Secretary of State.

There are many reasons for that, and I will give only the main ones. First, the site is approximately 1,700 m from the green belt. It is clearly visible from it and from many of the sites in Surrey that people use to look over the downs. The view from those sites is beautiful, the downs are spectacular and there, sitting in the corner, will be a pile of tin cans with a chimney poking out of it in the middle of a rural area. The drawings show a hideous building. Although it would be slightly lowered into the ground, it would still have a detrimental effect on the view. What is interesting is that the key reason for refusing the Thames Waste application at Guildford was reversed or ignored and ceased to apply when the committee considered the Capel application.

The second reason is that the application proposes a substantial industrial development for a remote rural location, which is contrary to the guiding principles for development in the countryside as set out in planning policy guidance note 7. Indeed, the Minister for the Environment is on record as saying that he thought that

"plans for incinerators in the countryside would not be approved".

I wish that Surrey had taken note of that.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

As I have already said, the application flies in the face of the proximity principle. Waste for the Capel incinerator would have to be transported by refuse collection vehicles in central Surrey, predominantly in Guildford and Woking, to the Slyfield site near Guildford—the same site to which the application from Thames Waste relates. The rubbish would then be transported by road to the Capel incinerator, giving a round-trip distance of approximately 100 km. We face the prospect of tens of thousands of 100 km-trips by heavy lorries to transport waste that could be dealt with nearby. If there is to be an energy-from-waste incinerator in Surrey, handling Surrey's waste, then Capel is probably the most remote from the origins of waste in Surrey. That is acceptable only if one ignores the whole basis of the proximity principle.

The Minister, with her local government background, will understand my great concern about the transparency of the decision. The council is not only the waste planning authority, but has a land ownership interest in the site and a waste disposal contract with the applicant. Indeed, the service committee chairman reminded the planning committee of the importance of the fact that Surrey Waste Management, the applicant for Capel, is the council's waste management contractor. My concern is increased by the fact that the reverse point was made regarding the Thames Waste application as the company is not a Surrey waste management contractor.

The Minister will be well aware that neither of those points are planning considerations, but they almost certainly influenced some members. As I said, there is an argument that consideration of the applications is premature, but it is worth recognising also that the proposed development at Capel is contrary to the provisions of the current Surrey waste local plan, to the Surrey structure plan and to the Mole Valley local plan—Capel is within the boundaries of Mole Valley.

Council officers have recommended granting planning permission for the site on the basis that it is the least worst of the three applications before them. They did not accept the argument that the sites for such development should emerge through the local plan process. To compound that error, they, by their own admission, accepted that the applicant's consideration of alternative sites had not been exhaustive. Indeed, at a public meeting in Capel, I asked Surrey Waste Management's planning adviser why the Capel site was chosen. He gave two reasons. First, the applicant, as Surrey county council's waste management contractor, had access to the site because the county had a land ownership interest. Secondly, because it was a rural site and therefore of low population density, there would be little protest. That is hardly a planning issue. Even so, I believe that the Government office of the south-east is currently dealing with about 1,500 written protests from very upset people in the Capel area, a rural area with about 880 houses.

To put it mildly, Surrey county council's consideration of its waste management responsibilities and of the three applications is at best murky. As the Minister will be aware, when a local authority grants permission, in effect to itself, which frequently occurs, that authority should go to considerable lengths to provide transparency. I believe that, in this particular case, that demand has not been met. As the decision conflicts with various local plans and the current waste local plan has been severely criticised, the application must be called in for a public inquiry and the Secretary of State's determination. Such important planning decisions must follow proper procedures and, most important, they must be absolutely transparent. In this case, Surrey county council has been found wanting.

6.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir P. Beresford) on his success in securing this debate on the proposed energy-from-waste incinerator at Capel. As a former planning Minister, he will understand that I cannot comment in detail on the specific proposal. As he outlined, following its decision to grant planning permission for the incinerator, Surrey county council has referred the application to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions as the proposal departs from the local authority's development plan. That procedure was introduced to give the Secretary of State the opportunity to consider whether such proposals should be called in for his determination. The incinerator scheme is before him, and I cannot comment because that could prejudice his decision.

Nevertheless, I reassure the hon. Gentleman that in deciding whether to call in the proposal, which, I know, has caused considerable local concern, we shall give careful consideration to the points in his letters to the Secretary of State, Lord Falconer and me. We shall also consider carefully the concerns of the local community, which we have heard about at some length. Given the limitations on what can be properly discussed, this could be one of the shortest responses to an Adjournment debate on record. However, it may be helpful for the hon. Gentleman, his constituents and people who have an interest in these matters if I set out the procedures and principles, to reassure them that the matter is being dealt with properly.

Although the hon. Gentleman is clearly familiar with the Secretary of State's power to call in planning applications, it may be helpful if I run through our policy on call-in, which was set out by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport in a written answer to a former Member on 16 June 1999. The general approach of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, like that of previous Secretaries of State, is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities unless it is necessary to do so because Parliament has entrusted them with responsibility for day-to-day planning control in their areas. It is right that, in general, they should be free to carry out their duties responsibly, with the minimum of interference.

There will be occasions, however, when my right hon. Friend may consider that he needs to call in applications to determine them himself. His policy is to be selective about calling in planning applications and, in general, he will take that step only if planning issues of more than local importance are involved. Such cases may include, but are not restricted to, those in which the decision may conflict with national policies on important matters; cases that could have significant effects beyond their immediate locality; cases that could give rise to substantial regional or national controversy; cases that may raise significant architectural and urban design issues; or those that may involve the interests of national security or of foreign Governments. However, each case will continue to be considered on its individual merits.

Before I talk about other issues involved in this debate, it may be helpful if I say that the three schemes that the hon. Gentleman talked about are regulated by the Environment Agency for England and Wales to prevent harm to health and the environment. I understand that a permit application has been received by the agency for the proposed incinerator at Capel, which is currently under consideration. An incinerator must have both planning permission and a pollution permit to operate; gaining one does not guarantee that the other will be issued.

I am aware that Surrey county council considered two other planning applications for waste-to-energy incinerators last month, at Slyfield industrial estate in Guildford and the Copyhold works in Redhill. I understand that those, too, were deeply controversial. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Surrey county council decided to refuse those applications on a number of grounds. The applicants have until July to appeal against the council's decision; the Secretary of State may find himself determining the appeals so, obviously, I cannot say anything that would prejudice them.

I should like to say a few words about the plan-led system and why we believe that such difficult and often highly controversial planning issues can best be handled at local level. It might be considered that there have been shortcomings in the way in which the wider system has been handled locally. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that when Surrey drew up its draft waste local plan, which was adopted in 1999 and is still in force, the plan contained a list of potential sites for large-scale waste processing and treatment facilities. There was considerable public opposition to the proposed allocation of some of those sites, one of which was the site at Capel. As a result, Surrey chose to delete them from its plan. Instead, the council drew up criteria-based policies against which planning applications for waste management facilities could be assessed.

In her report following the public inquiry into the plan, the local plan inspector recommended that Surrey county council proceed to an immediate review of the plan, which should include an identification of sites or preferred areas to accommodate Surrey's needs and to make an appropriate contribution to meeting regional guidance needs. I am encouraged to hear that officials in the Government office of the south-east have held discussions with Surrey about preparing a revised waste local plan containing sites for waste management facilities, although a new plan is unlikely to be forthcoming before the end of the year.

The lack of sites for waste management facilities is, of course, by no means exclusive to Surrey. In our role of scrutinising development plans to assess them against our policies, it is all too common to come across plans that lack identified sites for new facilities. A great deal of controversy is generated when such sites are later identified. If more sustainable waste management systems incorporating a range of waste management options are to be implemented effectively, there will clearly be a corresponding need to identify suitable sites for the development of the necessary facilities. The key instrument for identifying such sites is the waste local plan, which is developed in consultation with local communities.

Since Surrey adopted its waste local plan, my Department has finalised its advice in planning policy guidance note 10, which is intended to assist planning authorities in the preparation of their waste local plans, and in the determination of planning applications for waste management facilities. It also provides specific advice on the criteria for the siting of those facilities.

We expect waste planning authorities to consider all the relevant planning issues when determining planning applications, and PPG10 makes it clear that waste management decisions should be based on the best practicable environmental option and the following three principles, the first of which is waste hierarchy. That is a conceptual framework that we want local authorities and others to use to rank the waste management options. It sets out a preferred order for dealing with waste—reduction, re-use, recycling, composting, energy recovery and, if those are not viable options, incineration without energy recovery or disposal through landfill.

The second principle is the proximity principle, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It suggests that waste should generally be disposed of as near as possible to its place of origin. That was one of his prime concerns. It avoids passing the environmental costs of waste management to communities that are not responsible for its generation, and reduces the environmental costs of transporting waste. The third principle is regional self-sufficiency. As far as practicable, waste should be treated or disposed of within the region in which it was produced.

In considering waste management options, authorities should take into account all three principles to arrive at the option that produces the best balance between environmental, social and economic needs.

Sir Paul Beresford: When the hon. Lady speaks of disposal within the region, she is presumably not equating the region with the county. I raise the matter because next door to the northern border of Surrey is a site for which there has been a successful planning application, as I mentioned in my speech, for a large incinerator. It is conceivable that Surrey county council could use that, although the officers believe that they are restricted. I believe that they are misinterpreting the Government's guidance and interpreting the region as being within Surrey's boundaries alone. I think that that is incorrect.

Ms Keeble: I [illegible] not want to be drawn into interpreting the guidance, as in this instance, there is a specific application about which the hon. Gentleman is concerned. If he would like any further information about the principle of regional self-sufficiency, I shall certainly provide it to him writing, but I do not want my comments to be read across to a particular application.

To assist waste planning authorities to develop sustainable strategies for the management of waste in their areas and in the preparation of their waste development plans, my Department has commissioned consultants to develop guidance and best practice on identifying and assessing the factors that should be taken into account when deciding on the best practicable environmental option for dealing with controlled waste streams. Research has also been commissioned to produce good practice guidance on the types of policies that should be included in waste development plans. That will benefit waste planning authorities when they prepare or review the plans and assist my Department in its role of scrutinising development plans to ensure that they comply

[Ms Keeble]

with Government guidance. Both studies will report shortly and I shall certainly ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives copies of both reports.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the procedures by which the local authority would generally set about handling these matters. I thought that it might help him and his constituents if I set out some of the information, advice and views that the Department has on the way in which local authorities should conduct the process. The role of local authorities is, of course, crucial to achieving more sustainable means of handling the waste that we produce. As I explained, they are responsible for identifying suitable sites and methods for waste treatment or disposal. They are expected to take an integrated and socially and environmentally sensitive approach that includes the following three points: first, promotion of informed debate with the public and businesses; secondly, establishment of the best practicable environmental option, which means taking account of the waste hierarchy that we have set out in "Waste Strategy 2000" and the proximity principle; and, thirdly, regional self-sufficiency in managing waste and working with the Environment Agency to ensure that planning and licence conditions are complementary and effective. He also raised concerns about transparency. Of course, any local authority planning decision must be taken completely transparently and with a great deal of integrity. I do not want to make any remarks that might impinge on that.

In conclusion, I repeat that we recognise the concern that is felt locally about the Capel scheme. I assure the hon. Gentleman that he can inform his constituents that the Government are fully aware of the strength of feeling and the nature of the debate. We will consider this matter and the different issues that are involved against our planning policies and the call-in criteria. I hope that in the interests of ensuring that his constituents feel that the Government are acting transparently, he can inform them of the criteria by which we make a decision on a call-in application. Although I cannot say more about the decision on this particular scheme, I can say that we will of course ensure that he has that decision as soon as possible. I hope that he and his constituents will find the information that I have set out of some help and reassurance.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Six o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 18 January 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Employee Share Schemes Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.33 am

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am delighted to speak in support of the Bill. In so doing, I pay tribute to the support that it has received from many Members and from many organisations and bodies outside the House, including the co-operative movement, which first suggested its subject matter, and the employee ownership movement. I declare as an interest the assistance that I received in developing the Bill from the Co-operative party and Job Ownership Ltd.

The purpose of the Bill is to encourage greater employee ownership by extending the taxation benefits available for employee share schemes to companies that encourage widespread employee ownership. In particular, the Bill would encourage those forms of employee ownership where employee shares are held collectively in an employee trust.

The measure would also make it easier for employee trusts that hold shares to elect employees as trustees of the shareholding, thus giving employees a direct voice in the management of the business in which they work. Finally, the measure would facilitate the transfer of shares by companies to an employee trust. In some circumstances that cannot be done at present, as it would incur expensive taxation consequences.

As many hon. Members know, neither employee share schemes nor employee ownership are new ideas in this country. Several schemes designed to promote employee shareholding have been introduced by Labour and Conservative Governments, with support from minority parties. The 1974-79 Labour Government—with strong support from the Liberals—introduced the all-employee profit-sharing share scheme, which was excellent in many respects. After 1979, the Conservative Government introduced the executive share option scheme, which faced some criticism. They also introduced the save-as-you-earn option scheme and, in 1989, the qualifying employee share trust—the QUEST scheme—which was widely supported in the House.

In 1994, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, made significant improvements to the QUEST scheme, designed to encourage owners of private companies to sell their business, or substantial interests in the business, to their employees. The scheme was especially useful in promoting wider employee share ownership.

Most recently, under the Labour Government, the all-employee share ownership plan—now the share incentive plan—has further extended the taxation advantages available to encourage employee share ownership and the flexibility with which such schemes can be introduced.

Employee share schemes have been given cross-party encouragement under the tax system for almost 30 years. Employee ownership itself has a much longer history in the UK. Many Members are aware of the long-established employee-owned business, Scott Bader Commonwealth Ltd., founded in 1920 and employee owned from 1951; 90 per cent. of its employees are members of Scott Bader Ltd., the charitable trust that holds the shares of Scott Bader Company Ltd. In the words of that organisation, membership brings "advantages but also responsibilities", with many employees also serving on the community council that deals with day-to-day problems in the company. The company believes that involvement in decision making encourages commitment from its employees. Scott Bader also undertakes much charity work; that is typical of many companies with high employee involvement and ownership.

Members will be aware that there are many other successful employee-owned businesses in this country: the John Lewis Partnership and the Arup group are two well-known examples. There are many successful worker co-operatives. All the evidence shows that employee control—whether through employee share ownership or other methods, such as the traditional worker co-operative—brings real benefits to the businesses that introduce them and to their employees.

Employee-owned companies perform better than average. An investment of £100 in the FTSE all-share index in 1992 would be worth only £186 today. The same investment in a company in the employee ownership index, where more than 10 per cent. of the capital is held by employees other than directors, would be worth £370 today—more than twice as much.

Other evidence shows that the wider the degree of employee share ownership and employee control the better the results for both businesses and employees. A recent study by Conyon and Freeman shows that UK companies that give shares only to their senior managers experience a significant increase in productivity. However, companies that go further and spread share ownership to all employees achieve a productivity boost of nearly 50 per cent. more than companies that restrict share distribution only to directors or senior managers.

Evidence shows that wider employee ownership and employee control bring much wider benefits to society. One recent study of worker co-ops in northern Italy showed that towns with higher levels of employee ownership did better in terms of education, health, crime, social participation and perceptions of the social environment—even mortality was significantly lower.

It is dangerous to generalise too much from one case study, but I know from my experience in Scotland that some of the most successful examples of community regeneration may be found where community owned and controlled businesses have played an important role in

[Mr. Mark Lazarowicz]

building a strong and stable community. There is certainly an indication that wider worker ownership helps in creating successful societies.

As the legislation stands, however, there is an anomaly in the operation of the taxation advantages available to employee share schemes. Ironically, the very businesses that provide for a high degree of employee ownership and involvement, and are totally or partially employee controlled, are often unable to distribute shares to employees on a tax-effective basis because of their employee-based structure. That anomaly acts as a deterrent to a wider extension of employee ownership, and the Bill seeks to address it. To show how that will be done, I shall now outline the detailed provisions of the Bill.

I shall first mention clause 1(2), (3) and (4). The current legislation does not allow the introduction of a share incentive plan by some of the United Kingdom's successful and established companies that have long been owned, controlled and run on behalf of all their employees. Typically, many employee-owned companies are owned and controlled by an employee benefit trust, a charitable trust or, in some cases, a mixture of both. The holding of shares in a trust can be an effective way of encouraging a collective employee voice in the management of a business, and of preventing shares from being taken out of employee control—both very laudable objectives. However, the shares of such companies do not qualify under the requirements of the SIP legislation, because the tax benefits of the SIP for the company and its employees are available only if the shares are distributed to individual employees.

The clause seeks to eliminate that anomaly, which prevents some of the UK's most successful and longest-standing employee-owned businesses from delivering to their employees the tax-efficient benefits of individual share ownership that are now available to most other types of company under the SIP.

It is difficult for companies in that group, such as the ones that I mentioned earlier, to explain to their employees, who work in a culture of employee ownership, that they are not entitled to the tax incentives now offered for share ownership to employees of their competitors.

In addition, a collective trust-based scheme of ownership is often a route preferred by transferring business owners who want to pass on their companies, or a significant part of their interests in their companies, to their employees. That may be because the owners may wish to relinquish control gradually, for perfectly good reasons, or because the scheme may require financial contributions from employees over a period. The subsections that I mentioned will therefore allow a SIP to be available in such circumstances.

I turn now to the second group of provisions contained in the Bill—those set out in clause 1(5). The effect of that subsection will be to make it clear that employee-controlled companies will be able to benefit from a taxation concession available to employee share schemes if the trustees are selected or elected by the employees of the company. The view of the bodies in this country that promote employee ownership is that at present there is considerable uncertainty about whether such provisions are acceptable under the current legislation, and I understand that those who have sought to include what I would term "employee democracy" provisions—the election of trustees by employees—in employee share ownership schemes have had some difficulty in obtaining approval.

I understand that the view from within the Inland Revenue is that the subsection is not strictly necessary, because the legislation as currently worded does not prevent the appointment of employee trustees. I believe that the Revenue intends to clarify the position in due course by providing information on its website and making available model documents, which are to be drafted.

Notwithstanding that view, the bodies that make up the movement that supports wider employee share ownership consider the subsection to be very important. They consider that it will remove any doubt that such arrangements are possible and, moreover, place a clear pointer in legislation that employees can indeed become elected trustees of a trust that is set up under a share incentive plan.

Such specific provision allowing appointment of employee trustees will give employees and their representatives, such as trade unions, the confidence to request employee representation on the trustee body without the fear that they will be told that it is impossible or too difficult under the legislation. Case studies have shown that the most successful results arise from employee share ownership where employees have real involvement and participation in the non-financial—and particularly the decision-making—aspects as well as the financial aspects of share ownership, and that if employees have that greater degree of involvement they will have a greater sense of ownership.

I take as an example the John Lewis Partnership. A study of results over 17 years showed that, of all UK retailers, it had the highest marginal productivity gain for every new person employed and for every pound invested, and the highest capital and labour productivity in the industry. Studies by the Centre for Tomorrow's Company in the UK and a recent big European study point in the same direction. The more employee share schemes provide for what has been traditionally termed "industrial democracy", the greater the benefits for employees and businesses alike.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I believe that it is an excellent principle to encourage greater share ownership and involvement in one's company wherever possible. My constituent, Mrs. Jennifer Parry, who works for the John Lewis Partnership, shares my support for the principle of what the hon. Gentleman is trying to achieve, but she is uncertain whether part-time employees might be able to benefit, because of the rule that shares must be held for a minimum of five years to gain tax benefit. Will the hon. Gentleman perhaps enlighten the House on that matter?

Mr. Lazarowicz: I am not sure whether I can answer the hon. Gentleman's query in detail. The Bill is designed to facilitate as wide a range of schemes as possible. Every employee whom one would want to benefit might not benefit immediately, but I hope that the Bill will put down a marker for future legislation and point in the direction in which the House wants to go.

Appointing employee-elected trustees is an extremely effective way to achieve a form of industrial democracy. It is good not only for Britain's employees but for the whole country because the evidence is that such an increase in employee ownership increases productivity—a key Government objective. The more that employees are involved in the ownership and the direction of their business, the better the productivity and the better the results for the country as a whole.

I emphasise that this provision in the Bill enables employee trustees to be elected by employees. It is an optional provision; it does not force it on any unwilling company or employees, but it is important that such employee ownership be encouraged. Employee ownership is clearly not suitable for all businesses. No one is suggesting that the traditional form of share ownership is not appropriate for very many companies, and in many cases public ownership is the way forward. However, the Bill would move forward the idea that employee ownership is also a valid way—perhaps even the third way—that needs to be encouraged and supported by the Government and the House.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I am very interested in the Bill and in no way want to put a damper on it, but I should like to pursue the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), especially on the John Lewis issues. What advice has the hon. Gentleman received? I understand that John Lewis employees are particularly concerned about two main points. First, can the company maintain and provide liquidity to an internal share market, which would have to be created to allow employees to trade their shares?

Secondly, because of their low-paid and part-time nature, many of the partners in John Lewis may not be able to wait the minimum of five years that they are required to hold the shares before any gain on disposal becomes tax free. Although I understand that the hon. Gentleman may not be able to go into great detail, I and the wider audience outside the House would appreciate it if he would share with the House the advice that he has received and tell us whether he hopes that the Paymaster General will shine light on the problem or whether he has any solutions to those two thorny issues.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I cannot offer any detailed advice at this stage. Clearly, as she will appreciate, today's debate is on the Bill's broad principles. No doubt, if the hon. Lady or her hon. Friends wished to pursue those points in detail, they could do so in Committee. However, I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will be able to outline the Government's position. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that she will be able to do so. As I suggested to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), the Bill is intended to facilitate a range of options. Indeed, if my hon. Friend made any suggestion that fits the broader intent of the Bill, I am sure that it could be pursued at a later date.

The provisions in subsection (5) would seek to achieve the objective of facilitating employee representation on trusts. The final set of provisions are set out in subsection (6), which would support the position of companies, especially business owners who want to make a significant move towards employee ownership. Corporation tax relief would be granted up front where a significant block of shares—10 per cent. or more—were transferred to an employee trust.

Under the SIP provisions, such corporation tax relief is available only when shares are transferred to individual employees under the scheme, but that might take a very long time where a large part of the company is transferred at the outset for the benefit of employees, thus making that route expensive—often prohibitively so—for the company. Such up-front corporation tax relief was available under the previous QUEST legislation. The provisions in subsection (6) would encourage the establishment of employee ownership where businesses are owned wholly on behalf of their employees, largely through trusts.

The Bill would, if passed, be a modest but significant measure to promote active employee ownership. However, it represents something wider. As I said in my opening remarks, it was originally suggested to me by the co-operative movement. It did so because, as some Members will know, in recent years, the co-operative movement has been working closely with a wide range of organisations that do not have traditional links with the movement.

Those organisations include, of course, employee-owned businesses—what I term the employee ownership movement and many mutual businesses not only in the financial sector, but in other sectors. They include community businesses and many providers of community and social housing and community leisure facilities. Indeed, they include companies limited by guarantee—a topic of some interest at the moment. They include the exciting and innovative scheme to promote a voice for football supporters in the management and ownership of their football clubs—the supporters direct initiative. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] As the hon. Members can hear, that initiative has considerable support among Labour Members. All those organisations and sectors are now working much more closely than ever before on a common agenda. In effect, a new co-operative and mutual sector is developing.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Does my hon. Friend agree that wonderful opportunities now exist in central Scotland, with the development of the Forth and Clyde canal, which has had an impact on many communities throughout the central belt, and that that represents an ideal opportunity for such companies to develop because they will be successful if they have real support from the community?

Mr. Lazarowicz: Indeed. As my hon. Friend may well know, I, as a member of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, recently paid a visit, along with a number of Members present in the House today, to the Forth and Clyde canal and saw the wonderful opportunities that it presents to community business in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere. That opportunity indicates the way in which the new co-operative and mutual sector is developing.

The new sector includes, of course, traditional forms of co-operative activity. It includes new and successful forms of co-operative enterprise, such as the highly successful Co-operative bank, as well as long-established companies, such as the John Lewis Partnership, which has

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been discussed at some length already. However, lest anyone thinks that such a model of business ownership is valid only for century-old businesses, let me assure him or her that the involvement of employees in their business is as valid and important to what has been called the new economy.

For example, Poptel—a worker co-operative set up in the mid-1980s—now offers internet services. It has 60 staff based in London and Manchester and a turnover of £6 million. It is the inventor and registry operator of Dot Coop—the new co-operative internet identity. If worker co-ops are not to the taste of every Member, let me refer to Xansa—the consulting information technology and outsourcing group, with a turnover of almost £500 million. It has been quoted on the stock exchange for some six years now, but it is still controlled to a major extent by its staff, who have a 30 per cent. stake in it.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): My hon. Friend is listing a series of options for different types of companies, but does he agree that if we could somehow build worker share ownership into some of the larger companies—indeed, the multinational companies—it may reduce their tendency to be foot loose and to take decisions outwith a country that have an impact on the employees in the country in which they operate?

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend makes a very valuable point. I know, from his experience in Dundee, that the problems of foot-loose companies have caused great difficulties in his constituency.

As I have said already, employee ownership offers real advantages to employees and the businesses that employ them. As we have heard again in the House today, the concept seems to have all-party support. The Government strongly recognise the value of employee share ownership and the contribution that it can make to raising productivity. Support in the House is broad and, outside the House, the Bill is backed by the co-operative movement, Job Ownership Ltd., and many successful employee-owned companies, such as those that I have mentioned. It is backed by the Trades Union Congress, the Industrial Society and many mutual companies, including Nationwide and Standard Life—one of the major employers in my constituency.

Many hon. Members will have received letters from members of the public or employees of employee-owned companies in support of the Bill. In the fullness of time, some of those individuals and the businesses may well gain some direct benefit from the Bill. Most will not—but they support this measure because they recognise that, as well as its direct impact, the Bill can be an important symbolic expression of the House's wish to support the growth of active employee ownership.

I urge the House and the Government to give a positive response to that wide coalition of support for the Bill. I hope that the House will show its support for wide employee ownership by supporting the Bill's Second Reading today.

9.59 am

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): It is a pleasant duty to congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on his speech, which showed that he had immersed himself in the detail of his chosen subject and that he came to it out of a deep belief in the ideas to which the Bill gives expression, and on his success in the ballot. From my experience in my first Parliament, I recall the mixture of delight and terror that one feels when one is successful in the private Members' Bill ballot. He has chosen an important subject that is worthy of debate, and I congratulate him on that.

It is important to state on behalf of Conservative Members that we fully support the principle that we should encourage and make it easier wherever possible for employees to own shares in the company for which they work. One of the great achievements in British life since the second world war has been the creation of a property-owning democracy. Conservative Members take particular pride in the achievements of the Governments led by my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven in helping to bring that about.

One of the next steps forward from the achievement of a property-owning democracy must be to search for measures that will build a capital-owning democracy, in which not just those who are fortunate enough to inherit wealth but people from all backgrounds and all parts of the nation will have the opportunity to own and to take responsibility for the sums of capital that can provide them with the security which only a small number of our fellow citizens in previous generations had the fortune to hold. As the hon. Gentleman said, employee share schemes are an important means of seeking to achieve the objective of a capital-owning democracy.

A profile of British shareholders conducted by MORI on behalf of ProShare, the share ownership promoter, showed that approximately 14 per cent. of all shareholders in this country first became involved in the ownership of shares through an employee share scheme of some sort or another. I do not mean this in a partisan spirit, but a larger percentage—30 per cent. of all shareholders—first became involved in the ownership of shares through the benefits of privatisation schemes. It is important to accept that there is more than one route to more widespread capital ownership. The particular method embodied in the Bill is certainly important and deserves further debate and encouragement.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): The hon. Gentleman refers to wider capital ownership, so does he accept that the figures for the United Kingdom have been disappointing, especially compared with the United States, where there is much wider share ownership? Should we not look to the United States for examples of how we could do better in this country?

Mr. Lidington: I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman. He makes a perfectly valid point. A lesson for those of us on the centre right of British politics is that we should not be afraid to encourage greater employee share ownership. Across the Atlantic, that method of spreading capital more widely is accepted to a greater extent than it has traditionally been in the United Kingdom.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): If we are to learn from the United States, we must of course avoid scandals such as Enron. We should not accept everything that the United States has done for share ownership.

Mr. Lidington: I look forward to the continuing debate between the hon. Members for Cleethorpes (Shona

McIsaac) and for Edmonton (Mr. Love) about the merits of the United States model. We should never take the methods applied in any other country as a blueprint that necessarily can be applied directly to our circumstances in the United Kingdom. However, since his election to the leadership of the Conservative party, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has made a point of stressing that we need actively to consider examples of policy success across the Atlantic and across the channel; and should examine whether some lessons can be applied fruitfully in this country.

It is good for employees to have a material stake in the success of their employer. That is an important way in which to shape a corporate culture within a firm so that employees feel that they are valued by the enterprise for which they work and that their contributions are taken seriously by its management and directors. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said, companies benefit when they are able to unlock the enthusiasm, the creativity and the ideas of their work force and can enhance those to the advantage of the enterprise as a whole. Employee share schemes offer one important way of bringing the interests of employer and employee together.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, under Governments of both political colours, there has been a history of initiatives to encourage employee share ownership. He mentioned the save-as-you-earn scheme and the company share option schemes introduced by Conservative Administrations. Those schemes are still in being and currently benefit 1.75 million workers in about 1,200 firms. He also referred to the approved profit sharing schemes and the qualifying employee share trusts—QUESTs—that were introduced by Conservative Governments in the 1980s and that have been replaced by this Government's share incentive plan, the so-called SIP.

At the time of the introduction of SIP in the Finance Acts of 2000 and 2001, we took the view that the Government's measures were in some ways an improvement but in others worse than the schemes that they replaced. However, we were prepared to give the new schemes broad support. I hope that, when the Paymaster General responds to the debate, she will be able to bring us up to date with the Government's assessment of the success of the SIP scheme so far.

A press release from ProShare dated earlier this month said that 220 schemes had now been approved and that more than half the firms involved had fewer than 250 employees. That shows that smaller firms are becoming involved to a greater extent than before. That is clearly good news, but the Chancellor's stated aim is to have 1,750 schemes, which is the figure that was produced in the Government's impact assessment when they brought the legislation before Parliament. I would therefore be interested in the Paymaster General's assessment of how long it will be before that target is met. She will know that there have been criticisms from the financial services industry about the new schemes' complexity and the bureaucratic obstacles in the way of operating them. Some fears have been expressed that that might deter firms that might otherwise be attracted to this method of encouraging employee participation.

We welcome the hon. Gentleman's Bill as an opportunity to debate the issue further and to explore the merit of specific proposals for reform. I hope that I do not disappoint him too much if I say that I cannot promise to adopt his Bill lock, stock and barrel as official Conservative party policy. We take his points seriously, and they are embodied in the Bill. A number of detailed matters need to be debated, however. We do not oppose the Bill's Second Reading and I hope that it will proceed to a Standing Committee and beyond so that it receives the close scrutiny that it deserves and we can resolve some of my questions about its detail.

As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said, the Bill's measures can be divided into three. The first is the proposal to broaden the opportunity to participate in a SIP to include employee-owned companies. He mentioned some of those, including the John Lewis Partnership and the Arup group, and demonstrated that there is a gap in existing arrangements. Perhaps that can best be illustrated by referring to the John Lewis Partnership. I am grateful to its representatives, whom I met, for briefing me on the Bill.

Paragraph 61 of schedule 8 of the Finance Act 2000 defines those shares that are eligible for inclusion in a SIP. First, they have to be listed on a stock exchange. The trouble is that the only class of John Lewis shares so listed are preference shares, which the legislation specifically excludes from eligibility. Secondly, shares are eligible if they are in a company that is not under the control of another company. The structure of the John Lewis Partnership means that the shares in the plc are controlled by a corporate trustee and are treated in law as the shares of a subsidiary, which therefore makes them ineligible.

The third criterion for eligibility might get John Lewis out of its hole. Shares are eligible for a SIP if they are in a company that is a subsidiary, other than a closed company, and listed on a stock exchange. The trouble is that the Inland Revenue ruled that the John Lewis Partnership counts as a closed company. It is ineligible for the SIP arrangements because it has fewer than five shareholders, which is a result of its particular corporate structure and the involvement of the corporate trustee. Although it looks like the Bill might fill a gap in the arrangements, I wonder whether it would deliver the benefits that the hon. Gentleman and the Bill's sponsors wish to see.

John Lewis told me that it supports the Bill, but it also explained that it would not be a panacea. My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) alluded to some of the possible difficulties. It might be hard for such a company to create a class of ordinary shares that meets legislative requirements and complies with the obligations in the partnership's trust settlements. It might be awkward in practice to establish an internal share market, which would have to be created if we were to allow employees in such a company to trade in shares. In addition, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) said, many retail workers are part-time or low-paid employees. We have to wonder whether an SIP is the right savings vehicle for such people. Is the five-year period during which planned shares have to be held before tax benefits accrue realistic for them? Again, I have to wonder whether that aspect of the Bill will be as beneficial as the hon. Gentleman hopes it will be.

The second broad proposal is to allow employees who are elected by the work force to sit as trustees. I have no objection to that in principle. If it makes workers more involved with the decisions of a trust and gives them a sense of ownership and a greater stake—in the wider

[Mr. Lidington]

sense of the word—in the fortunes of their company, then that is welcome. Questions again arise, however. Would it be wise to allow, as the Bill does, the majority of trustees to be non-professional, given the considerable obligations that fall on trustees to look after the assets of their co-workers? Should there be a definition in legislation of the way in which such employee trustees are to be chosen?

The hon. Gentleman and some of the commentary in support of his proposals suggest that the Bill would provide for elected employee representatives to sit as trustees, but the Bill does not lay down a method of election, nor does it say that that election should take place. There is not even an enabling power for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make regulations to define a method of election. The Bill does not specify that there has to be a secret ballot, nor does it stipulate the period of trusteeship before a worker trustee has to seek re-election.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman raises important matters of detail. Would it not be sensible, however, to deal with elections in the framework of the memorandum and articles rather than including them in the Bill and having to sort them out now?

Mr. Lidington: That is a reasonable point, but I would want to explore in Committee and on Report whether that is the best approach. It might be better to stipulate it in law or, more probably, secondary legislation through regulations, which would receive parliamentary scrutiny.

The third proposal is to change the arrangements for corporation tax relief. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not mind my being amused at the irony of ditching tax relief arrangements for some schemes which were introduced by the Government in favour of those introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) in QUESTs. That also gives rise to some questions. I have not formed a final view on the matter and think that there should be wide consultation with interested parties and the business community in general. Is it right to limit those corporation tax relief advantages to some employee share schemes rather than giving them to all such schemes? Is 10 per cent. the right threshold if we are to distinguish between schemes? How do the corporation tax arrangements set out in the Bill interact with those set out in paragraph 106 of schedule 8 of the 2000 Act?

That leads me to two questions about the Bill as a whole. One is about the possible cost to the Government of the Bill's changes to corporation tax relief. Inevitably, if the Bill provides for more generous corporation tax relief than is covered in present legislation, there is bound to be some cost to the public purse in terms of revenues forgone. Clearly, before Parliament agrees to let the Bill proceed to the statute book, it would be right to know the best estimate of the revenue which will be forgone.

I do not blame the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith for this, but he has not been able so far in the debate to provide such an estimate. I am sure that the Treasury and Inland Revenue have been doing some number crunching, and I hope that the Minister will be able to come up with an estimate when she speaks—if she catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The House needs to bear in mind not just the immediate cost of the Bill. After all, the reason why the Government decided to change the corporation tax relief arrangements that they inherited was the way in which, they argued, those arrangements were increasingly used by companies to avoid considerable amounts of tax, thus offering scope for growth in legal tax avoidance. In the words of a commentary from ProShare that was distributed at least to some hon. Members this morning:

> "in 1997 clever tax advisers spotted the generosity of the legislation—the upfront Corporation Tax relief for the company—and began to market the use of QUESTs to FTSE companies."

Of course, the clever officials in the Treasury realised what was going on. Changes to legislation were introduced, but comparable things have happened and will continue to happen in various aspects of tax legislation. The House will want to hear from the Minister how the Government assess both the likely immediate cost, were the Bill to become law, and whether the Bill as drafted would allow scope for growth in legitimate avoidance of tax as people latched on to the corporation tax advantages that the arrangement would bring. We need to be aware of that risk.

We also need to ask about the compliance costs of the legislation. Again, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith will know, any Government Bill must be accompanied by a compliance cost assessment of what it will mean to industry. It is a private Member's Bill, so I do not expect him to come up with the sort of audit that Whitehall is capable of providing, but the Government's view on that matter would be welcome.

The Government's regulatory impact assessment for the SIP legislation suggested that a large company would face start-up costs of between £200,000 and £750,000 when it first established an SIP, plus annual running costs of between £100,000 and £200,000. The estimates for smaller companies, by which the Government meant companies employing about 50 people, were start-up costs of between £20,000 and £40,000 and annual running costs of between £15,000 and £30,000, possibly capable of being reduced to about £10,000 in some circumstances.

We therefore need to take seriously the possible costs of these measures both to the Treasury in terms of revenue forgone and to businesses themselves in terms of possible burdens. If those administrative costs are excessive, the Bill will not have the beneficial impact that its sponsors wish. We need to consider in Committee and on Report whether it is right to amend the law in that way.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I hear what the hon. Gentleman says and am pleased to hear that the Opposition Front-Bench team supports the Bill in principle; but does he agree that there is prevailing unfairness about the way in which we treat mutuals? There is greater complexity than there needs to be. Often, they are exempted from what other public and sometimes private businesses can gain access to. This Bill is about putting right those wrongs.

Mr. Lidington: The Bill is about trying to encourage both employee share ownership in companies that at present cannot take part in the SIP arrangements and worker ownership—greater mutuality, or however the hon. Gentleman wishes to describe it. There are certainly advantages to mutuality. As the hon. Member for

Edmonton said, we should consider carefully why such arrangements appear to be more successful and more widespread in the United States than they are here, and the benefits that they undoubtedly bring, but we do not want to pretend that mutuality is an answer to everything. There are merits in the orthodox idea of a firm with shareholders who hold a board of directors to account. The largest private sector employer in my constituency is what used to be Equitable Life, so mutuality is no guarantee that the right decisions will be taken.

Mr. Love: In the Finance Act 2000, the Government in their great wisdom extended SIPs to redeemable shares of industrial and provident societies. The Bill will extend SIPs to employee trusts. As yet we have not been able to find a mechanism to extend it to mutually owned businesses such as building societies. Will the Opposition parties join the Government in trying to give the benefits of employee share ownership to mutual organisations?

Mr. Lidington: I am happy to say that we are very willing to explore ways in which that may be done, subject to what I have said about costs, both to Government and to the business sector, but the principles set out by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith are good. It is right to seek to expand the opportunities for employee share ownership and to look for ways in which to make workers feel that they have a real stake in the company by which they are employed. If we can devise the right arrangements in which to embody those principles, I agree that the economy will be more productive and the prosperity of all our citizens will be enhanced. It is in that spirit that Conservative Members will be happy to see the Bill gain a Second Reading and continue to be given the detailed consideration that it merits.

10.28 am

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I support the Bill and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on the slot that he drew in the private Members' ballot. I thank him for choosing this subject as the basis of the Bill.

I should make it clear that I have been a lifelong supporter of co-operative principles and of the co-operative movement. Indeed, I was an employee of the co-operative movement for 18 enjoyable and rewarding years. I am proud to stand in the Chamber and say that I am a Labour and co-operative Member of the House.

Although the Bill does not directly promote co-operatives, it reinforces the principle of democratic participation in companies by employees, and gives staff the right to share in the appreciating value of their company, which their labour has helped to build. Both are values and principles held most dear by the co-operative movement. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith and the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said, the Bill is the latest in a sequence of measures; it would tidy up anomalies that have arisen out of legislation introduced by both Labour and Conservative Governments to provide a corporate legislative framework that will enable capital and labour to work together for the benefit of both.

Historically, Britain's industrial performance has been dogged by tensions between capital and labour. Reading the Bill brought to my mind a book and film that many hon. Members will remember: "I'm All Right, Jack". Starring the late Peter Sellers, the film caricatured the bitterness of industrial relations under the old-style capitalist management prevalent in the immediate post-war years. I do not claim that the attitudes portrayed in the film were typical of all companies, but there is no doubt that the tensions it portrayed were reflected in our industries for many years following the war.

The Bill is the product of a new era. The old tensions led to strikes, the consequences of which were sometimes devastating to our economy, staff employed and companies themselves. Even when companies survived without such tensions, the corporate framework in which they worked meant that they were unable to harness the collective talents of employees or stimulate their collective initiative in a way that added value to the companies' managerial strategy.

There is a world of difference between the contribution of an employee who goes to work, clocks on or signs in, does a conscientious day's work for his day's pay and then goes home, forgetting about his work, and an employee of a company in which employees have a share and participate. He goes into work feeling part of that company, wanting to contribute, looking for ways to increase efficiency; he works with colleagues who are in the same position to promote new ideas and more effective working arrangements. The Bill promotes the sort of corporate framework in which the latter can thrive.

Employees who are confident that their ideas will be listened to and respected, and who know that if those ideas are implemented and are successful they will benefit from the additional productivity generated, are far more likely to be positively committed to their work than those who are not. The Bill is one of those rare pieces of legislation from which everyone is a potential winner.

The economy should gain from increased productivity. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said, the latest research in the United States demonstrates the gains made in productivity in companies in which there is wider share ownership and participation. From my perspective as a lifelong supporter of co-operation and the principles that lie behind it, it is good to know that there is now a body of statistical evidence that demonstrates the principle—the instinctive feeling—that the system set out in the Bill embodies the right way forward. No wonder the model is more advanced in the United States than in this country.

The Bill will assist the development of a new enterprise culture, wherein people are encouraged to invest responsibly and develop confidence in doing so. The hon. Member for Aylesbury highlighted the contribution that Conservative Governments made in creating a property-owning democracy—although tempted to intervene, I resisted the urge to point out that for many it subsequently became a property-owing democracy. The hon. Gentleman rightly spoke about the steps taken to increase the number of people who owned shares and became used to handling them. The great virtue of the Bill, as opposed to the Conservatives' privatisation measures, is that it promotes responsible long-term use of shares, rather than their purchase for quick short-term profit. It would be interesting to carry out research into the relative duration of ownership of shares by those who purchase them via the Bill's mechanism, compared to those who purchased shares in the privatisations, but I shall not divert the debate by speculating on that point.

[Mr. Adrian Bailey]

Individual companies are clearly likely to gain from having better motivated staff with lower rates of absenteeism and unpunctuality. Participation in decisions by employee representatives leads to greater understanding of company business and acts as a unifying force among staff. The employees gain from the wealth created by the improved working environment and the confidence created by decision making and being able to take greater control of their lives.

The Bill would correct some of the deficiencies in legislation made under previous Governments. Hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise the merits of its approach. I am pleased to commend the Opposition on following the logic of legislation introduced by Conservative Governments and supporting the Bill in principle. I especially welcome the provisions that widen the range of companies eligible for tax relief on employee share holding. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith spoke eloquently about the irony of a company such as John Lewis Partnership, which is regarded as a model of employee participation, being excluded by previous legislation. The Bill would correct that anomaly.

The Bill also makes provision for companies that set up share trusts, facilitating the process whereby democratic elections can be held to place employee representatives on the trust. Everyone welcomes the reinforcement of such rights of representation. I applaud the changes that remove tax barriers to enlightened company owners who want to hand over their company to employees, or to make a substantial donation to existing employee trust funds. Hitherto, the obligation to pay corporation tax up front when transferring companies has been a major disincentive, especially when the company is experiencing difficulty and the prospect of a transferred company under employee control surviving is made slimmer by the additional costs incurred under existing legislation.

The Bill gives new hope and new scope to a new generation of entrepreneurs—the example of Poptel was quoted. It gives new entrepreneurs, working in new areas, looking for new methods and pioneering new ways of working, new scope to set up corporate models that will maximise the talents of their work force.

When I first looked at the Bill, I could not help but reflect that company law and tax law are probably the driest and most arcane areas of the law. This Bill is a combination of both. However, we must recognise that, despite that, the forces that the Bill seeks to liberate are potentially revolutionary. It seeks wealth creation by recognising and rewarding innovation; wealth distribution by spreading the benefits of wider share ownership; and education and confidence building by including people in vital corporate decision making, which hitherto has been denied them. Despite the Bill's dryness, those are vital parts of a developing new economy, and I hope that everyone who shares the aspirations reflected in the Bill will join me in supporting the measure.

10.41 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) not just on the Bill but on the way in which, having done so well in the ballot, he made his choice and formed the proposals. He consulted widely inside and outside the House, which is a model approach to producing proposals for hon. Members who want to ensure that their legislation achieves a consensus. He deserves congratulations from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) talked about the history of industrial relations and some of the obstacles that have prevented employee share ownership becoming more widespread in Britain in the past, and about some of the past battles between unions and management. It is good to see that, in many respects, those days are behind us. Proposals such as this have helped to bridge the gap between what used to be seen as the two sides of industry.

As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said in his short historical analysis of the development of employee share ownership, in the '60s and '70s, the Liberals were great advocates of employee share ownership schemes and, in the Lib-Lab pact in the late '70s, they were extremely successful in persuading the then Labour Government to implement in their Finance Acts some of the first schemes in that area. That set the ball rolling and was important in ensuring that Britain went down that route.

In recent decades under the previous Conservative Administration, we saw some developments, which in many respects were welcome but which in general tended to suffer from two particular problems. First, not enough of the schemes were all-employee schemes. I well remember that, in my back room days when I was advising my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) when he was the Liberal spokesman in Committees considering Conservative Government Finance Bills, we tabled amendments to try to persuade the then Government to make more of their employee share ownership schemes all-employee schemes, but there was a lot of opposition to that from the Conservative Government. That was one of their major failings in this area and one reason why we did not make the progress that could have been made from the arrangements in the late '70s.

That is why I start my remarks by praising the Government. In their consultation in the previous Parliament and their proposals for what have turned out to be share-incentive plans, the Government have ensured that all-employee involvement in tax-favoured schemes is a bedrock principle, which we should keep to, maintain and develop. The Government are to be congratulated on dealing with that huge omission from the proposals of previous Conservative Governments.

Mr. Love: I agree strongly about the principle of all-employee share ownership, but is it not also a practicality in that the research shows that when all employees are part of a scheme it delivers the benefits of performance and productivity?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is exactly right and he slightly anticipates my next remark. The nature of all-employee schemes is that they provide the benefits that have been suggested today: namely, improved productivity.

The good thing about the Bill, and why it is less modest than the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith suggested and is a radical step forward, is that it deals with the second problem that the previous Conservative Administration never dealt with: namely, the fact that employee share ownership schemes work best when they involve and encourage employee participation.

Far too often, employee share ownership schemes are about a new form of remuneration. That is important to employees because remuneration is one reason why people go to work, but, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said in quoting some of the research, if we are to benefit fully we must move from just a remuneration relationship between employee and employer to a co-ownership of the future of the company, so that the employees or their elected representatives participate in thinking, strategy setting and decision making. If employee share ownership schemes are developed in such a way, we shall see some of the long heralded but yet to be fully achieved benefits of employee share ownership.

I hope that the Government will not only support the Bill, as I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues will do today, but will listen to the reasons why so many hon. Members support the measure. It is not just about the old forms of employee share ownership; it is about something more. It is about trying to get employees more involved, and giving companies incentives to involve employees more in real control and participation.

The economic benefits have long been heralded, as I know from my studies of labour market economics at university, about which I read rather too much because I was studying the mid-1980s when there was a flurry of economic articles and books promoting employee share ownership. In particular, I well remember "The Share Economy" by Martin Weitzman, which was one of the seminal works in the early to mid-1980s. He drew on the experience of the Japanese economy and tried to argue that profit-related pay, which may in some cases take the form of employee share ownership, was the answer to stagflation and the reason why the Japanese economy had not suffered from the problems of the British economy.

Judging from the smiles on hon. Members' faces, they share my scepticism about such claims by Mr. Weitzman and others. It is important that we understand why some of the claims for such schemes are wrong while others are right. People such as Mr. Weitzman argued that moving towards profit-related pay was a way out of the wage inflexibility problem; the fact that nominal and sometimes even real wages are downwardly inflexible, so the labour market fails to clear and there is unemployment when there are demand shocks. They tried to suggest that to get out of that, risks should be transferred from the owners of the company to the workers. That model assumed that people were prepared to take quite a sizeable risk as part of their remuneration. Of course, in reality, that is not so. While employees will take some risk, they will not take the amount required to make practical or real the theoretical models advocated by some. The problem with those models is that they took a top-down view of the benefits of such schemes. They looked at a macro-economy and asked how we could try to get rid of inflation and unemployment; they proposed trying to change the whole labour market macro-economically.

The real benefits come from a bottom-up or bubbling-up approach, which looks at enterprise at a shop-floor level. If one looks at the relationships between employees and managers—the ways in which they work best and how they can be improved—we see that they are not about risk sharing or risk transfer from the owners to the workers. They are more about a shared vision of where the company is going. It is through a shared vision that one gets productivity improvements; genuine incentives; shared or pooled ideas of how to do things better and improve processes in a company to make sure that the output, whether a service or a good, is produced at a lower unit cost; and improved relationships and morale. It is also the way to achieve better communication, which is one of the genuine benefits of proper all-employee share ownerships schemes that involve extra participation. If one is going to make such schemes a reality, one inevitably gets better communication and, through that, greater understanding, which often ensures that difficulties faced daily or weekly by companies can be tackled by everyone involved in the company.

Those shop-floor business-based advantages are the theoretical underpinning of the benefits claimed for that type of scheme. They might not reduce stagflation, as Mr. Weitzman suggested some schemes might, but over time they will significantly increase productivity. The Government rightly regard the schemes as being crucial to what they claim is their top economic objective in this Parliament of improving the productivity of the British economy. They should therefore pay particular attention to the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith to see whether they can harness those productivity benefits even more. It is through active ownership that we will secure those benefits.

The Government are looking at other benefits of share incentive plans. They have tried to suggest that when companies take up SIPs they have the option of introducing performance-related share schemes. Indeed, they have set out proposals with conditions on forfeiture if staff leave early and so on, and particular rules on holding periods for shares. They may have two other objectives in introducing those conditions. The evidence that performance-related pay improves productivity is much less than the evidence for employee participation. That is worth looking at, but the complexity of the arrangements proposed by the Government suggests that some of the benefits may not be as easily obtained as some people have argued.

The points on forfeiture and holding periods in the Government's SIP schemes are interesting because they may address some companies' problems with staff turnover. For example, sometimes staff leave their company far too quickly, and it loses the benefits of training and building up relationships. Some people may say that the forfeiture and holding period conditions are rigid, but they may be key to the benefits that we are trying to get from the Bill and the Government's proposals. If one wants improved productivity, it is common sense to retain staff a little longer to get the benefits of the training and investment that the company puts into them. I certainly recognise that in paying staff in my own office. I try to encourage them to stay a bit longer by paying them a little bit better, as I believe that that is the way to get more out of one's staff; it is a productivity gain as it reduces staff turnover. Some of the additional objectives in the Government's approach to SIPs are therefore to be welcomed.

[Mr. Davey]

I now turn to the detail of the Bill. As the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said, it tries to widen the application of available tax reliefs, which is to be welcomed. Figures obtained by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) in a parliamentary question to the Treasury show that, in the first instance, more than 100,000 employees might be eligible as a direct result of the Bill's implementation. Over time, eligibility could further increase. Creating the incentive for companies to adopt the model favoured by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith would enable us to experience its key benefits.

In discussing that part of the Bill, the hon. Member for Aylesbury and some of his colleagues made points also made by John Lewis Partnership. They wonder whether the Bill will achieve its intentions because of problems involving part-time employees and possible liquidity in organisations' internal share markets. The House and the Committee considering the Bill should try to explore those valid concerns with John Lewis Partnership, the Government and others. It is not beyond the wit of Members to deal with those problems.

It is important to put on record the fact that John Lewis Partnership is one of the organisations that really values its part-time employees. There are two large John Lewis Partnership stores in my constituency—the John Lewis store in Kingston and Waitrose in Surbiton—and I know some of the people who work in them. Indeed, they have written to me, as I shall explain later. They extol the way in which John Lewis Partnership implements its principles and core values to make sure that all employees are valued, whether they are full-time or part-time. Indeed, up to 30 per cent. of John Lewis Partnership employees are part-time and are integral to the company's strategy. It should be noted on the record that it treats them well.

It is possible to get round the two problems mentioned by the hon. Member for Aylesbury. The partnership could undertake innovative work on liquidity to see whether it is possible to introduce a new concept of an internal capital market, and we should look at that. It is possible that in the past we did not spend enough time looking at how to improve the performance of mutuals and not-for-profit organisations. It is for Members of Parliament, given the public service reform ideas that are knocking around, which would involve greater use of the not-for-profit and mutual sector, to try to see how we can ensure that staff involved in such organisations can share in their prosperity and control.

We may look to the external capital markets to see whether shares held by employees in such organisations can realise their value. External capital providers may be prepared to lend against the value of such shares. Clearly, they would have to take risk issues into account, but it may be possible to get round the problems that have been identified. We should certainly look at that in Committee.

On the involvement of part-time employees, the hon. Member for Aylesbury expressed concern about the five-year period. We must remember that the Bill's key micro-economic purpose is to raise productivity. As such organisations will often value part-time employees and regard them as part of their longer-term strategy, we should not get rid of the five-year period. The productivity of part-time employees is just as important as the productivity of full-time employees. We must remember that the Bill is not about giving a quick profit to employees or their making a fast buck; that is not the objective of tax relief. The objective of the Bill is to make sure that the interests and the vision of employees and employers come together, for the future benefit of the company and therefore of the economy.

Mr. Love: I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so generous with his time. Surely one of the other reasons for maintaining the five-year time limit is to ensure that employee share ownership is not abused, as it was in the past, and converted to profit-related pay, which was discredited?

Mr. Davey: I agree. The Bill is an anti-abuse measure, but it is more than that. It is important to remember that, in case there is a future lobby for the Government to get rid of the five-year period. We must ensure that the objectives of the tax relief are achieved. I do not think that the interests can be fused or productivity benefits such as reduced staff turnover can be achieved in a shorter period than five years. We may want to consider the time scale, but we should do so with great care.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is typical of many employee-owned companies that part-timers may stay for longer periods? That is traditional in many businesses that employ part-time workers.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. He is right. It is important that we do not set up false divides within the work force. We must remember that part-time employees play a crucial part in the economy. They should not be seen as necessarily moving in and out of the work force. They are permanent features of the work force.

The second major provision clarifies the option of employee participation. As I said in my opening remarks, that is the key radical aspect of the Bill. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said that the Inland Revenue would provide guidance, and that in its view, the measure was not needed, as the current legislation was adequate. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he should stand fast in his belief that measures such as the Bill are needed.

I am sure that the Inland Revenue will provide guidance and that its analysis is right, but it is important to provide greater clarity, transparency and awareness of the option. We need legislation that clearly encourages employer participation. In Committee, we can listen to the opinion of the Inland Revenue and consider other ways of providing clarity and ensuring that the current legislation and the options available are better known.

If there are to be non-professional trustees, as the Bill suggests, it is important that companies give them proper training. The role of trustee carries significant responsibilities for the wealth of others. When companies go down that route, they should ensure that the trustees elected by their employees are suitably trained.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury rightly mentioned the nature of the election, which is not specified in the Bill. I understand why the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith has chosen not to do so, as we could get involved in a huge argument. It is often better if legislation is not over-specific. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Edmonton, from a sedentary position, speaks of proportional representation. He is tempting me, but I shall not go down that avenue, as I could be here all night.

Although I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith that the primary legislation should not be over-specific, I believe that in Committee we should explore the issues, as the hon. Member for Aylesbury suggested, because public money is involved. Also at issue is the reputation of the employee share ownership movement, and of the fairly radical measure proposed by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith to get more active employee participation. It is such an important social and economic objective that we must get it right. We may need to be more specific than we would like, but that is no reason for objecting to Second Reading. It is a matter for full debate in Committee. As the hon. Member for Aylesbury observed, it is possible that it could be dealt with through secondary legislation.

The third detailed measure in the Bill removes financial obstacles facing companies and provides financial relief if they choose to go down the route of employee share ownership. I welcome that. I do not know whether it originates with the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). I am not familiar with the exact provision that he introduced. If it was introduced by him, that is not necessarily a poor source. The right hon. and learned Gentleman was responsible for some good measures.

In the March 2001 Budget and in the 2001 pre-Budget report, the Government expressed interest in the matter. I shall be interested to hear from the Paymaster General when she sums up the debate tonight—*[Interruption.]* I meant this afternoon, as the Paymaster General reminds me. I am having a problem with timing. I hope that when she responds to the debate, she will say whether the measure is in line with the Government's thinking as it has developed since the 2001 Budget.

I shall speak briefly about the John Lewis Partnership, primarily because, as I said earlier, it has two retail branches in my constituency. I have received letters from three constituents about the Bill. *[Interruption.]* The Paymaster General implores from a sedentary position that I do not read out the full letters. I will not, but I will read extracts. The support shown by constituents for the measure is one of the reasons that I will support it today.

Mrs. G. Coleman of New Malden wrote, asking me to support the Bill. She made it clear that she wants the Government to go further. It is interesting that this letter and one or two others that I received are from employees of the John Lewis Partnership, who are not yet sure whether the legislation will apply to the company. If such doubts exist, we may need to ensure in Committee that the measure will apply to such firms.

Mrs. Coleman wrote:

> "Long term as a partner in a business, I, as would my colleagues, want to see the Government take action to allow the staff of companies like the John Lewis Partnership to reap some of the benefits of ownership free of tax, in the same way as the staff of other major retail companies such as Tesco and Asda".

That puts the point clearly. Successful companies such as the John Lewis Partnership, which are set up to encourage employee participation, should have the same tax benefits as others.

Mr. Will Sayer of Surbiton stated in his letter:

> "While I understand that there may be no direct benefit to my company or myself"—

that illustrates the point that I made a moment ago—

> "I think this cause is worth championing as it recognises the values and principles of our kind of business and will help to give it a more public voice, which cannot be a bad thing."

That is interesting. The employees of the John Lewis Partnership are very attached to the values and principles underlying that trust.

Finally, Richard Bonner of Kingston, who is a councillor on the local John Lewis Partnership branch council, wrote:

> "I would like to see the Government take action to allow the staff of companies like mine to reap some of the benefits in the same way as employees of other retailers".

Many people employed in that partnership are looking to the Government to support the idea and take it forward.

In conclusion, I shall examine one or two of the alleged problems with the Bill and with the Government's plans. I dealt earlier with the five-year period and the matter of liquidity. Some people have argued that we are trying to get employees involved in risky investments. There is not a huge exposure in that regard, although there is, of course, a degree of risk. If people borrow against the assets or put some of their savings into buying them, a degree of risk will be involved, but it is not of the order of that which is associated with many other investments, especially as the Government have limits on the tax advantages of particular degrees of shareholding. The risks are reduced and are of a different order.

Some people have complained about complexity and have suggested that we are using the tax system to promote particular types of behaviour. As somebody who believes that the tax system is massively over-complicated, I am concerned about making over-complicated tax legislation. The hon. Member for Aylesbury rightly referred to the compliance costs. We in this House are not good at introducing simple tax legislation that minimises such costs. When Whitehall writes its regulatory impact assessments, it is not very good at considering the compliance costs of tax, as it uses a questionable methodology in doing its sums. It always considers marginal change, but companies already have a set of accountants and tax advisers to consider that. Indeed, to the company, the change will be marginal, but we never stand back and consider the overall effects of the increasing complexity. Adding all the marginal changes together can demonstrate a huge increase in compliance costs.

That is a serious issue. My approach to measures that add yet further complexity is to ask whether the benefits that will be achieved are really worth the costs. In respect of many of the Government's proposals, I do not think that such increases are worth the cost. The Government have tinkered with the tax system and have not justified the extra complexity to the House by demonstrating that it is worth the benefits that they maintain are achieved. However, as my previous remarks show, I do believe that there are such benefits in the type of legislation that is before us. I am completely convinced that the long-term growth, productivity and performance of UK plc will be significantly enhanced over time if we make the proposed improvement. In this case, I think that the extra complexity is justified, although perhaps complexity in

[Mr. Davey]

the administrative arrangements could be reduced. I am not sure whether we should lay that matter on the shoulders of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, but I think that the Paymaster General and her colleagues should consider how to reduce such complexity.

I have not seen any of the commentary on the Bill, but I believe that we should mark up another issue as a potential concern. It relates to what the hon. Member for Aylesbury said about the overall costs of the measure, which I think will be relatively minimal in the early periods. The Paymaster General shakes her head. I hope that that does not mean that the Government are going to oppose the Bill, and that she will persuade us that we can, at least through negotiation, ensure that the costs are not preventive. Indeed, it is some of the Government's other measures—not only in respect of the proposed scheme, but elsewhere—that might mean that the costs become a problem later.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the hon. Gentleman comment on whether putting an extra 1p on income tax might be an appropriate way of meeting the costs?

Mr. Davey: There have been some helpful interventions, but that was not one of them. For the record—Conservative Members are already getting in a bit of a tizz—I should say that the matter under discussion has nothing to do with that pledge, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

I was referring to the capital gains tax reforms that the Government have cack-handedly implemented over the past few years. They introduced 10-year, five-year and now two-year taper relief, which has implications. People who are remunerated in capital in relation to shares may be able to get capital gains tax benefit fairly quickly. The overall income tax base may well be reduced as changes are made to the way in which people are remunerated. Some people—I do not necessarily exclude myself from them—welcome some of the changes that the Government have made to capital gains tax, and especially those that tidy up some of the original mess. However, we need to take cognisance of these matters in the way in which we estimate the potential cost of the measures and try to find a way of taking the proposed route without undermining the health of the income tax system in the longer term.

I should like to raise another issue that is relatively small, but is important to achieving the benefits that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith seeks. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) raised the issue with a Treasury Minister in relation to Government proposals that were originally made in the Finance Act 2000. He asked whether low-paid employees who were getting holidays or exemptions from national insurance contributions would lose the benefits because they were not paying the contributions. In an answer given on 19 July 2000 at column 399 of *Hansard*, a former Treasury Minister said that it would be up to individual employees to decide whether they got the benefits from the contributions, and whether or not to get national insurance relief but buy the shares, or to opt for the shares and tax exemption. That Minister was leaving it to individual employees and suggesting that they had the information on which to base that choice.

Will the Paymaster General go a bit further? Could there be some protection with regard to the contributory benefits? We have seen similar protection in other reforms that the Government have introduced in the national insurance system, so perhaps it could be provided in addition to the relief that is given to make the share purchase.

It has been clear in this debate that there are some matters with which we shall need to deal in Committee. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith is raising some tricky and complex issues. However, as we do that work, we must not lose sight of the fact that we should support the core of the proposals. I hope that the Government will indicate their support and that they will take a constructive attitude to the way in which we negotiate and amend the Bill in Committee.

11.17 am

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I take great pleasure in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), a fellow Labour and Co-operative Member, on his luck in the ballot and on his choice of this Bill, which sits very well with the range of issues in which we take a special interest as co-operators.

My hon. Friend's Bill both widens and deepens existing provision for employee share ownership schemes. As has been shown in all parts of the House, there has been support for such change for many years and under Governments of all colours. Thankfully, the Bill apparently has cross-party support in principle, so I look forward to some of this morning's discussions being explored in more detail later.

The Bill widens existing provisions by making more companies eligible for tax reliefs in relation to any move that they may be considering to distribute shares to employees. It thereby makes that distribution more likely to happen and stands a strong chance of extending employee share ownership to many more people. It also widens existing provisions, enabling companies that are controlled by employees to benefit from tax advantages by setting up share incentive plans. It also deepens the provisions, especially through clause 1(5). I noted that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said in his opening remarks that people had asked whether the provision was necessary. I believe that it encourages companies to provide for the appointment of employee-elected trustees when drawing up a trust instrument. That should be welcome, for several reasons that I shall outline.

The Bill ensures that employee share ownership schemes will progressively be for the many, not the few, to use a well known phrase. My hon. Friend cited some significant figures to show what employee share ownership means for the prosperity of companies as measured through growth in share value.

The measure builds on the Budget provisions of 2000 and 2001 and should increase the number of employees that have access to such schemes. It contributes to the quality and the added value that arise from employee share ownership schemes. It also builds on what Paul Burden, communications director of the John Lewis Partnership, described to me as increasing the economic biodiversity of ownership. It also introduces greater choice in forms of ownership.

It is generally agreed that employee share ownership schemes are good for companies, employees and the economy. They are good for companies in many ways. For example, employee share ownership can improve retention; some argue that it also improves recruitment. Through reducing staff turnover, it can lower the company's costs and lead to the productivity that other hon. Members have mentioned this morning. That is an important goal, which creates competitiveness.

Employee share ownership is also good for companies because it allows them to draw directly on employees' special experience. That is especially beneficial to companies that need to progress through research and development and get their choices right in the first instance.

Employee share ownership leads to more commitment, which is especially important when, from time to time, the going gets tough for companies. Employees who are share owners tend to become more aware of any difficulties that face companies earlier, and contribute to heading off problems and tackling them constructively.

The financial stake rewards the employees if the company is doing well. Employee share ownership therefore builds a virtuous circle of commitment. Employees often feel put upon if others benefit from their hard work. When the going gets tough, such schemes give employees a greater sense of influence and control. There is nothing worse than feeling that one has no say or control when things are going wrong, especially when one can contribute skills that make it more likely that a company will pull through.

Employee share ownership is also good for the country. I am sure that many hon. Members agree that we need to encourage long-termism. Such schemes are a way of doing that. "Employees Direct" is a document that comes from a new publishing stable, Mutuo, which belongs to Communicate Mutuality. It is a partnership between organisations that wish to show the value and potential of the mutual sector to a modern society. In the foreword to the document, John Monks states:

> "the shareholder voice of employees could prove a powerful counterweight to the short-term horizons of other investors and create the conditions necessary for stable workplace partnerships to flourish."

The document explores some methods of achieving that. I recommend it to the many hon. Members who are interested in the subject.

Employee share ownership encourages growth. Some argue that it has even wider benefits, such as social cohesion and regeneration. Earlier, some hon. Members suggested that it might anchor footloose companies. I am not sure whether those claims stand up to scrutiny, but research in Italy shows that full employee ownership has wider social effects in the towns where it exist. The benefits include improvements to education and health, reduced crime and greater social participation. The schemes have also affected people's perceptions of their social environment.

Earlier exchanges between my hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and for Edmonton (Mr. Love) and the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) dwelt on the importance of employee share ownership in the United States. Much of the research has been carried out there because the schemes are better developed. Recent research shows that employee share ownership in the United States spreads wealth and enables employees to weather periods of unemployment. It thus makes a wider contribution to preventing poverty, including child poverty. Recent research has also shown that companies in which all employees have shares enjoy 50 per cent. more productivity than companies in which only senior employees have shares.

The Bill will open up more opportunities for employee share ownership. It will add to eligibility a small but important sector of employees and encourage owners to transfer to employees. It will help to obtain maximum added value, which arises from such schemes by providing for employees to be more involved in managing trusts that hold shares for their benefit, and by giving employees a significant say in the company's development.

In the best tradition of private Members' Bills, the measure is a win-win Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) said. The employees, the companies and the country will win. Companies will win when the going is good and a winning outcome is more likely to result when the going gets tough. I support the Bill, wish it a fair wind and hope that it returns to the Chamber in its final form.

11.28 am

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I shall be brief. I want to make two or three points, if I can remove the frog from my throat. It has become fashionable in my party to have a frog in the throat, and I am trying to adopt the style of the Front Bench. I shall also try to make myself understood.

Many constituents have written to me about employee share ownership, including eight partners in the John Lewis Partnership. I am delighted to support the Bill. The John Lewis Partnership has several excellent stores in my area, including Bonds, a department store in Norwich, and two branches of Waitrose, one of which is in my constituency. They provide a superb service to local people in Norfolk as well as employment for several hundred people.

Mr. Joe Mooney, one of my constituents who is a partner in the John Lewis Partnership, wrote:

> "I believe the John Lewis Partnership is a successful retailer because it is owned by its employees, who care about the development of their business today and for future generations.
>
> The Bill"—

which he has asked me to support—

> "is seeking not only to make it easier for companies to become employee-owned, but also to improve the position of existing employee-owned companies. These improvements will include tax exemptions on shares given to employees by their company."

It seems odd that companies such as Asda and Tesco—competitors of the John Lewis Partnership—are able to take advantage of those tax exemptions in helping their employees, while good firms such as the John Lewis Partnership are not. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the John Lewis brief, and asked whether it would be possible in practice for the company to provide liquidity to an internal market for the shares. I think that, with 55,000 employees across the country, that ought to be possible.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), who is no longer in his place—I dare say he has gone off to write his press release, or to find another

[Mr. Richard Bacon]

use for the 1p—made the point that part-time employees can play a long-term role in a company. I think that that is right, and there is no reason why these problems should not be sorted out in Committee. We ought all to unite in supporting the principle in the Bill of wider employee share ownership.

I confess to having a lot of sympathy with the criticisms made of the actions of my party in the 1980s in introducing schemes that benefited only some, rather than all, employees. Manifestly, something that is introduced because it is of benefit to certain classes of employee ought, by its very nature, to be available to all employees. The former head of the Prime Minister's policy unit looks as though he wishes to intervene. I give way to him.

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): Does the hon. Gentleman share my pleasure in an example of a change of attitude in South Shields? It exemplifies the shift that he has talked about, from rewarding only those at the top of the company to rewarding everyone throughout. For 11 weeks last autumn, a major employer in my constituency was in receivership. During that time, a management buy-out team was brought together and I am delighted to say that in December a new company, Circatex, was launched. The first thing that the new management did was to introduce a 30 per cent. employee share ownership scheme for the new company, as a way of showing their commitment to the employees and saying that they were there for the long term. They wanted to reward the employees, many of whom had been with the company for 10 or 20 years, and make them part of the company's future. Does the hon. Gentleman hope, as I do, that that represents a change of attitude for significant parts of British management, as well as for those in the House?

Mr. Bacon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is representative of the change in attitude. In fact, there has been a sea change in attitudes generally. I enjoyed what I might almost call the Thatcherite speech by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey). I used to go to West Bromwich as a small boy to watch its football team; it did not seem to be a bastion of Thatcherism in the late 70s. In fact, I joined the Conservative party because of Red Robbo, whom I am sure the hon. Gentleman remembers well.

There has been a change in attitudes, and that is most welcome. It is extraordinary that anyone should suppose that these incentives would not be sought by all kinds of employees, and I am very pleased to support the principle of the Bill. We have nothing to fear from diverse forms of capital ownership. That could mean ordinary shareholding in the traditional western capitalist sense. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) here in full battle dress.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I think the full battle dress will appear after lunch. My hon. Friend will be glad to know that my luncheon activities are being catered for. May I also say that I very much agree with the Bill? It seems that the John Lewis Partnership's employees around the country have been lobbying us all furiously, because I, too, have had at least half a dozen letters from a similar source.

Mr. Bacon: I have noticed that, any time after about 4 o'clock, the likelihood is that I shall find my hon. Friend in a dinner jacket, limbering up for his evening activities, usually with the King of Jordan or somebody like that. The rest of us have to slum it in the Terrace caff.

We have nothing to fear from diverse forms of capital ownership. That could mean ordinary share owning, co-operatives, employee trusts or mutuals. I acted for a mutual building society for some months; I was seconded to it three days a week. Hon. Members may remember when the Britannia building society faced a most unwelcome challenge from a demutualisation campaign. If anyone doubts the benefits of what is sometimes described as the nebulous trade known as public relations, I would refer them to the photographs that occasionally appeared in the tabloid newspapers of that mad butler, Mr. Michael Hardern, wearing a dress, under the rather suggestive headline:

> "This is the nutter who wants to run your savings."

That alone justifies the existence of the public relations industry, because that campaign helped to ensure that the Britannia, now the nation's second largest building society, thrives to this day as a conscientious local employer in regions across the country, and one that takes great pride in being involved in the community.

Reference was made earlier to the business of profit-related pay, and to its being discredited. I have not examined the issue in detail, but it would not surprise me if it had not worked as well as it was supposed to because, in a funny sort of way, this question is not mainly about money. Money is obviously important, but this is mainly about people having control over their own lives. The hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) referred to the company in his constituency. In a previous incarnation, I used to write about management buy-outs and management consultants helping companies that were on the brink to climb out of that position. Nearly always, the solution involved drawing in the entire work force and making them work with one purpose towards success.

Mr. Love: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we will really have seen the revolution that people have been talking about today when companies that are not on the brink of bankruptcy or in financial difficulties involve their employees, without the spur that bankruptcy provides?

Mr. Bacon: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. I find it difficult to understand why managers would ever think of introducing an executive share option scheme that would be available only to them and those close to them, and not to everyone else. The Government should seriously consider ways of making it more beneficial for companies to have schemes that involve everyone, rather than involving only some employees. I would be strongly in favour of that. The principle of employee share ownership deserves the widest support on both sides of the House, and the Bill definitely deserves a Second Reading.

11.37 am

Dr. Doug Naysmith (Bristol, North-West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on his success in the private Members' ballot, and on choosing such a worthwhile and achievable topic for his Bill, which he introduced so clearly today.

We have already heard a lot about partnership—not just the John Lewis Partnership—sometimes from unusual sources, which is to be welcomed. I want to expand on the principle of partnership between the work force in general, through employee trusts and shareholder trusts, and board members of the company. Partnership clearly pays. Companies that tap into the skills, knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm of their work force are the better for it. We have heard examples of that already. Innovation and productivity are positively related to a partnership approach, in which the work force can influence strategic decisions and individuals have more control over the immediate decisions in the company that affect them.

That is increasingly true as our economy becomes ever more knowledge-based and skills-driven. Companies that fail fully to harness their work force's potential will lose out in the future. Those that forge successful workplace partnerships will gain an important competitive advantage. For a partnership to deliver, however, it must be genuine; anything less will lead to disillusionment and resentment. Structures are required to ensure that such partnerships are demonstrably real and equal. Although we have heard discussions today about what that should mean, and whether the detail should be spelled out now, that area can be fruitfully explored when the Bill gets into Committee, as I believe it will.

Collective ownership stakes for employees could play an important role in the achievement of that. Collective shareholder trusts could signify a shared interest in the long-term success of organisations, while providing a collective voice at boardroom level for members of such trusts—the employees who generate companies' wealth. The shareholder voice of employees could provide a powerful counterweight to the short-term horizons of other investors, and create the conditions that are necessary for stable workplace partnerships to flourish.

It is widely acknowledged that business in Britain faces two major challenges. The first is this. Successive commissions and reports have sought to improve the structure of corporate governance—the way in which boards of directors operate and conduct their business, the way in which they respond to wider concerns including the environmental impact of their companies' operations, their responsibilities to the communities in which their companies operate, and so forth. The combined code on corporate governance that resulted from those deliberations is useful, although many of us would like the standards to be given a statutory basis.

One of the main problems identified by the inquiries is the inadequate involvement of the chief shareholders, the financial institutions. It is important for shareholders to take a long-term interest in their investments. Employee shareholder trusts could achieve precisely that, and could encourage institutional shareholders to do the same. Creating employee shareholder trusts, and encouraging employee shareholders to play an active role in their companies, could go a long way towards improving the corporate governance of United Kingdom firms.

This is the second challenge. The Government have stressed the importance of boosting productivity in UK firms. They have rightly recognised that the key to that will be the commitment and participation of the work force, and they have accepted the view that, developed in the context of partnership, employee share ownership can produce significant productivity gains. The task now is to push at the margins of Government policy and to encourage workers, through their representatives, to use the power of their equity stakes to influence corporate decisions.

I welcome the proposals, although encouraging employee shareholders to play an active role will not be an easy task. Advice and training will be needed for those who will take positions of responsibility in trust organisations. I understand that the Trades Union Congress has established a working party to deal with the details: it will include representatives of the TUC and the Confederation of British Industry, as well as the chief executive of the Co-operative Union, leading academics and others. The results, along with the outcome of the Government's company law reform review, could lay the foundations for a transformation of corporate governance. Such an achievement would be a landmark for Labour's second term.

The major proposals in the Bill fit into this ferment of ideas well, which is my reason for supporting it.

11.43 am

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): Like my hon. Friends who have spoken, I broadly support the Bill's intentions. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) analysed the proposals carefully, and I agreed with what he said. I shall therefore try to put the Bill's aims into the wider context of share incentivisation rather than pursuing my hon. Friend's remarks.

The Bill tweaks existing legislation, rather than requiring us to take a good look at existing incentivisation law. It merely skims the surface: while it is not harmful in any way, it is not adequate. We need to look more closely at the underlying share incentivisation legislation, and at its current limitations.

Many of the issues are very technical, but we should realise that the underlying assumptions are not. Giving employees shares in their companies is a desirable objective. It is good for employees to have an increasing say in the running of their companies, and for them to see a direct link between their own increases in productivity and the companies' success—a link which, as was noted by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), breaks down the "them and us" culture that has plagued our business sector in past years.

The increased productivity of workers, and even the increased profitability of companies, may not increase the value of shares; but that is simply the reality of the market mechanism. Employees should recognise that the value of their shares can be affected by outside events: the impact of the disastrous events of 11 September on the tourism industry is a good example. Such a recognition is useful in bringing together management and employees in a better realisation of the overall market position of their companies.

Having said that, I must add that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) assumes that the widening of share ownership is best achieved by

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

a company's issuing shares to employees rather than granting share options. That may be right in certain circumstances, but not in others. It depends on the type of incentivisation required, the level of the employees, and the expectations relating to comparable incentivisation schemes in similar sectors. In high-tech companies, for instance, there will almost invariably be a high use of share options, because that is what employees in such industries will expect. Problems would arise if they were told that they should have something else.

Members have referred to what should be deemed an acceptable time for shares to be held before tax advantages are gained. That, I think, will depend on the circumstances. In certain industries a large investment will be made in a company, and employees will be expected to work at least 20 hours a day over a short period. Their vision of when they will produce their product, and of the benefits that will result in their pay packets or incentivisation schemes, must be moulded accordingly. The key to understanding incentivisation is realising that there is no such thing as "one size fits all"; the situation can be much more complicated.

Share options are often more popular with employees who, with relatively limited resources, find the gearing effect relatively attractive. Having exercised their options most people sell immediately, thus incurring no capital outlay. That greatly reduces the risks that they would otherwise incur from buying shares and then having their capital locked in an asset for five years, subject to the possibility of a fall in value.

For a company, the advantage of an immediate purchase of shares is that it will receive the additional share capital on the spot. Most companies, however, are started by entrepreneurs with perhaps one original investor—up to six, but rarely more. In practice, those individuals will certainly take up tax breaks offered by Government, but they will seldom wish to hand out cheap equity to low-paid staff from day one. Most entrepreneurs will see the low investment cost as the benefit of their having taken the risk of setting up the company and running it in the early days.

I understand from my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury that some 200 SIP schemes have now been approved, and that half of them were established in firms with fewer than 250 employees. It would be interesting, however, to find out how many of the schemes were set up within a year of a company's incorporation, and how many companies had issued SIP shares to people other than the founding shareholders.

Mr. Mark Field: I congratulate my hon. Friend on a thoughtful speech. As he rightly pointed out, the matter is technical, and he has succeeded in putting it in straightforward and simple terms. Does he think that certain share schemes may prevent the setting up of new companies? If a strong scheme is already in place, it may act as a powerful disincentive to would-be entrepreneurs employed in small companies, thus preventing them from breaking out on their own.

Mr. Djanogly: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is developing an argument that I was about to make. If he cares to intervene later, I shall be happy to hear what he has to say. In reality, few start-up companies would want such a scheme. The SIP concept is likely to be attractive to established smaller companies and also to larger companies that often do not want to administer large numbers of small share options.

SIPs may have an additional advantage for listed companies, especially when we consider the alternative investment market. Such companies are often larger—although by no means always. The Association of British Insurers has published guidelines on the issue of share options. The guidelines are many and complicated but, put simply, companies cannot hold more than 10 per cent. of their issued share capital subject to option. That means that companies have a limited number of options to issue. In general, the smaller the company, the less its headroom as regards the number of options.

Companies may use SIPs to incentivise lower-paid employees, rather than use up their precious packages of share options. They may want to retain those options to incentivise higher-paid employees, and in practice they often do so. However, that does not necessarily mean that the company is doing the right thing. While SIPs may to some degree increase share ownership, because they offer companies a further route through the maze of tax laws and other regulations and guidelines, none the less they are not necessarily the most appropriate form of incentivisation, from the perspective of either the company or the employee.

Profit-related pay has been mentioned. Bonuses are an important part of the armoury of incentivisation, but it is not always appropriate to hand out equity. I fully support that practice, but in certain circumstances it may be more appropriate to use bonuses. I am sure that all hon. Members appreciate that workers in many industries, especially the low paid, would prefer cash bonuses rather than the choice of receiving shares. In certain circumstances, that may be appropriate. I still fail to see why the Government abolished the PRP scheme because—

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's speech, but I must correct him on one point. It was the Conservative Government who abolished profit-related pay. PRP was phased out over a number of years, after the election of the Labour Government in 1997; but it was actually abolished by the Conservatives because of the huge problems in the scheme—not least its cost, which rose to £1.5 billion.

Mr. Djanogly: The scheme was phased out, and that was contentious at the time. One important arm in the ability of companies to decide how to remunerate their employees was taken away. Cost may indeed have been highly relevant to Her Majesty's Treasury at the time, but that does not mean that the principle was wrong and that the Government should not be encouraged to reconsider such measures as a means of incentivisation.

The measure will open up the SIP regime to a wider base, such as trust-based companies. That is certainly to be commended. However, the measure will not improve the underlying weaknesses of the SIP regime. As I have tried to argue, the regime is unlikely to help starting-up companies, or indeed middle-ranking companies.

The briefing notes for the Bill state that many firms, especially small family-owned ones, are eventually handed over to their employees, and that the changes to corporation tax under the Bill will make it possible for more businesses to be transferred into employee ownership. That may be true in certain cases, especially for extremely small companies, but normally the company purchases are carried out by a small number of managers rather than the staff as a whole—so-called management buy-outs. In such circumstances, the £7,500-worth of shares that have the benefit of SIP status are likely to be negligible in the context of the transaction as a whole.

I very much doubt whether the impact of the Bill will enable employee buy-outs—one of its intended effects—other than for tiny companies or occasionally, large transfers where enormous administrative problems would have to be overcome.

Mr. Edward Davey: I do not understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. The management buy-outs that he describes happen anyway. The point of giving tax relief is to encourage behaviour that would not otherwise happen. My understanding of the Government SIP scheme and the Bill is that they would encourage something that would not happen otherwise.

Mr. Djanogly: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. The rationale for the Bill can be considered at various levels. On the one hand, it is a straightforward attempt to encourage employees to become interested in their company, but as we can see from the briefing notes the measure would also provide that SIPs could be used as a another mechanism to promote activities such as employee buy-outs. I am simply saying that that is unlikely to be the case, and that the real benefits of the Bill are likely to be more modest than several hon. Members have implied. Of course, that does not mean that the Bill is worthless.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman is making a distinctive contribution, focusing on many of the technical issues that form a background to the Bill. He spoke about the rationale for introducing the Bill and said that there were several different levels. Has he been influenced by the most basic form of rationale for legislation: the fact that his constituents want the Bill? Would he join me and other Members of Parliament who have been lobbied by employees of the John Lewis organisation in congratulating them on the effectiveness of their lobbying operation?

Mr. Djanogly: I certainly would congratulate John Lewis on that lobbying operation. John Lewis does not have a base in my constituency, but it does close by. As I said, the larger organisations such as John Lewis could enjoy real benefits from legislation such as the Bill because it would give them another way of incentivising their employees. To that extent, I welcome the principle of the Bill.

However, it is important to appreciate that—probably because of the limitations of the underlying legislation—the Government wisely decided not to abolish previous share incentivisation plans, such as the save-as-you-earn share option scheme and the company share option plans. Although they were by no means perfect, they at least—together with the Government's new enterprise management incentive scheme—make available a wider package for tax-advantageous share ownership and incentivisation. However, there remain significant problems with all those schemes, which we need to get right. There is still much to do.

The business of a company may not qualify to be included. The company may not be independent—I appreciate that, in a limited context, the Bill identifies that as an issue to be dealt with for certain companies—or its assets may be too great. In practice, there will be many occasions on which, and many different reasons why, a company cannot tick all the boxes that it needs to tick to set up a particular incentivisation plan.

In such situations, the company will need to fall back on the so-called unapproved issue of shares or unapproved grant of options—in other words, schemes that do not have tax benefits. In such circumstances, once the top layer of the schemes is removed, the picture changes somewhat to reveal a system that is extremely complicated and often unfair to company and employees, and in which the tax payable has been substantially increased by the Labour Government.

If the Bill is truly to improve share ownership and encourage the setting up of new companies and the incentivisation of employees who wish to purchase their own company, I would suggest that three issues in particular need to be covered. The first concerns listed companies whose shares have fallen substantially. Many, if not all of their share options will be "under water"—the exercise price of the shares will be greater than the price at which they are currently quoted. Many such companies, which are particularly predominant in the technology sector, will have issued share options up to the maximum permitted level of 10 per cent. of their issued share capital. As a result, many dozens of companies are negatively incentivised. I would suggest that, in such circumstances, it be made easier for companies to terminate existing options and re-issue at the lower current market price.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman has just put forward an interesting idea. What does he think the impact of his proposal would be on the nature of risk-taking associated with employee share ownership?

Mr. Djanogly: The nature of risk-taking is not relevant because the individual can decide not to exercise those options, so there is no risk for the employee; there is simply no incentivisation in so far as he will not exercise those options. If one wished to incentivise employees who are in that position, one would need to cancel the existing options and re-issue new ones. If a company has had a very high share price and the market collapses, as the technology market did, employees may well have share options at a strike price that is so far ahead of the market price that they are negatively incentivised rather than incentivised by having those share options.

Mr. Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Djanogly: I feel that that issue needs to be addressed, but I shall move on if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

I have a second suggestion for improving the Bill. Since April 1999, national insurance has been charged to companies on gains arising from the exercise of unapproved options. That has been nothing more than a

[Mr. Djanogly]

staff tax. In practice, companies have been amending their documentation to say that they can get the employees to pay the extra tax on their behalf, but it is conceptually wrong that a company has to pay national insurance on the open-ended growth of the value of its own shares. Finally, where a company agrees to deliver shares and those shares are forfeitable due to performance conditions—resembling an SIP but without the tax breaks—the gain becomes taxed on the value of those shares at the point when they become non-forfeitable. As with the options, the gain would be unascertainable on grant, but worse than with options, the company could not recover national insurance from its employees. Clearly, the position should be aligned with share options or, better still, national insurance on the growth in value should be abolished.

The reference to the United States by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) reminds me that employees there have the opportunity to choose whether to pay up front or later, and we could do much by adopting the same position. I conclude by repeating that the measures that we are debating today will do no bad at all and some good, but they will tinker at the edges of the issue and fail to get to the heart of the problem.

12.5 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I am delighted that the House is giving such serious consideration to the Bill and that it has received support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. As a member of the Labour and Co-operative parties, and as a representative of those parties in Parliament, it is interesting to hear the issues and values that my hon. Friends and I stand for being discussed.

The Bill would make three significant changes to the law to encourage wider employee share ownership, by improving representation for employees with shares and changing corporation tax and tax reliefs. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) explained those aspects of the Bill in detail, and in supporting it I wish to focus more on the positive aspects of employee shareholding and to say why I believe that it is particularly positive for individuals, companies and societies.

In doing so, I hope to provide a balance to the speech made by hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly). Although he went into a great deal of technicality, he seems to have considered this issue as merely a matter of money, bonuses and incentives, whereas I believe that it is much more fundamental to the way in which we run companies and people operate in this society.

Employee share ownership is about enriching the experience of working life. After all, people spend a lot of time at work—some of us more than others. One of the key factors in having a positive experience of work is how much we feel in control of our own lives. The people who suffer the most stress in their working lives are often those at the bottom of the pile—those who do the jobs that keep the rest of us going, but who have very little say in what goes on.

When I became a Member of Parliament I noticed that there was something a little different from my previous occupations and the other workplaces of which I am aware. It is certainly not unusual elsewhere for people to look for opportunities to take early retirement. Interestingly enough, that does not seem to be true of Members of Parliament. Many Members continue to make valuable contributions and to enjoy this job long beyond the usual age of retirement. I pondered why that is so and wondered whether it is because of the convenient working hours and the fact that we are often so close to home and that we have our own place on the Benches and never have to fight to sit down, or because of the supportive and friendly atmosphere in which no one ever criticises us, looks for our mistakes or writes to the papers about the worst way in which we have put our foot in it recently—which I am probably doing at the moment.

Many people get so much job satisfaction from being a Member of Parliament because they can largely control what they do with their time; they are self-directed—Whips permitting, obviously. They can decide to concentrate on various subjects and to pursue particular interests. They feel that they are making a contribution and doing something worth while. That sense of job satisfaction and having control and a stake in what happens is crucial to employee share ownership.

The first benefit of employee share ownership is that it encourages an active participation in decision making. Employees are not always on the receiving end of decisions that other people have made and that seem to have no relevance to the employees or to the company for which they work. That taps into the motivation of employees and gets back from them a level of commitment.

Employee share ownership also helps to enable work to be designed to encourage the fullest contribution from employees. If they want their companies to do well, they are more committed to using all their skills and abilities and to becoming more fully involved in what the company is trying to do. That also ensures and enhances the competence of the employees, as they become committed to taking up training opportunities and to pooling their knowledge and abilities for the best of all concerned.

The Bill is welcome because it would improve the current situation. Importantly, it would seek to democratise share owning in UK companies. It is about introducing mechanisms to translate individual employee shareholding stakes into a collective voice, making sure that those interests are represented and convincing employees that their shareholdings can give them a stake in the whole enterprise.

I particularly welcomed the contribution of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), who recognised that employee share ownership enables individuals to build up capital. This country has a problem with savings and we know that sectors of the population have no capital to provide for their families in the long run. Although the Bill might make only a minor contribution to solving that problem and might affect only a few people, the issue should not be ignored.

Other Members have made it clear that employees who feel that they have a stake in their workplace are more likely to be committed to their jobs, to stay longer in the company and to become valuable members of a team. That will lead to a company's longer-term prosperity and, as other Members have eloquently pointed out, research shows that employee share ownership often boosts productivity.

Companies face difficult issues of corporate governance and in ensuring that things are done properly. When stakeholders take a long-term interest in their investments, that is more likely to lead to good corporate governance and to good outcomes for companies. Employee shareholder trusts are an excellent way of encouraging just that. The employees involved have a long-term interest in the company and in their own future. It is a win-win situation.

If employees can participate in decisions and are not merely the recipients of shares, share options or bonuses in the way that the hon. Member for Huntingdon suggested, that will help to generate and sustain company loyalty and commitment to the organisation. It helps to combat the long-term British disease of short termism. We need companies that will be successful in the long term and, in a rapidly changing world, innovation is important. Employees who are involved in their companies are able to contribute to decisions about what is produced and about the processes used in production.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said, the Bill would broaden the definitions involved to cover more employee participation companies. It must be right that the tax benefits available to companies under existing schemes should be spread to those organisations whose fundamental purpose is to include employees in their running. They include worker co-operatives, in particular, and the Bill represents a step forward in recognising that companies, such as the John Lewis Partnership, about which we have heard a great deal, should receive the same benefits and opportunities as other employee shareholding arrangements receive.

Employee share schemes also raise issues for society in general. Does it matter who owns companies? My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) talked about the distinct views that were expressed on that a few decades ago, and employee share schemes might be a different approach—a third way, perhaps. However, it is a case not of public or private ownership, but of recognising that our society benefits from different ownership structures. There are different ways to produce profits and to reward employees. Those different structures add to the richness of our society and the proposals will help us to consider new ways to operate that will also improve efficiency, which we all want.

Hon. Members mentioned what happened a few years ago when many financial mutuals converted to plcs, which was resisted by those of us with a strong interest in mutuality. Anything that encourages people to become involved in companies again is welcome because it allows us to have a more balanced society. Such an approach allows us to recognise the contributions of individuals and the fact that people who work together often achieve more than people who work against each other.

Unfortunately, with private ownership shareholders' interests often come first. The benefits of being responsive to the interests of employees, consumers and local communities is often forgotten. There is the opportunity, in companies in which employees have a much greater involvement, to raise such issues and put them higher on the agenda, ensuring that the long-term interests of the enterprise are promoted, but not at the expense of the interests of those other important stakeholders.

Society is changing and the economy is much more skills driven and knowledge based. We know that those attributes come from employees and that it is not possible to go out and buy those skills as part of a mechanistic process. It must be a good thing if we ensure that people who have that knowledge and those skills are involved in a company and committed to it.

We must welcome the fact that the Government have promoted employee share ownership, as reflected in previous Budgets. However, the Bill would tidy up some of those provisions and take us significantly further forward. Hon. Members demonstrated how extending employee share ownership can benefit individuals, companies and the wider society. We have discussed whether the Bill would bring about huge changes in society. Are the proposals radical or just minor tinkerings that will not do what people expect? We need to make it clear that the model is optional. People can choose it and it is important that the Government encourage them to do so. For those who see the potential of encouraging active employee participation, the Bill will be an improvement. It will clear up anomalies that penalise those organisations that are at the forefront of involving their employees.

I conclude by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith on introducing the Bill. I am especially delighted, as I am sure he is, with the cross-party support that it has received.

12.19 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I start where the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) left off by congratulating the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on giving us the opportunity to debate the subject. The Bill is a move in the right direction and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said when he set out in detail our approach, we welcome it.

Involvement in a company is a key that can open the door to a new way of working—a door that should be open to as many people as possible. For many people, the weekly pay packet or monthly salary is what work is all about. They have no involvement, no commitment and no responsibility for the future growth of the company, never feeling part of its decision making, which affects a large part of everyday life.

One of the facts of business life is that productivity must constantly be improved in order to survive. More efficient methods must be implemented or competitors will win the day. Often, innovation, team working and efficiency were driven by a very small team from the top down—by those who thought they knew best. That is no longer good enough. Companies must maintain the involvement of all employees.

Employees who have a shareholding in their company are more likely to want to develop an understanding of how the company works and to be involved in its progress and success. They are less likely to leave it to someone else to act when problems are identified that affect the company's strength. Hon. Members have mentioned unjustified absenteeism. When employees are involved strongly with their company, that is less likely to be a problem.

For 20 years, before being elected to this place, I was fortunate to have a stake in my place of work. I have worked with many who have owned all or part of a

[John Barrett]

company, held shares in companies, or wanted to have a stake in a company but have had no stake in it. There is a clear correlation between increased involvement in a company and the drive needed to make the company succeed.

Anything that moves legislation in that direction must be welcomed. It will affect the lives of many people in a number of ways. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) mentioned an Italian study that showed that increased company involvement resulted in improved health, education, lower crime rates and social participation. I look forward to studies of whether such involvement has the same results here.

When morale is declining in any company, the disfranchised feel that there is little they can do. Many lose interest and spend more time looking for another job than considering the well-being of their company. Work problems lead to health problems and health problems have an educational impact.

In recent years, the detachment of many employees from their companies has increased with the use of short-term employment contracts. In the past, often the assumption was that the job would last unless something unexpected happened. Nowadays, often the assumption is that the contract will end unless something unexpected happens. The result is reduced company loyalty, a work force on the move, and less commitment to a company. There is a short-term outlook in many companies and among employees, which is a major problem for British industry. If, as I believe it will, the Bill facilitates more involvement by more employees in more companies, people will be inclined to look long term. As many hon. Members have said, it is a win-win situation.

Share ownership is not suitable for all, as was mentioned earlier in comparing it with house ownership. Many who have bought homes have done very well. Indeed, in Edinburgh today, many people could not afford to move into their own homes at current prices, but buying a home brings costs and responsibilities for which people may not be prepared. The value of any investment can go down as well as up. There will always be people who want no more from their employer than a weekly pay packet. However, those who do want to play a part should be encouraged and enabled to do so. The Bill enables something that is not possible at present. There was possibly one negative contribution, but I was glad to hear positive speeches and interventions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that the Bill will go to Committee and be a great success.

Mr. Love: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a significant number of employees who may be sceptical at the start of such a share ownership scheme become mobilised by the increase in their influence and the return that they receive from share ownership?

John Barrett: I could not agree more. Many employees think that share ownership is for other people, not for the likes of them. People will have to embark on a learning curve: once they discover the benefits that they, their company and their family can gain, the system will gain momentum. I wish the Bill success and look forward to Committee.

12.25 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I am glad to be able to make a contribution to this worthy debate on the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz). I congratulate him on his success in the ballot.

I am well placed to pay tribute to my hon. Friend's commitment, having known him for 20 years. We first met at Edinburgh university, where I was studying for a post-graduate qualification in business administration, majoring in industrial relations. My first chance to enter an electoral contest was in the regional division of the then Lothian region, in Newtown-Stockbridge. I believe that it was my strong showing in that election that turned the corner for Labour in what had been an extremely Conservative part of Edinburgh, resulting in my hon. Friend's being returned as Labour MP at the last election and so getting the chance to introduce this Bill. We both served as leader of our respective city administrations, and we share an office in Millbank. In the light of all that, I am in a good position to comment on his collaborative and co-operative efforts.

Throughout that time, my hon. Friend has shown a strong commitment to the co-operative movement, which has strong roots in Scotland. I remember as a boy in 1950s Dundee queuing up at the local co-op to put in my book so that I got my messages delivered by the co-op, which was often the only retail outlet in the area. Sadly, such practices, as well as the dividend the co-op used to pay, have in many cases been lost, but we must give credit to the co-operative movement for coming up with new and innovative ideas, pressing them on Governments through elected Co-operative Members of Parliament, and furthering the ideals and spirit of the movement.

If successful, the Bill will further the progressive action taken or encouraged by Governments for the past 20 years and in recent Budgets. The positive comments of hon. Members on both sides of the House, including the hon. Members for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), testify to our commitment to stop indulging in "yah-boo" politics. Such positive views will help to lay to rest the conflicts that long beset the world of industrial relations.

We have lived through tumultuous times. I well recall the debates on "In Place of Strife". The Donovan report and the report of the royal commission on industrial democracy set some of the context of today's debate. We all remember the industrial relations courts at the start of the 1970s, as well as the three-day working weeks, social contracts 1 and 2, and the miners' disputes. The heavy-handed legislative approach of the 1980s and 1990s divided Britain right down the middle.

By way of contrast, I remember part of my first experience of teaching in further education. I had to explain concepts of business structure to new apprentices drawn from a wide range of trades; we discussed how they could set up business in an "enterprise" fashion, or using an alternative model. Teaching them for their city and guilds general studies exam involved a video that reviewed the development and workings of the Mondragon co-operative—an industrial complex in north-east Spain.

We are a long way from creating that sort of enterprise in terms of size, integration and contribution to the economy. However, the Bill's objectives are welcome, marking a rejection of the battle and conflict of old-style industrial relations and taking us a small step away from the old idea of "them and us". Through its three main objectives, it would extend the idea of co-operative productive activity.

First, the Bill extends the tax relief benefits already on offer to more companies and employees. That is obviously welcome because it gives more companies and more people the chance to be involved. There has been much discussion of the John Lewis Partnership and how, up to now, that has not been able to benefit from such a scheme. I hope that, in Committee, that advantage will be extended to that company, which has done so well in its endeavours for its work force.

The Bill makes it easier for companies to become full employee-owned co-operatives, but we have a long way to go. We should be doing all that we can to encourage such activity. But most importantly, the Bill encourages, enables and involves employee shareholders, on a collective basis, to play a greater role in the management of their shares held in trust and in the direction of the company that employs them; and thereby, however indirectly, to become more involved in the management and direction of the company which provides them with their livelihood and which often supports the livelihood of many in the neighbourhood in which the company is located. That will ensure that the business survives and makes a profit, which is important.

From the research done by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, it is evident that experience shows that where such schemes are in place, productivity, profits and worker satisfaction are greatly improved. In the cut-throat, competitive economic world of today, those are essential elements in the survival of many companies throughout Britain.

In my intervention I referred to the footloose attitude of multinationals. In the recent announcement by Levi Strauss in Scotland of the loss of more than 450 jobs in Dundee and 150 jobs elsewhere, productivity was one of the major reasons for the shell-shock proposals that have put so many jobs at risk after 30 years of successful production and profit making in Dundee. No one wants to wake up to discover that a company in one's locale is, in a matter of days and without real notice, in crisis. The first notice that I had in this case was a letter delivered here to the House of Commons on Thursday. That is something that hon. Members and their constituents do not wish to see and hope to avoid.

Not that Levi Strauss is a bad employer; on the contrary, it was a model employer, heavily involved, through the community development responsibility fund, in many worthwhile projects in Dundee and elsewhere. However the company's structure and the way in which it takes decisions, without any real input from its employees, creates the feeling of helplessness that I hope the Bill will help to counter; along with the helplessness felt by elected Members at our inability to influence corporate decisions in such company structures where employees are disfranchised because of the multinational nature of the operation. The disillusion in management and the productive process is something that we should be trying to avoid. We should be trying to encourage more participation by employees in good decision making for the benefit of the company. That is the crux of the Bill.

I send my best wishes to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), who, with my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) will be meeting the management of Levi Strauss this afternoon in Scotland because the plants are located in their constituencies. They will put the case for a lifeline based on the real improvement in productivity that the company has seen over a long period and the commitment of its work force. Hopefully, as I tried to stress earlier, in future we could look at ways in which to promote employee share schemes in multinational enterprises, thereby curbing their often footloose tendencies. However, that is for another day and another debate.

To conclude my brief contribution, I pay tribute to the commitment of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, a member of the Labour and Co-operative party, to the principles and ideas of the co-operative movement. The Bill may be small but, if successful, it will have an impact well in excess of its brevity. Its softly-softly approach, without the push for legislative requirements, is in the spirit of the co-operative movement. It certainly helps to close the gaps in employee share ownership between us, our European neighbours and the United States. Most significantly, it continues to build on the all-important bridges that establish links between employees and employers, between the managed and the management, and between capital and labour which, historically, has often been beset by struggle and conflict in this country. If the Bill achieves that goal, it will be to the benefit of all concerned.

I wish my hon. Friend all the best in his endeavours to get the Bill into Committee and on to the statute book. Like other Members, I think that there will be a lot of discussion and argument about its final details. I would be happy to help my hon. Friend in any way that I can, although I am not a great expert on tax or fiscal measures.

Reference has been made to the political slogan of the Conservative Government of the 1980s and 1990s to do with trying to create a small shareholder democracy, under which council houses were sold off up and down the country. Much of the privatisation programme was sold to the public under that banner. The Bill tries to create a shareholder work force—a point strongly made by the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington)—with a genuine share in business decisions and business. That is a commendable and hopefully achievable aim.

The Government are keen to promote the creation of a true stakeholder economy. We could look at models for such activity, as has been said, including models for allowing football fans to have much more involvement in the shares of club companies. One of my own city teams has been racked by a share problem; the old directors were sacked by new directors, and the fans had no real say in what happened. We could also allow tenants with a long-term involvement in housing a greater say in the direction and control of the organisations that provide their accommodation; there has not been a great deal of work on housing trusts.

I hope that the Government support the measure, and shall be glad if the Paymaster General says that she and the Government do so in her summing-up. Finally, I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make a brief contribution to the debate.

12.38 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I am pleased to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I want to join other contributors to our debate in congratulating the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on his success in getting a high position in the ballot and introducing the Bill. There is an unusual consensus across the Floor of the House that it has merit and deserves further examination in Committee. I hope that the Minister will allow it to make progress and be examined in more detail in Committee.

I do not want to delay the House long, but having intervened earlier, I wish to make a brief contribution to echo concerns already expressed about the Bill as drafted. I do not need to reiterate the points that my colleagues and I have made about the John Lewis issues; the Minister has taken them on board and I am sure that she will address them later. Like other contributors, I am concerned about red tape and the cost of the proposal. I hope that there will be an opportunity to address those issues.

For understandable reasons, a regulatory impact assessment has not yet been carried out for the Bill. I should like to be sure that a company which chose to take part in the schemes introduced by the Bill would not be subject to onerous red tape requirements. Although I am in favour of employee share schemes, I believe that we should do all we can to reduce the red tape associated with them. After all, there is no point in implementing worthy employee share schemes in the interests of raising productivity, for example, if the amount of red tape created in other areas overwhelms businesses and ends up reducing productivity.

Real examples support the concern about red tape. For example, let us consider the problem of tapers. When the 2000 Budget was introduced, all shareholders in an unquoted trading company became eligible to qualify for a higher rate of capital gains taper relief for the benefit of start-up companies. Although welcome, the relaxation in the definition of business assets in itself created complications. Gains may be subject to different rates of taper, depending on the relative periods of ownership, as a business or a non-business asset.

The apportionment is on a strict time basis and does not take account of the asset's value at any given point in time. There are pitfalls, and it is easy to trigger anti-avoidance provisions inadvertently—for example, giving employees shares that carry conversion rights could result in any gain on the ultimate sale of the shares being taxed as income, not capital. Depriving the employee of all taper relief may also produce a national insurance charge for the Chancellor.

Overall, schemes can sound great in principle, but as soon as the complex tax rules or the compliance rules come into play, there can be unfortunate side effects, as we all know, which result in extra red tape or unnecessary complexity.

Finally, I am concerned about the possible costs of the measures to the taxpayer. As I understand it, the intention of the tax measures is to address the problem whereby many firms, especially the small family-owned ones, are eventually handed over to their employees, with expensive corporation tax liabilities incurred on the transfer of a block of shares to an employee trust. The Bill would remove that legal technicality, making it possible for more businesses to be transferred into employee ownership. That seems a perfectly acceptable proposal, but I should like to know the cost to the Exchequer of this aspect of the Bill.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to make a brief contribution. Overall, I support the measures, which spread the benefits of employee share ownership. However, as with many Bills, the devil is in the detail. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

12.42 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I am grateful to be offered the chance to speak in the debate. Like most other speakers, I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on coming near the top of the private Members' ballot. I entered Parliament at the same time as my hon. Friend and chose not to submit my name for the ballot—a decision that I have not regretted. As was said earlier, I cannot imagine a worse feeling of panic than being in the House for a week and discovering that one is near the top of the private Members' ballot. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his staying power and self-control.

I declare an interest as a member of the Co-operative party, although I am not a Labour and Co-op Member. The Co-operative party supports the Bill, as do I personally. I would have supported it, whether or not I was a member of the Co-operative party.

I should have liked to welcome the presence of representatives of the Scottish National party here at Westminster. I find it incredibly discouraging that a party that claims to stand for Scotland does not see the need to come to the House on a Friday to represent its constituents' interests and to discuss a measure that will have an effect throughout the United Kingdom, including on many thousands of workers in Scotland. It is a disgrace that SNP Members are not present. They are showing their contempt for this Parliament by showing their contempt for the interest of their own constituents. I hope that that will be noted by hon. Members in all parts of the House.

It would be useful to put this debate into context. As a Labour party member of 18 years standing, it is difficult for me to think about the debate on share ownership without remembering some of the debates that have taken place in the Labour party, the House and the country as a whole in the past 20 years and even before that. I am delighted that we are having this debate and that the Bill's promoter is a Labour Member. We should be very proud of that. However, the Labour party has not always been as far-sighted and open-minded on share ownership. For example, when I joined the party in 1984, if any Labour candidate or, even worse, Member of Parliament, was discovered to own shares in a private company, especially on the eve of an election, it was something of an embarrassment and certainly a cause for media concern. At that time, Lord Healey had to admit publicly on television that he had used the private health service to carry out an operation on his wife, and similarly, that was considered to be a huge embarrassment for the party. I am extremely grateful that we have moved on leaps and bounds since those times, not least because we have moved from opposition and into government as a direct result of having done so.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Will my hon. Friend confirm that some of our Labour party colleagues have sometimes misunderstood the concept of holding shares in the Co-operative party? When one admitted that one was a co-operator and held shares in that organisation, some people began to worry in just the way that he describes in relation to the private sector.

Mr. Harris: My hon. Friend is correct. I shall add that to the very long list of deliberate misinterpretations of various actions that hon. Members in all parts of the House have had to put up with, whichever party we belong to.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) mentioned the profound impact of the Thatcher Government on the country's attitude to share ownership. It would be churlish to deny the impact that Baroness Thatcher and her Government had in that regard. I do not agree, however, with his suggestion that all of the innovations that the Conservative Government introduced in this area were entirely positive. Even that statement would not have been couched in such moderate terms 20 years ago, but I shall leave it at that, and say that their actions were not entirely positive. For example, in 1985, *The Observer* reported that, within two years—coincidentally, this was to happen in the run-up to the 1987 general election—the Conservative Government would have contrived to create 5,000 new shareholders in previously nationalised companies in every marginal seat in the United Kingdom.

It is appropriate to suggest that, although it was part of the Government's agenda at that time to create a property-owning and share-owning democracy, there was a very large element of cynical manipulation of the electorate. I am happy to take any interventions on that point. Perhaps credit is due to the Government of the time, as the strategy was very clever. However, it was also balanced. It was intended to promote share ownership and an understanding of how the economy works, and to encourage people to have a financial interest in the economy, but it was also an attempt to ensure that the Conservative Government were re-elected. It was a successful attempt, so I cannot bang on about it for too long, but we should acknowledge the cynicism.

Mr. Luke: Does my hon. Friend accept that the 5,000 new shareholders that the Conservative Government said they had created in constituencies throughout the United Kingdom still believed in the welfare state and free health care for all? Despite the change in capital ownership, people have remained true to core values.

Mr. Harris: My hon. Friend is right, and I do not want to be interpreted as saying that we lost the 1987 election because of share ownership. People who perhaps continue to own shares in the private companies to which I referred have largely voted Labour in the past two general elections. I congratulate them on their judgment.

Employee ownership is different from what is commonly known as share ownership. One of the problems with the Conservative experiment in the 1980s was that it was based on short-termism. People with no interest in British Telecommunications, British Gas or British Nuclear Fuels were encouraged to buy shares in them.

Linda Gilroy: My hon. Friend recalled the 1997 election. Does he remember that a strong theme of the campaign was that social justice and economic efficiency went hand in hand? Does he agree that the measure would extend employee share ownership along those lines?

Mr. Harris: My hon. Friend makes a good point and the Bill chimes well with the general view that has existed since before the 1997 election.

The Government of the 1980s did not encourage private individuals to buy shares in former nationalised companies in order to promote an interest in their expansion and development. The experiment was specifically marketed as, "Give us your money and we'll double it in a short time. You can sell your shares quickly and walk away with a far bigger profit than you would have made with a building society."

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about investment. Does he agree that increased employee participation should tackle the lack of investment in training and in research and development that has bedevilled British industry, especially the manufacturing and construction industries, for many years?

Mr. Harris: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which is annoying, because I was about to make it. However, I am grateful to her.

When considering the Thatcherite reforms of the 1980s, economists say that short-termism has been the long-term problem of the British economy. When individuals are encouraged to make short-term investments in industry, we cannot hope to generate the investment that my hon. Friend mentioned. There has been a sea change in attitude, and the Government are pursuing a longer-term strategy. However, such a strategy was rarely pursued by the Conservative party when it was in government.

Ms Munn: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the contribution of the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) was interesting in its detail and complexity, he missed the point of the Bill? He spoke at length about share options and people selling shares, and asked whether that was a risk, and whether they would get their money back, instead of considering the benefits of longer-term investment in not only money but skills, ability and commitment to an enterprise.

Mr. Harris: I absolutely agree, and I look forward to seeing whether the hon. Member for Huntingdon—who, unfortunately, is not in the Chamber at the moment—intends to support the Bill when it is in Committee.

Participation is the key factor in all employee share ownership schemes. Sadly, perhaps because of the structure of the British economy, most of the research into this has been carried out in the United States. It was mentioned earlier that there is much wider participation in these schemes across the Atlantic than here. The largest survey of which I am aware was carried out between 1983 and 1986 among 3,700 employees in 45 companies in the United States.

In its conclusions, the survey identified the three most important factors in the success of any employee share ownership scheme. The first is how much stock is transferred to employees each year. It found that contributions under 3 or 4 per cent. a year simply did not

[Mr. Harris]

get employees interested enough. That would not get their attention, unless, of course, the value of the stock was increasing at a spectacular rate.

The second important factor is the employees' involvement and participation in decision making. My very first job was as a reporter on a local newspaper, the *East Kilbride News*, and one of the biggest employers in the area was Motorola. Motorola had an interesting and innovative strategy on employee relations. It did not recognise trade unions, which I still believe was a major mistake. Thanks to legislation introduced by this Government, that is no longer an insurmountable problem for the trade unions.

Motorola did, however, have employee councils, and it was noticeable, on visiting the factory, that the employees were much happier and more content when they were actively encouraged to take decisions or at least consulted by the management before major decisions were taken. There was also a much lower turnover in the work force. One of the features of the Bill relates to participation. It is crucial that employees have a practical role in running the company in which they are employed.

The third factor in the American survey is how often a company communicates with employees about the decisions that it is taking, which relates to the second point about participation. Interestingly, many of these surveys have found that other factors are far less important. For example, factors such as whether a company is unionised, the size of the company, the type of business it pursues, or even the demographics of the work force do not have as much impact on the success of an employee share ownership scheme as those three main factors.

I hope that the Government will support the Bill. We shall find out when my hon. Friend Paymaster General addresses the House. Incidentally, I think that, in Committee, it should probably be re-titled the Employee Share Ownership (John Lewis Partnership) Bill. I congratulate the John Lewis Partnership on its extremely effective lobbying. When I was lobbying, in a previous incarnation, I wish that I had been half as effective as the John Lewis Partnership. Of course, I had nowhere near the resources that it has.

The Government have a long-term strategy for industry, and the Bill chimes well with that general philosophy. I hope, therefore, that when my hon. Friend comes to the Dispatch Box, she will tell us that the Government support the measure, which is essentially an amendment to existing legislation, rather than a brand new measure.

An eloquent Conservative speaker—I think it was the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon)—spoke of the difficulty of rewarding part-time and low-paid workers, precisely the ones who often feel left out of share ownership schemes. I understand that the industries with the lowest-paid workers and with part-time workers have failed to motivate them by means of short-term measures such as one-off bonus payments. There has been a much more positive response to longer-term commitment on the part of companies. I hope that that philosophy will encourage low-paid and part-time workers to have a vested interest in their companies—although, thanks to the national minimum wage introduced by this Government, far fewer people than ever before now receive very low wages.

Turnover is a huge problem, especially—paradoxically—at times of low unemployment. The worst companies will have the highest turnovers at such times. It is difficult for a company to have a long-term healthy outlook when 20, 25 or 30 per cent. of its workers are constantly leaving and being replaced by people with, in many cases, no knowledge of or interest in the company. American surveys have shown that share ownership schemes can contribute hugely to reducing turnover.

Ms Ward: Research shows that not just turnover but absenteeism is reduced. People who want to be involved in a company in which they have a stake do not want to take time off sick as an excuse, because they have a real interest in maintaining the company's profitability.

Mr. Harris: That is an excellent point. Although we must not automatically describe all absentees as people who are not committed to their employers, it is true that those who feel they have a personal vested interest in the long-term health of their companies will be inclined to take far fewer days off sick. That will inevitably have an impact on productivity in the long run. Surveys have also shown that increases in sales and employment are much higher in companies with share ownership schemes.

Employee share ownership also gets rid of the notion of "workers against employers", mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey). It puts workers and employers on the same side, where they should have been in the first place. It thus helps to end industrial strife in which trade union shop stewards feel that they must win concessions from the "enemy", and employers feel that they must not give an inch to the "enemy" on the other side of the table. That division has crippled British industry for a huge part of the 60 years that have elapsed since the end of the second world war.

The more that we extend share ownership schemes, the more I hope that we shall see positive industrial relations. Trade unions and employers will see the benefits of everyone working together to ensure that the owners of the shares—that is, the employees—gain from the productivity of the company.

The United States General Accounting Office, in an ongoing series of reports, shows that productivity in companies that run share ownership schemes for employees is 52 per cent. better than in comparable firms. That alone should convince us of the value of such schemes.

It has also been suggested that employee share ownership schemes can make privatisation programmes more politically acceptable—I am of course offering no advice to the Government as to future privatisation projects. However, employee share ownership can help to overcome the resistance of work forces to any new status or structure that results from privatisation. Furthermore, such schemes may encourage investors; they may be more likely to invest if they feel that there will be no conflict between the work force of a formerly nationalised company and its new private owners.

I am delighted to speak on behalf of my hon. Friend's Bill. He has put a great deal of work into it and consulted many organisations about it. The Bill has only four pages but—if the House accepts it—it will have a major and positive impact on thousands of workers, not only in Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom. I wish it well.

1.7 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I am delighted to be able to make a short speech. I must first declare an interest. I may have received more effective lobbying about the Bill than any Member in the Chamber, as my son works at John Lewis. He is employed at one of the most successful branches in the country—which happens to be in my constituency.

John Lewis's workers are motivated. They are called partners and they are indeed regarded as partners. The company's principles and values have already been mentioned. Every week, the Cheadle store issues a staff magazine. I shall quote from an interview with a member of the work force. He was asked:

> "Which aspect of your job are you passionate about?"

He replied:

> "The wellbeing of my team and the integrity of the Partnership. We're a unique business. We have high standards of conduct with each other and our customers. I feel very strongly for what we have achieved and I know that our enthusiasm for constant improvement stems from the fact that we are part of the Partnership and everything it stands for."

That was the positive side. He was then asked: "What's your pet hate?" He answered:

> "Stock inaccuracies. In an ideal world we would all have the correct information the moment we needed. We're all still working on this."

We need that kind of attitude in this country. We need managers and work forces to share a common aim and to be jointly informed.

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton noted that John Lewis attaches great importance to part-time workers. We need to explore in Committee the effects of the Bill on part-time workers. I should support that, as would John Lewis.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) said that we could avoid stress by exercising control on our lives. In my earlier life I was a teacher. One sees a great many more stressed people in teaching than one does on these Benches. The hon. Lady accurately identified what makes the life of a Member of Parliament less stressful than that of a teacher: we work just as many hours as teachers do, but we control our lives. We are the ones who decide when and how we put those hours in, and we have much greater freedom in that regard than teachers do. The issue of control and of being able to play an equal partnership role in one's life is important.

This country's future lies in the work force, its leaders and the managers and owners of companies realising that their long-term interests are shared. Work is more than earning money. It takes up more than time. A work force who own their company and are truly involved in decision making and sharing in its success will be happier, healthier and more committed. The managers and work force of the future, and those who are successful now, recognise that their partnership is key. They respect each other's contribution.

I applaud the Bill's aims and very much hope that it will meet with success.

1.11 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I seem to have been left out in that I am the only hon. Member who has not been circulated with information by the John Lewis Partnership; I shall write to draw the matter to its attention.

I join other hon. Members in offering my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz)—I am sure that when he is in Leith, that title would change to "the hon. Member for Leith and Edinburgh, North". I congratulate him not only on his luck as a new Member in being drawn sixth in the first ballot that he entered—I could see the frustration on the faces of colleagues who have been in this place considerably longer and have never been drawn in the ballot—but, more important, on his choice of subject for his Bill.

Inevitably, as a private Member's Bill it will be only a limited measure, but employee participation is an extremely important issue, for two reasons. First, as has been said, it is crucial to the efficiency of the economy. Productivity, which is central, can be improved by employee participation. The performance of our companies—their ability to compete—is at stake. The measure also chimes in well with the direction that the Government have been taking.

Why is employee participation important? First, it engages with all the employees of a company—with their skills, their special knowledge and particularly their commitment to the company. If it is conducted properly, it can improve employees' motivation and drive innovation from the shop floor, which is where most of the best ideas in good companies come from.

At its best, employee participation provides a genuine workplace partnership between the owners and those who represent them and the management and workers of a company. That has very important benefits for the company. First, as many hon. Members have said, it reduces employee turnover. Not only are workers retained for longer, but the effectiveness of their training increases. They do not go off and work for someone else as soon as they have completed their training. Therefore, investment in staff can pay dividends if one can keep hold of those staff.

Secondly, and perhaps most important, employee participation fosters a more co-operative ethos. When we discuss the workplace in this country, we continually talk about confrontation. The Bill will help to develop a more co-operative ethos.

Employee share ownership can assist employee participation in several ways. First and most obviously, it incentivises employees. In doing so it also, if properly structured, aligns the interests of both sides of industry in the same direction. To return to an aspect that has been central to the debate, it also increases performance and productivity.

We normally have long discussions about productivity at the time of the Finance Bill and the pre-Budget report. The Treasury is on record as saying that we are not doing as well with productivity as we should and could be. The economy is going well, but we need to improve productivity. Even though it is a small measure, the Bill will go some way to achieving that.

Share ownership and, in particular, some of the aspects of the Bill can have a beneficial impact on several issues that have been discussed today. First, short-termism plagues the British economy. Our competitors all take a much longer look at what is best for their companies. Shareholding by employees, who have a longer-term interest in their companies, will have a beneficial impact on the short-term outlook of many in power in this country.

[Mr. Andrew Love]

Secondly, such share ownership will help company investment decisions. We all know about the dearth of research and development and about the need to ensure that we have adequate capital, especially behind our manufacturing industry. Every time that we compare the capital used per employee in Britain with that used in Germany or the United States, we see that we are failing in this country. The Bill would bring home that fact in boardrooms throughout the country.

Thirdly, corporate governance is an extremely important facet of the future of the company sector in this country. A wider stakeholder voice—whether for employees, or for customers and others—is very important.

All that will assist company performance, but I do not want to give the impression that it will revolutionise things overnight. We ought not to overstate the benefits, but there is a lot of evidence—such as that cited by hon. Members on both sides of the House today and that from the United States, where significant numbers of employees are involved in such plans—to show the benefits that employee share ownership can bring.

Many hon. Members have said that such schemes have been with us for a very long time. They go back to the early 1980s—a fact that Opposition Members have drawn to our attention. Indeed, three different schemes operated in this country when the Labour party came to power in 1997: the approved profit-sharing scheme, which has been placed in abeyance, the save-as-you-earn scheme and the company share option plan. About 2.5 million employees enjoy the benefits of those three schemes. That is to be commended, but the shortcomings of those schemes was the theme of the consultation document on extending share ownership that the Government issued in 1998.

Several facets of those schemes were considered in that document. The first issue is providing a greater reward for the long-term commitment of employees to their companies. Many hon. Members have mentioned that issue and explained how it is reflected in new legislation. The second issue is creating an enterprise culture, which we talk about a lot. Often—certainly in the past—our debates have been about creating an enterprise culture in the boardroom, but we need to create that culture on the shop floor, and the schemes, as currently structured, go some way to doing that.

Perhaps the most important issue that the Government highlighted was the need to extend such schemes to a much wider range of companies in our economy. We often talk about the importance of small and medium-sized companies to the United Kingdom economy, yet the existing schemes did not really involve them, and the schemes introduced in 1999 and 2000 represented an attempt to do so.

Experience in the United States shows the benefits that can be produced. A report on research into those results states:

> "The key conclusion . . . is that employee share ownership, especially when combined with other means of active employee participation, does have a positive impact on employee motivation, productivity and corporate performance."

I shall return to that point later, because the Bill refers specifically to active employee participation.

There are other facets of the Government's concerns about the schemes that existed before 1997, the first of which relates to fairness. We cannot have fairness if only a limited number of senior managers are allowed to participate in a scheme. The only fair and proper mechanism is to have all-employee share schemes. Inevitably, they will be different for different employees, but they need to include everyone if they are to be fair.

I am a little surprised by some of the comments of Conservative Members, because the new SIPs were an attempt to reduce complexity and to reduce the cost to companies of share ownership schemes so that they could be extended to the smaller companies that were obviously concerned about such issues. It was to recognise the concerns expressed in the consultation exercise that the new scheme was developed. It has several features that were not in any of the previous schemes.

I wish to highlight some of the new features, and the first is that share awards can be performance related. I am sure that everyone will join me when I say that I am a little disappointed that many of the companies that have taken up the new schemes have not related awards to performance. The Government may wish to look at that in the future. Secondly, the new scheme gives companies the freedom to design schemes to suit their particular circumstances. One of the great difficulties with previous schemes was their rigidity, but companies now have much greater freedom.

Forfeiture and the need for employees to stay in a scheme are an important aspect of the new scheme, and it is one that I strongly support. The new scheme provides flexibility for the employer and employee and, perhaps most important for the employees, it allows them to buy shares out of gross income.

The Bill considers some of ways in which the 1999 and 2000 legislation can be improved. It talks about extending SIPs and the opportunity to take up a SIP for companies owned by employee trusts. That is important. We need to extend the schemes to a wider range of models of corporate ownership. We should not think that the share ownership company is the only corporate entity or that it is the most competitive, efficient or productive. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that there are other models, and the Bill will allow employee trusts to take part in employee share ownership. According to a parliamentary answer that I received in November last year, that could extend to as many as 60,000 employers. I shall return to that important consideration later.

I referred to United States research about active employee participation. Extensive research has also taken place in the United Kingdom and I wish to quote from the research carried out by Birkbeck college, which appears in the mutual pamphlet from Employees Direct. It states:

> "Two important conclusions have emerged, though. The first is that employees do respond positively to what might be termed 'high commitment' human resource practices such as promoting participation and involvement. The second is to confirm the sort of causal links suggested above, from human resource practices such as participation and involvement through to the attitudes and behaviour of employees and from there on to performance outcomes such as productivity."

That is an academic way of saying that we need to involve employees and give them a meaningful voice in their company. Only if they have a role and some influence—each company will have to structure how it provides that—will they commit to the company.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) spoke—I believe that he thought eloquently—about the distribution of shares through privatisations. The vast majority of employees sold their shares at the earliest opportunity, which does not benefit companies and is clearly not in their interests. Electing employee representative is one way to foster a commitment that will achieve the objective of getting employees to hold on to their shares. As democrats, we should be in favour of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith is right not to be prescriptive about that. No doubt there will be many views, as there are in the Chamber today, on what would be an appropriate election. We need flexibility, which is at the core of any development in this matter and needs to be maintained. The important principle is employee representation. Experience suggests that until now management has represented employee interests on a trust. The Bill would give employees a voice.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman raises the issue of elections. It has cropped up several times and, as hon. Members said, we could consider it in Committee without being too prescriptive. Perhaps he can set out criteria or principles that would determine how a group of workers in a company would elect representatives. For example, perhaps we could state in the Bill that every employee should have a vote of equal value, without being too prescriptive about electoral systems.

Mr. Love: Let me state here and now that I shall not be a member of that Standing Committee and will not be able to enter into that debate. However, if the share ownership plan is for all employees, everyone who is involved must be able to take part in electing those who want to represent them. I suspect that all hon. Members would uphold that principle. No doubt principles will be laid down for such elections, but it will be important to allow some flexibility; otherwise, the Bill will be as rigid as other legislation, which will not help to persuade companies to take up the scheme.

The Bill also deals with the discrimination that those people who want to make a significant move towards employee ownership experience as a result of paying corporation tax up front and of the considerable time that it takes to distribute shares. Opposition Members are having a rather good time. I think that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was on the sensible wing of the Conservative party, and this may well be a case in point. The arrangements for corporation tax discriminate against small family-run businesses in particular. Rather than selling out to a major larger competitor, they might prefer to reward their employees for many years of long service, but that option is not open to them. The current tax regime puts them at a disadvantage and no owner would choose to put himself in that situation, so it is sensible to make the change.

The 10 per cent. threshold is a safeguard. It would at least make companies pause for thought before using the measure as a tax-saving mechanism, because they would be creating a significant employee shareholding. That might want to do that, but I suspect not in the circumstances. No doubt that could be discussed at length in Committee.

Finally, I want the Minister to have a flexible approach to the extension of employee share ownership. In the Finance Act 2000, the Government extended the SIP scheme to industrial and provident societies, in particular to redeemable shares. Such shares do not require the same involvement in the company as ordinary share capital, but the Government thought that that would benefit employees. I supported that policy and the impetus behind it. However, I mentioned earlier that mutual organisations have considerable difficulty. As a result of discussions that I had, I wrote to the previous Financial Secretary to the Treasury, whose response was illuminating:

> "so far no arrangement has been identified that would replicate the effect of share ownership in incentivising employees, aligning their interests with those of other shareholders and encouraging improved productivity."

However, discussions were on-going. I asked my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury a parliamentary question and received the response:

> "We have not yet been able to devise a way in which the link between share ownership and company performance might be reflected in such corporate structures."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 608W.]

Building societies and other mutuals do not issue shares. Therefore, it is very difficult to have a share ownership scheme. I understand the problem, but employees of commercially successful businesses are being disadvantaged because they are not allowed to take part. Even more important, mutuals are not operating on a level playing field. They are suffering a disadvantage, and there are many other disadvantages, so I hope that the Minister will look at the issue.

The Bill allows the Government to extend employee share ownership to employee trusts. I hope that over the next few months the Minister will look constructively at the matter to see whether a similar extension could be made for mutual organisations. The scheme has dramatic benefits for companies and for employees. It should be available as widely as possible.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) Leith on introducing the Bill. Like all hon. Members who have spoken, I recognise—dare I say it?—his bravery in taking such an issue through the House under the private Member's Bill structure. It is a difficult task and will give him a great deal of work over the next few months. I thank him and his team for working so constructively with me and my officials on the Bill.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have contributed to what has been an excellent debate on this important issue. Increasingly, employee share ownership is at the heart of the Government's productivity agenda. All Members recognise the importance of the style of company ownership and the structures of a company, as well as of rewarding employees.

I am pleased that we are agreed on the general thrust of the Bill. However, there are elements of the Bill that I would not be able to support. I will come to those. My comments will follow many of the points that were made by the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) in his thoughtful speech.

As another caveat, I say to all hon. Members that the tax system is a very important part of our democratic system, but it is not easily amended or dealt with. It does not always produce the effect that hon. Members believed it was going to produce when they drafted legislation. The

[Dawn Primarolo]

House will forgive my caution, but after five years as a Treasury Minister, I understand that things do not always work precisely as one intended them to.

First, I shall focus on the Government's record. There is a wealth of evidence to support employee share ownership. In July 2000, the Government introduced the share incentive plan and enterprise management incentives. The two schemes are very different, but both are aimed at encouraging enterprise and productivity, and both offer generous tax reliefs.

At the end of October, I launched a nationwide roadshow on the share incentive plan, with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The launch was supported by Digby Jones of the Confederation of British Industry, John Monks of the Trades Union Congress, and George Cox, all of whom expressed unreserved support for the plan. That demonstrates that all hon. Members who have spoken are right to say that there has been a sea change in attitudes toward participation in employee share ownership schemes.

The aim of the roadshow, run jointly with ProShare, was to tell companies directly about the benefits of SIP and how to go about introducing a plan. Comments have been made about complexity; in fact, after extensive consultation on SIP, the options available to companies are as simple or as complex as they feel necessary in their circumstances. I do not want the House to think that there is a "one size fits all" approach.

Since enterprise management incentives were introduced in July 2000, we have made improvements. Already, almost 2,000 companies have notified us that they have granted more than 16,000 options. This month, we doubled the gross assets limit to £30 million, allowing 6,000 more small and growing companies to qualify. There are other tax approved schemes—the ones I have described are not the only ones that give employee share schemes access to tax advantages.

No one can doubt the Government's commitment to employee share ownership. A sound basis for our commitment is provided by research that clearly shows that companies with widespread employee ownership and participation outperform their rivals. Some of the most powerful support is found in a survey carried out by ProShare. It found that 83 per cent. of employers who had introduced a share plan said that it met or exceeded their expectations. There are also interesting results from shareholding employees: 34 per cent. said that they were now more interested in the company and its activities, and 25 per cent. said that share ownership made them more likely to stay with their employer. Similar views were expressed by everyone who has spoken in the debate. Results like those can translate into a significant effect on business success.

The Government are justifiably proud of SIP, which is the most tax-advantaged share plan ever introduced by a United Kingdom Government. Our aim in introducing the plan was to encourage employees to take a long-term stake in the company for which they work. We want to align employees' interests with those of other shareholders, and give them access to the rewards that flow from the success that they help to create. That is crucial to fulfilling the principles underlying the plan.

The plan was developed in partnership with industry, which wanted a framework that would appeal to smaller and unquoted companies. SIP was therefore designed to meet the needs of a range of companies. It has already proved successful. To date, 260 companies have had share plans approved and well over 250 plans are awaiting implementation by the company or are in the process of being approved by the Inland Revenue. The plan is being taken up by companies both large and small, listed and unlisted.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury asked for details and I can tell him that, of the 260 plans so far approved, 150 are in companies that never previously had an all-employee share scheme, and 71 companies are replacing their old profit sharing schemes with a share incentive plan, and that is what we hoped for. In addition, another 250 or more plans are in the process of being set up by companies. The hon. Gentleman asked how we would meet our target. No time limit was placed on the target of doubling, but given the present pace of change, we can be reasonably confident that in the next few years we shall be close to our target.

Several hon. Members asked about the involvement of low-paid and part-time workers in share incentive plans, and it seemed to be the view that, particularly in the retail sector, the plan was not being taken up. Hon. Members should be aware that a number of the large supermarket chains already operate, or are bringing in, a share incentive plan. Employees must be properly advised about the most appropriate way in which to use their funds. All hon. Members will appreciate that shares are not a one-way street and there is a risk—a point that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) sought to make in an intervention.

As the Bill seeks to extend the share incentive plan, it is important that I should spend a little time describing how it works. The share incentive plan allows a company to bring its employees into direct share ownership in several different ways. Up to £3,000 worth of free shares can be given annually to participants tax free. In addition, employees can contribute up to £1,500 a year out of pay before tax and national insurance to buy what are called partnership shares. Employers can then reward the commitment by awarding up to two matching shares for each partnership share bought.

Employees pay no tax or national insurance on the shares that they are awarded under the plan as long as they are held in the plan for at least five years. I shall not go through the reasons for that, because they have been adequately dealt with today. There are capital gains tax benefits and links to pensions and individual savings accounts. There are also tax breaks for companies, which are allowed deductions against corporation tax for the costs of awarding shares and for their costs in setting up a plan. Employers make substantial savings on employers' national insurance contributions on the salary that employees use to buy partnership shares and on shares given to employees through the plan. It is fair to say that all parties gain from the share incentive plan, whether from direct tax breaks or greater productivity.

Having set out the Government's commitment to employee share ownership schemes, I shall deal with the Bill, which sets out to change the rules of share incentive plans and has three major objectives. First, it seeks to extend the share incentive plan to companies whose shares are held for charitable purposes or in an employee benefit trust. A number of changes are needed to allow that, including allowing the award of share types not currently allowed in the plan. Secondly, the Bill provides for elected employee representatives to act as trustees of a company's share incentive plan. Thirdly, the Bill aims to encourage the transfer of shares into employee ownership through early corporation tax deduction on money given by the company to a plan trust for buying shares from an individual on behalf of the company's employees.

I shall deal with each of those aims in turn. Clause 1(2) seeks to extend the share incentive plan to trust-controlled or employee-controlled companies. Because of their structure, those companies are currently excluded from the approved employee share arrangements. They cannot use the arrangements because their constitution prevents them from awarding shares to employees.

A number of Members asked about the cost of the Bill, including the hon. Members for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and for Aylesbury. The cost of extending the share incentive plan to trust or employee-controlled companies would be about £25 to £30 million a year, assuming that there is high participation. Corporation tax costs, if the Bill is amended as I seek and as I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith will accept, would be about £5 million to £10 million a year. However, as a Minister, I have a problem with that part of the Bill, which is not drafted tightly enough to ensure against abuse. The John Lewis Partnership has been mentioned a great deal; I am not suggesting for a minute that such organisations would be involved. However, as we saw in high costs to the taxpayer of the profit-related pay experience, there are people who seek to use elements in the tax system to reduce their tax, even though they were not designed for that.

Awarding different classes of shares is a problem. To allow employee-controlled companies to use the share incentive plan without changing their share structure, clause 1(4) seeks both to extend the class of share that can be accepted under a plan and to place restrictions on it. It seeks to enable ordinary share capital held in trust or for charitable purposes to remain untouched, by allowing companies to use another class of ordinary share for the plan; that class may have restricted rights which may affect their value.

The share incentive plan does not allow companies to use anything for the plan other than the company's ordinary share capital, to ensure that employees are not being awarded shares inferior to the shares of other shareholders. I appreciate the point about the John Lewis Partnership. Under the 1929 settlement, the company established a profit-related scheme, under which all distributed profits to the employees as partners, in the form of an annual profit-related bonus, were paid pro rata to the salary. Because the company could not take part in employee share ownership schemes, in 1990 it converted its existing bonus schemes into a tax-relieved profit-related pay scheme. I do not want to go over again the problems with the profit-related scheme, which was designed to help companies like John Lewis, but had an astronomic cost for the taxpayer. Experience teaches us to be careful in that area.

I am aware that employee and trust-controlled companies feel that they are at a disadvantage compared with other companies which can use approved employee share schemes, particularly now that profit-related pay has been phased out.

This is an extremely complicated area, to which many of my hon. Friends referred. We have struggled in the past and we continue to struggle to see how we might help such companies. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith and his team have encountered the same difficulties in devising a practical approach for the Bill. That, in part, is why I hope that he will agree that these provisions should be removed from the Bill. I cannot consider an arrangement that moves away from ordinary shareholdings, or one which breaks or weakens the link with improved productivity, or reintroduces profit-related pay by some other means.

I am, of course, conscious that flagship employee-controlled enterprises have successful arrangements for achieving and rewarding employee participation and involvement. Various such structures were discussed today. It is unclear how they would want to use the share incentive plan, and in what ways it would add to the incentives already available to their employees.

We have, however, already provided for co-operatives to participate in the share incentive plan by allowing them to use redeemable shares in the plan, which conventional companies using the plan cannot do. That was because redeemable shareholding is the vehicle for co-operative membership. Allowing redeemable shares meant that employees would be issued with the same shares as other members.

Having asked for the provision to be removed from the Bill, I will continue actively to consider whether there are other ways of extending the share incentive plan to trust and employee-owned companies that wish to use the plan as conventional companies do, in ways that preserve the aims of improved productivity and do not allow scope for abuse. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith will accept that.

On elected employee representatives as trustees of a company's share incentive plan, I share my hon. Friend's aim of encouraging greater employee participation. The proposal in subsection (5) is that the deed of a share incentive plan trust should allow companies to have at least one elected employee to act as a trustee. I am happy to support the election of employees as trustees. Strictly speaking, that can already be done, but if hon. Members want it to be beyond doubt and written into the Bill, we have no problem in supporting that.

I am happy for Inland Revenue officials to work with my hon. Friend and his team on a trust deed that would provide for elected employee trustees. That could be offered alongside the existing model trust deed on the Inland Revenue website.

Finally, I shall deal with early corporation tax deduction on money given by a company to a plan trust to buy shares from an individual. Subsection (6) provides for a corporation tax deduction to be given when a company contributes money to a share incentive plan trust to buy shares from one or more individuals. The figures of £5 million and £10 million that I gave are calculated on the basis that what I am about to say will be accepted, not on what is in the Bill. That would be more expensive.

Again, I support my hon. Friend's aim of encouraging individuals such as family owners to sell their shares into employee share ownership. I am mindful, however, that the early corporation tax deduction that is currently available through qualifying employee share ownership trusts—sometimes called QUESTs—has been used very

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little by the individuals such as family owners for whom it was originally designed. The Government have already gone a long way to facilitate the transfer of shares from individuals such as family owners into the share incentive plan.

My particular concern with the provision is that the corporation tax deduction would no longer be linked to the distribution of shares to employees, which is crucial to the relationship between productivity and employee benefits. The shares acquired by the plan trust could remain indefinitely in the trust. As I said, that would be contrary to the fundamental aim of the share incentive plan. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith is aware of those concerns and I hope that he accepts that the provision is drafted a little too widely, in terms of missing that crucial link. I would be prepared to accept an early corporation tax deduction where that is clearly linked to the aims of the share incentive plan legislation. That would mean that shares would need to be distributed to employees through the share incentive plan over a defined period. If he can accept those amendments as well, the Government can be satisfied that his proposals fit squarely with and support the actions that we have already taken.

I share my hon. Friend's aim of encouraging employee participation and share ownership. None the less, I have had to conclude that, in some respects, the Bill as it stands would work against the purposes and design of the current share incentive plan. I do not believe that the plan is the right vehicle for achieving collective employee share ownership, because its purpose is to increase productivity through direct individual employee shareholding. Nevertheless, I would be prepared to support an amended Bill along the lines that I have set out.

First, I would support a Bill in which clause 1(2) to (4) and clause 1(7) were dropped. As I explained, those provisions seek to extend the share incentive plan to company structures that cannot currently use it. Secondly, clause 1(6) would need to be amended so that the shares acquired with up-front corporation tax relief were distributed to employees within a defined limit.

I am satisfied, having taken advice, that no human rights, European Community or devolution issues would be raised by the amended Bill that I propose. We believe that the impact on the regulatory burden, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham is negligible. None the less, officials will do further work on the shape of the Bill and on assessment.

I hope that my hon. Friend will accept the amendments that I propose so that I can accept the progress of the Bill into Committee, where the issues can be sorted out. Again, I congratulate all hon. Members who participated in the debate, which was an excellent example of how Government policy can be probed in the House—and, indeed, improved a little—in a spirit of co-operation.

1.57 pm

Mr. Lazarowicz: I thank the Paymaster General for her support of significant elements of the Bill and welcome her commitment to continue considering ways of trying to reach what I think is an agreed objective on giving some advantages to employee trusts, which is one of its aims. I accept the validity of the concerns that she expressed, and not just because it is sometimes wise for Back Benchers to accept the Government's concerns on matters of this nature. Even with the assistance that I have had in drafting the Bill, I do not claim that it is a model of ultimate perfection. The tax system is a complex area. I fully accept the concerns that she and other hon. Members have raised. For that reason, I accept that amendments will have to be made in Committee to give effect to the changes that she outlined. On that basis, I hope that the House will give the Bill its Second Reading. Like the Minister, I thank hon. Members throughout the Chamber for the support that they have shown today.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Public Right of Planning Appeal Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Friday 25 January.

National Heritage Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

2 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has three principal objectives. First, it would remove some anomalies in the power and functions of English Heritage. Secondly, it would acknowledge that English Heritage merged with the royal commission on historical monuments of England in 1999. Thirdly, it would implement some of the uncontroversial proposals in the 1996 Green Paper, "Protecting our Heritage", which was published by the previous Conservative Government.

The Bill originated in the other place, where it was promoted by Baroness Anelay of St. Johns. It received its Second Reading on 31 October and was in Committee in the other place on 14 November, when it reported with one amendment, which the Baroness moved.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I hope that the Bill will make good progress. In the short time available, will my hon. Friend assure us that, although it appears substantial, he is satisfied that the content is uncontroversial, and that we will be able to scrutinise it adequately in Committee?

Sir Sydney Chapman: Although the Bill deals with important matters, it consists of only eight clauses. The eighth deals with commencement, a technical matter that is included in every Bill. The record of the debates in another place shows that the Bill has been scrupulously examined.

The Bill would put on the statute book proposals that the previous Conservative Government initially presented. Its contents were included in a Bill that the Government introduced in the last Session of the last Parliament. I hope that my right hon. Friend is satisfied with that reply.

The Bill has all-party support, and I shall deal generally with the eight clauses. Clauses 1, 2, 3 and 6 would transfer responsibility for underwater archaeology from the Department for Culture. Media and Sport to English Heritage. That responds to the overwhelming wish of many organisations, professions and amateur marine archaeologists. The aim was universally accepted in consultations on the 1996 Green Paper, "Protecting our Heritage", to which I referred earlier.

Hon. Members know that the seas around Britain contain a wealth of archaeological sites and remains. I hazard the opinion that the density of wrecks around our shores is the highest in the world.

I shall deal briefly with clauses 4 and 5. Clause 4 covers the trading functions of English Heritage and enables that organisation to produce souvenirs that relate to ancient monuments and historic buildings only in England, where English Heritage's remit runs.

Clause 5 would empower English Heritage to offer its services and expertise outside the United Kingdom. Hon. Members will know that the National Heritage Act 1983 restricts the commercial activities of English Heritage to England. It is common sense to allow it to deal in services and offer its expertise outside the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will my hon. Friend humour me by telling me whether any commercial gain resulting from the Bill might be passed on to any of our excellent universities that carry out first-class archaeological work? I am thinking of Bristol university, in particular, which has an eminent archaeology department. If there were some way in which our heritage could help to bring extra funds into our academic institutions—which provide their services not only in this country but throughout the world—there could be spin-offs that my hon. Friend has not thought of.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I cannot give my hon. Friend a categorical, definitive answer, but I would judge that, if clause 5 were enacted, archaeological interests throughout the country, including universities, would indirectly be helped. The reason why I dare to suggest that is that English Heritage is funded by the taxpayer, but the amount of its funding depends on how much it earns from other sources. Presumably, the more it earns from other sources, particularly—as clause 5 would allow—from outside the United Kingdom, the less the Government will have to give it in grants. Alternatively, English Heritage would have more resources to give grants to universities. Either way, the prospect will be brighter for supporting archaeological interests if the Bill goes through.

Clause 7 seeks to empower English Heritage to delegate functions if it has the finance available for a project, but not the personnel. This is a rather technical clause, but it is common sense that, if English Heritage does not have the personnel available to help with some project, it should be able to offer its finances to other reputable organisations to carry out the research or whatever work might be involved. Clause 8 covers the usual technical details relating to the commencement and extent of the Bill.

I understand from my research and that of Baroness Anelay of St. Johns that all the organisations directly affected by the Bill seem to support its provisions. The two principal organisations affected are English Heritage and the Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites. Both fully support the Bill.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman says that those organisations are in favour of the Bill. Does he know whether they have received assurances from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport about whether the budget that currently resides in the Department will be sent down to English Heritage to ensure that its funding is not cut? English Heritage is at present unable to fund some very valuable projects throughout the country—for example, repairs to Kingston parish church in my constituency—because of constraints on its budget. If this transfer of responsibilities were to result in its budget being eaten into by further responsibilities, without a transfer of additional funds, some of us might be a little more concerned than the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Sir Sydney Chapman: It is not for me to give the categorical assurance that the hon. Gentleman seeks, because I do not happen to be in the Government, and only the Government can be answerable. I understand, however, that the DCMS is anxious for the Bill to be passed. It feels that English Heritage is the right authority to deal with such matters. If we cannot secure the

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guarantees sought by the hon. Gentleman on Second Reading, I am sure we shall be able to ask for them in Committee.

Mrs. Gillan: In another place, the Minister dealing with the Bill said:

> "In conclusion, the Bill is a valuable and useful piece of legislation, and I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, for introducing it. It will give English Heritage the opportunity to export its expertise and also to generate more income . . . Once again, perhaps I may say how pleased I am to be able to offer the support of the Government."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 2001; Vol. 627, c. 1497-8.]

Is it not disappointing that no DCMS Minister is present to—obviously—support the Bill? It is a great shame. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), who is present, knows that the Government support the Bill; she must be a bit chagrined.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I see one extremely attractive member of the Government, and another member of the Government, on the Front Bench. I am immodest enough to declare a certainty that my subliminal powers of persuasion will reach the Government, even if no DCMS representative is physically present.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) may well have forgotten that, in this Government, Ministers are able to deal with a range of issues. I am more than sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health will be able to deal with this matter, on the Government's behalf, as capably as any DCMS Minister.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I do not know whether I am referring to one or to both Ministers involved, but I know that if the Bill is given a Second Reading a money resolution will be needed, so I will do all that I can to be polite to Ministers—especially Treasury Ministers.

I have no doubt, given all that was said in the other place, that the Bill has all-party support. It reflects the last Conservative Government's views, as declared in the 1996 Green and White Papers. Moreover, I think its exact provisions were included in the present Government's Culture and Recreation Bill, introduced in the last Session of the last Parliament. I gather that the Government did not proceed with the Bill because they wanted to run for cover and call a general election.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): I have two interests in the Bill. A long time ago I wrote a book for English Heritage, so I have intellectual property rights in that regard; and I am a member of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. Would English Heritage be allowed to consult other expert groups, and would it be given money enabling it to perform functions that it could not otherwise perform owing to a lack of expertise or personnel? If something exciting and wonderful was discovered, what would happen in terms of the commission's exploitation of intellectual property? Will the hon. Gentleman expand on the two relevant clauses, and how they would work?

Sir Sydney Chapman: I recognise the hon. Lady's interest in these matters. I trained as an architect because I moved down the alphabetical list, and could not remember how to spell "archaeology". Clause 7 would act as a long stop. It would apply only in those cases where specific expertise or action was needed. English Heritage might not have the personnel, or they might be working on other things, but it would have the power to give grants to other organisations to complete work that might be highly specialised. That is certainly an aspect that we can explore in Committee.

Ms Shipley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. My point may indeed be one for Committee, but how would the provision affect intellectual property rights? If an individual, or a group of individuals, has undertaken work, who would own those rights? There is a discrepancy in the provision.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I apologise to the hon. Lady for misunderstanding her question. I must brazenly say that I cannot give her a definitive answer. I think that the work would be subcontracted and that, as the finance would be provided by English Heritage, it would own the intellectual property rights. I shall certainly find out and write to the hon. Lady, or we may be able to deal with the point in Committee.

The Bill would put underwater archaeology on the same basis as land archaeology and bring it within the remit of English Heritage. It would enable English Heritage to take over the running of the secretariat of the Advisory Committee on Historic Wrecked Sites. Indeed, that committee fully welcomes that provision.

The Bill would give English Heritage the right to sell its expertise abroad at a commercial rate, produce souvenirs and exploit its intellectual property. The measure would assist the formal merger of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England—which has already merged with English Heritage—with the royal commission on the historical monuments of England into a single national body for the built heritage. In fact, those bodies have already been merged administratively.

For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House. I hope very much that Members will feel able to give it a Second Reading.

2.17 pm

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): As a member of the all-party archaeological group, I am delighted to speak in this debate. I wholly support the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman). It is entirely common sense to put marine archaeology on the same footing as land-based archaeology. There has been a mismatch for many years.

The waters around the United Kingdom are among the richest in the world for archaeology, especially as regards wrecks—to which the Bill refers. Around our coast, there are some Viking wrecks and Spanish wrecks from the time when the armada was scuttled. Such wrecks are to be found in many parts of UK waters, especially in Scotland. We all recall the raising of the Mary Rose. That vessel still provides us with a vast amount of information on the shipbuilding of its period.

When the Bill is in Committee, I hope that we may be able to address the fact that many wrecks are also graves. The Bill deals with archaeology, and it will not be long before some of the battleships sunk during the first world war can be examined as archaeology. However, in the minds of many people those ships are also war graves and we must consider that point in Committee.

When we consider the scientific aspects of underwater archaeology, we sometimes underestimate its importance, as regards not only wrecks but towns, and so on. After the last ice age, sea levels rose when the ice melted and many cities and villages were flooded. I was intrigued to hear today that a city about 9,000 years old has been discovered off the coast of India. Although the Bill will not affect that, it will revolutionise our thinking on the origin of cities. That is part of underwater archaeology, and it will be a new area of exploration in future.

I am glad that the Bill has been introduced, because it will put lost underwater villages on the same footing as the ancient villages that are protected by English Heritage on land. I hope that the Bill receives a Second Reading and rapidly becomes law.

2.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I shall keep my remarks as short as possible. On behalf of the Government, I welcome the Bill. We give it our wholehearted support. The substance of its provisions was contained largely in the Government's Culture and Recreation Bill, which was introduced in another place in December 2000 but was unable to complete its parliamentary passage before the general election was called, so, unfortunately, the provisions contained in this private Member's Bill were lost at that time.

The changes that the Bill would effect are needed. The Government are very pleased that these provisions have been given a second chance, because broadening the powers of English Heritage to allow it to export its goods and services abroad and to take on work associated with underwater archaeology will be of great benefit not only to English Heritage but to the historic environment and the heritage sector.

I can assure the House that these provisions have been subject to a number of extensive consultations. They have also received a very positive response from a wide range of heritage organisations. The devolved Administrations are content with the Bill and considerable consultation has taken place with Ministers and officials in those Administrations.

English Heritage was established in 1983 by the National Heritage Act 1983, which restricts the activities of English Heritage exclusively to ancient monuments and historic buildings situated in England, yet there is a demand from overseas for English Heritage's expertise, goods and services. We know that England is noted for its cultural heritage. English Heritage is itself a leading brand name and the organisation is respected throughout the world for its expertise, skills and experience in the management, conservation and restoration of the historic environment, but at present it has to turn away requests to use that expertise in foreign countries.

The Bill's overseas trading provisions, like those in the Culture and Recreation Bill before it, will therefore enable those skills to be shared with a wider audience—for example, by creating the opportunity for English Heritage to sell products and services around the world—and will create export opportunities for other English suppliers and contractors in the heritage field who are keen to benefit from English Heritage's lead.

The underwater archaeology provisions of the Bill arise from the fact that the 1983 Act and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 do not give English Heritage any powers to act below the mean low water mark. As hon. Members have said, that obviously leaves an anomaly whereby English Heritage cannot perform the functions for underwater archaeology that it can for land-based archaeology, whether it be the provision of educational facilities and services or public information and advice or the making of contributions to research costs and grants, to name but a few.

It is not possible at the moment for the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to direct English Heritage to carry out certain administrative functions in relation to underwater archaeology. To allow English Heritage similar involvement with underwater archaeology to that which it has with land-based archaeology would permit considerably more expertise to enter the management and decision-making process in connection with underwater archaeology.

The Bill is valuable and useful. It will give English Heritage the opportunity to export its expertise and generate more income and it will create opportunities for small private sector organisations to penetrate overseas markets. It will place underwater archaeology on the same footing as land-based archaeology and, most important, it will further enhance English Heritage's status as the lead body in the sector.

I repeat that I am pleased to offer the Government's support for this private Member's Bill.

2.24 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I shall not delay the House, except to rise in support of the Bill and to say that, despite the United Kingdom's rich maritime history and in contrast to what happens in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, English Heritage—the lead agency for managing physical remains and the historical environment in England—is not responsible for marine archaeology; the Bill will redress that situation.

At the moment, we are failing to act to protect our national historical heritage, and the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) will correct that. I am delighted that the Government and all the hon. Members who have spoken so far in this brief debate wish the Bill well and hope that it receives its Second Reading. I hope that the House will allow the Bill to be debated in Committee.

2.25 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I want to add just a brief word in support of the Bill, which my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) has so skilfully steered to this stage of its proceedings. It is now pretty obvious that he has persuaded the House of the Bill's merit, and time has fortunately permitted a debate to take place. The Bill was considered fully in another place, as he said, so we can look at it from our perspective in the light of that knowledge.

I very much welcome, for example, clause 4 on the new trading functions of the commission. The Bill has been widely welcomed, and there is no doubt that it will allow

[Mr. Eric Forth]

the great inherent strengths of our heritage to be fully exploited—in the best possible meaning of that word. However, I want to put down a tiny marker, which hon. Members may want to consider in Committee.

I am always interested when a Bill contains provisions such as those in clause 3(2), which states:

> "If the Secretary of State directs the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission . . . to exercise functions . . . the Commission shall exercise them."

It looks as though the Minister, even in these provisions—welcome as they are—was not quite able to let go, but perhaps that can be considered in Committee, and it is proper that the Committee should do so. All in all, the Bill, which started in another place, has been debated here and has received a widespread welcome, and I wish it well.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

THE SPEAKER'S ABSENCE

Ordered,

That the Speaker have leave of absence on Tuesday 22nd January to attend the funeral of a close personal friend.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Mitcham Cottage Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.27 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I am pleased to have secured this debate on an issue that is very dear to the hearts of my constituents—the future of the former Mitcham cottage hospital, the Wilson. It is no exaggeration to say that I speak for virtually all my 70,000 constituents—no matter what their politics—when I say that they would dearly love the Wilson to re-open its doors as a hospital. It is also no exaggeration to say that the people of Mitcham had, and still have, a strong and proud affection for the Wilson—it was, and is, cherished.

I can do no better to sum up the feelings of Mitcham people than to quote from a handful of the huge number of supportive but unsolicited letters that I have received since I took up the issue in December. Mr. John Brett of Imperial Gardens, Mitcham wrote:

> "Having been born in Mitcham 75 years ago I know what an asset it would be for local people, especially the elderly as patients and visitors. I am sure that the growth in Mitcham's population warrants the need for the Cottage Hospital."

Mrs. J. M. Collins of Fenning Court, Mitcham wrote:

> "I am behind you 100 per cent. It should never have been closed. I have been a patient of the Wilson having had both my hips replaced and received the best of care and attention. I cannot speak highly enough of the surgeons, doctors and nursing staff that attended me."

Mrs. Marie Patterson of Sherwood Park road, Mitcham, wrote:

> "It would certainly be handy for the elderly of the borough who now have at least two buses to catch to get to any hospital for treatment."

Mrs. Helen Manning-Legg of Commonside East, Mitcham, wrote:

> "Congratulations on initiating the debate for giving the Wilson Hospital back to the people for whom it was a gift! For years we have felt cheated, and in the beginning we fought to keep it open. You have our full support."

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Siobhain McDonagh: Dr. Alan Cohen, a local GP and chair of the East Merton and Furzedown primary care group, wrote:

> "I am sure that it will not surprise you to know that it has been a stated aim of the Primary Care Group since our inception to provide clinical services at the Wilson . . . The PCG would very much like to put clinical services in the Wilson, but are currently prevented from doing so by the Health Authority insisting on using it for offices."

The Wilson disappeared off the clinical radar in the closing years of the Conservative Government, becoming offices for Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority. A much-loved and much-used amenity was lost. Desks and filing cabinets replaced beds; offices replaced wards and an operating theatre. Mitcham was stripped of the hospital that Sir Isaac Wilson, a local benefactor, specifically endowed for the people of Mitcham in 1928. Sir Isaac endowed a cottage hospital for the many, not an office block for the few. The current misuse of the building is an affront to his intentions and to the people of Mitcham.

As a local councillor for 16 years in the 1980s and 1990s, I was involved in the campaign to keep the Wilson open. It was a strong and determined campaign, and we achieved a marvellous amount with next to no resources. In spite of initially being successful in preventing its closure, in the end we failed. We were let down by false promises from Conservative Health Ministers. It has been a constant regret to me that we failed.

Towards the end of last year, I took up a campaign in my constituency to urge Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, and the new south-west London strategic health authority, which is poised to replace it, to find alternative office accommodation to clear the way for the re-introduction of clinical services at the Wilson. Not only is the transition from the health authority to strategic health authority the perfect moment to restate the case for the Wilson, but it is crucial to me that the people of Mitcham are not elbowed to the back of the health queue again.

My campaign includes a petition signed by a large and increasing number of constituents that I plan to present to the House early next month. The campaign has gained eager support from local people of all ages and backgrounds. They include local GPs, and speaking to them has brought home to me the fact that Mitcham—which is part of the East Merton and Furzedown primary care group—is very much a victim of health inequality.

East Merton primary care group is some £4 million over target compared with Balham, Tooting and Wandsworth primary care group, which is £3 million under target despite similar levels of deprivation. The extra spend comes from the greater use of secondary care services by GPs in East Merton, as there has not been the investment in infrastructure in primary and secondary care from which Wandsworth has benefited so much.

Mitcham has the highest rate of teenage pregnancies and low birth weight pregnancies in the area covered by Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority. Sadly and probably amazingly, Merton has the highest number of children put up for adoption in London. According to 1996 figures, Phipps Bridge ward, in which the Wilson stands, had the highest adult mortality rate in the borough.

Clearly, as well as crying out for the restoration of hospital facilities, there is much to be done to address the very real and disturbing health inequalities that people face in this area of my constituency. I understand that the public health department has been encouraged by local GPs to investigate the inequity between East Merton primary care group and Balham, Tooting and Wandsworth primary care group but, over the last two years, it has been unable to do so. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister would offer some help to hard-pressed GPs in my constituency on this point.

My main objective in this debate is to ask my hon. Friend to offer an undertaking to my constituents in Mitcham and Morden that an option appraisal of intermediate care services in Merton can be carried out to assess the viability of reopening the Wilson as an intermediate care centre and as an extension to the intermediate care service, thereby serving the elderly and the infirm in the Mitcham area who are in need of hospital care.

All hon. Members are aware of the colossal pressure on our large NHS hospitals, such as St. George's in Tooting and St. Helier in Carshalton, both of which serve my constituents. The Wilson is equidistant between the two and could ease the pressure on acute beds in both. Indeed, many former cottage hospitals nationally could be pressed back into use to ease the pressure on acute hospitals and to provide care for the elderly who cannot be cared for in their homes.

I fully realise that there is an on-going debate on how best to deliver intermediate care—whether it should be in the patient's home or in dedicated beds at a resource such as a cottage hospital, which the Wilson has the potential to be. I understand from talking to local GPs that current evidence indicates that care at home with intermediate care nursing teams is probably more effective and better liked by the user of the service. I believe that encouraging independence by providing care in the home is absolutely right.

There are circumstances, however, when respite beds are necessary, for instance when a patient's home circumstances may be unsuitable, or when patients are suffering from dementia or some other severe infirmity that means that they need clinical care 24 hours a day. The Wilson could come into its own in those circumstances, relieving pressure by relieving bed blocking.

Considerable work has been done in the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth area on intermediate care services. A domiciliary provider team currently managed by South West London Community NHS trust and five residential home beds with rehabilitation services attached are available to support the discharges of Merton patients from St. Helier hospital.

There are between 40 and 55 delayed transfers of care each week from St Helier, the split between Sutton and Merton residents being approximately two thirds and one third respectively. The most significant group that experiences those delays in both boroughs is composed of patients who are waiting for long-term nursing home or residential care. Intermediate care services in their current form would not provide an appropriate level of service for that group of patients. Additional intermediate care beds, with the appropriate rehabilitation input, would, however, undoubtedly allow the trust to discharge some patients much more speedily. That could happen at the Wilson.

In respect of intermediate care needs at St George's, a recent study on such care identified a need for 60 to 70 intermediate care beds across the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth area. For the area that St. George's covers in Battersea, at least 16 intermediate care beds are needed and the hospital has forwarded a proposal to the Department of Health to expand the intermediate care provision at the Bolingbroke hospital. Such intermediate care provision could also be provided at the Wilson.

On alternative offices for the health authority, I certainly would not want to hound the new strategic health authority out of Mitcham and Morden. I am pleased that such an organisation wants to have its base in my constituency. I acknowledge the good work done by the health authority and the work that its successor body will no doubt do. This is not about the individuals who have their office at the Wilson, but about the fact that that should not be at the expense of a hospital to serve the people of Mitcham.

[Siobhain McDonagh]

I have done some research into the office accommodation available in Merton that is of a sufficient size—more than 1,000 sq ft—to house the new strategic health authority, its support groups and the primary care trust that will be co-located with it. With a bit of imagination and, more importantly, the will to move, the health authority could find office accommodation within a few miles of the Wilson. I hope that Merton's Labour council will assist the health authority to find a new home, just as it has made strenuous efforts to help Wimbledon football club find a site for a new stadium. For instance, the partially empty Brown and Root tower in Colliers Wood, just opposite Colliers Wood tube station, has more than enough space for the health authority. More controversially, perhaps, there is space in the soon-to-close Rowan school in Longthornton, which is a fine building in need of a new use. There are others, too.

I ask the Minister to give an undertaking to my constituents, the people of Mitcham and Morden, that an option appraisal of intermediate care services in Merton will be carried out to assess the viability of reopening Wilson hospital as an intermediate care centre. I further ask her to take steps to deal with the inequity between local primary care groups.

I have spoken a lot about the feelings of the people of Mitcham. As someone who has lived in the constituency all my life, I share their feelings. Mitcham has suffered over the years as its facilities and its civic pride have taken a battering. Reopening the Wilson would be a tremendous boost for Mitcham. It would give an entire community great pleasure to see it reopened for the purpose for which it was intended. Sir Isaac Wilson never intended to endow an office block. I therefore strongly urge the Government to respect his wishes, and the wishes of my constituents in Mitcham.

2.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing the debate. She has made a powerful case on behalf of her constituents about Wilson hospital and about tackling health inequalities in her area. In the wake of our recent consultation on how to narrow health inequalities across the country, I will happily talk to her further about specific issues that she, general practitioners and in particular her constituents face.

The main subject of my hon. Friend's speech was the future of Wilson hospital. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the future of a facility that, as she has made clear, is strongly valued by her constituents.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, responsibility for deciding what services are provided in Mitcham rests with the local NHS in south-west London. The key decisions must be taken locally and with proper public consultation where appropriate. Nevertheless, I will respond to her as far as I can about the issues that she has raised, the local position, and how it fits in the context of the national approach to intermediate care.

Clearly, the issue is important to my hon. Friend's constituents. As she said, Wilson hospital, which was established as a cottage hospital by Sir Isaac Wilson in 1928, was a gift to the local community.

In 1990, following consultation, it was agreed that in-patient services at the Wilson be transferred within the district, in line with the previous Government's policy. By that time, the Wilson was offering mainly out-patient services and elective orthopaedic surgery, and had some elderly in-patient beds. Many of the services were transferred to Sutton hospital, part of the current Epsom and St. Helier NHS trust. During that time, the district headquarters, now the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, was searching for new accommodation, so it moved into the empty space at the Wilson.

A health clinic still serves local residents. It offers dental services, a blood clinic and district nurse and health visitor services for the South West London Community NHS trust. The Merton community mental health team is also based on the site. I am aware of local concern about the future of the site and have been very impressed by the strong community feeling on the issue.

My hon. Friend is right to stress the value of local cottage hospitals. The Government are committed to making appropriate and effective use of those community services. There is an important role for cottage hospitals in the delivery of local health care and in the future development of intermediate care.

In the NHS plan, we pledged that, as well as additional money, by 2004 there would be 5,000 extra intermediate care beds across the country. Some of those will undoubtedly be in cottage hospitals, some in existing facilities and some in new developments. I agree that often the potential of such hospitals has been ignored. Now, with a new emphasis on intermediate care and delivering care "closer to home", there is an opportunity to breathe new life into local services.

The NHS plan announced extra investment of £900 million annually by 2003-04 for intermediate care and related services to promote patient independence, of which around one quarter was earmarked specifically for NHS investment in intermediate care. With the £150 million made available recurrently from the previous financial year, that will bring earmarked NHS resources for intermediate care to a total of £405 million by 2003-04.

A substantial component of that money is to be provided to local government for a range of services to link to intermediate care—for example, through the provision of home care, giving people enough day-to-day help to enable them to live in their own home rather than have to remain in hospital or nursing care. The results of a survey on intermediate care undertaken in August last year show that good progress is already being made. From a baseline of 1999-2000, there will be 2,400 more intermediate care beds by the end of this year. Of course, there is still progress to be made. Our aim now must be to ensure that everyone has access to high-quality, effective intermediate care services.

Locally, Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, Merton social services and the proposed Sutton and Merton primary care trust have been working closely together to increase intermediate care provision. There are currently 31 intermediate care beds for Sutton and Merton residents and 10 beds for Wandsworth residents. Intermediate care provision for Merton residents includes beds for elderly people at Bolingbroke hospital, which is part of St. George's Healthcare NHS trust, as well as beds at Eltandia nursing home and Carshalton War Memorial hospital. Earlier this month, Merton social services received £248,000 from money allocated to councils to reduce the number of delayed transfers of care, and it has developed a plan with local partners to use the funding to offer older people more opportunities to return to or stay in their own home—for example, through the provision of additional home care arrangements.

Together, local NHS and social care organisations will develop a more detailed strategy on intermediate care over the next 12 months. Current estimates of need suggest that a minimum of nine additional beds plus additional community placements will be required by 2003-04 for Sutton and Merton residents, although projections are still being reviewed. To meet that need and to reach targets for intermediate care, the health authority, social services and the PCT will need to consider all the options, including enhancing home support as well as providing additional beds in the area.

It will be for the NHS at local level to decide how and where services should be provided and how best to use local NHS resources, but it is important to involve the local community in discussions on those matters and to take account of local people's views. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that there is also a need to take into account issues of clinical viability, accessibility for patients, and cost-effectiveness for the NHS, so that the NHS can provide the best possible services across the board.

My hon. Friend will be aware that some of the changes resulting from the NHS plan and "Shifting the Balance of Power" announced by the Secretary of State last year were about putting patients and staff at the heart of the NHS and moving power from Whitehall back to those on the front line. The key aim is to reshape the NHS around the needs of its users, to offer them choices and to involve them in decision making and planning. That is key to the discussions that must take place locally and involve local communities, as well as discussions with local authorities, the voluntary sector and other key partners. To create a more responsive health and social care system built around the needs of local communities, patients, front-line staff and local people must be involved in consultation.

My hon. Friend mentioned the fact that the Wilson is currently used for office accommodation. The proposed Sutton and Merton PCT is in need of headquarters office accommodation. That is currently under review, and I am advised that the Wilson is one of the sites being considered. She will be aware that, because the Wilson is not in the commercial sector, the cost of providing offices there is considerably lower than that of leasing commercial premises; that is one of the factors that must be taken into account locally. That will also be a factor in the considerations of the new strategic health authority.

How far facilities may need to be modernised will also have to be considered. If the Wilson were to be considered as a cottage hospital in the way that my hon. Friend and the community suggest, there will be concerns about the costs associated with modernising the building to the standards expected today for clinical services. Such factors must be taken into account by the local NHS when considering the future of the services in the area.

I have listened carefully to the points made by my hon. Friend, who spoke clearly and happily on behalf of her constituents. Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority welcomes her interest in the matter and would be happy to discuss it further.

As far as possible, discussions and decisions must take place at the local level, but we shall take a continued interest in the discussions that my hon. Friend has at that level. I shall be happy to discuss the matter further with her when local discussions have taken place about the development of intermediate care in her area and the Wilson hospital.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 21 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

Ordered,

That Mr. Speaker do issue his Warrant for the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the County Constituency of Ogmore in the room of Sir Raymond Powell, deceased.—*[Ms Armstrong.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

English Heritage

1. **Mr. David Crausby** (Bolton, North-East): What recent meetings she has had with English Heritage about giving children free access to its sites. [26164]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The Government's statement on the historic environment, "A Force for Our Future", which I launched on 13 December last year, made clear our wish to encourage the widest possible access to the country's heritage. We proposed in the statement to consider at the earliest opportunity—and in consultation with the relevant key organisations, which include English Heritage—how the principle of free access for children, which has been such an enormous success in our national museums and galleries, might be extended to the historic environment.

Mr. Crausby: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. After the enormous success of free access to museums, does she agree that completely free admission for children to sites such as Stonehenge will not only have a similar effect on numbers, but, most importantly, encourage more visits with the family?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The issue links our twin objectives of opening access and promoting excellence. There are families throughout the country who have seen for the first time the treasures that we share as a nation, and it is our aim to extend that opportunity to our historic environment.

Regional Theatre (Leicester)

2. **Mr. Jim Marshall** (Leicester, South): What steps the Government are taking to support regional theatre in Leicester. [26165]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): This is a matter for the Arts Council of England and the regional arts boards. The Arts Council last year announced an additional £25 million funding for theatre by 2003–04—an increase of 56 per cent. on current levels, taking the total budget for theatre to £70 million. Over the next two financial years, funding for the Haymarket theatre in Leicester will increase from £992,000 today to £1.36 million in 2003–04—an increase of 37 per cent.

Mr. Marshall: Perhaps my hon. Friend will realise that, with the events that have unfolded in Leicester in the past days, there are other questions that I should like to address to the Government, but I do not think that he is the relevant Minister to answer them. I thank him for his reply, but is he aware that the replacement theatre for the Haymarket, which is due to be built in the St. George's area of the city over the next five years, is to be the centrepiece of a cultural centre in Leicester? Will he give an indication as to the Arts Council's contribution towards the cost of that new theatre? Will he give an undertaking to impress upon the Arts Council the need to ensure funding beyond 2005, so that the cultural centre can be fully developed? Is he also aware of the county council's decision to reduce its annual grant to the theatre by £100,000 per annum—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That question is far too long.

Dr. Howells: I do not know what the Arts Council's projected contribution to the new theatre is likely to be, but I shall impress on it the many points that my hon. Friend made.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will the Minister bear in mind that Leicester is not the only place in Leicestershire that has a theatre? The Concordia theatre in Hinckley has been hugely successful, and is supported by private subscriptions. Will he look favourably on its applications and have a word with the funding organisations? Will he confirm that the Secretary of State has had to call in or write to all the distribution agencies because they have failed to distribute billions of pounds of lottery money? He should deal with that urgently because we believe that we are losing out in the midlands.

Dr. Howells: I congratulate the theatre in the hon. Gentleman's constituency on surviving and flourishing through private subscription, of which I am in favour because it is an important way to fund the arts. I hope that the theatre continues to flourish. However, I am reliably informed that the premise of the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question is not true. There has been no crisis meeting, but we need to monitor matters closely.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): While we are plugging our theatres, will the Minister acknowledge the valuable work of Loughborough town hall in promoting the excellent pantomime that I saw only a few weeks ago? People in Loughborough travel to the Haymarket in Leicester; there is a pantomime there at the moment. Does he agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), who was unfortunately unable to finish his question, that Leicestershire county council should also make a contribution to theatres in the county? Will he join me in condemning it for cutting £100,000 of funding for the future?

Dr. Howells: It is important that the sort of gesture that the Government have made in providing £25 million of investment is echoed throughout the country. Investment in theatre must be good for many reasons. It not only continues one of the great creative traditions of this country but deals with many issues in troubled environments. Theatre does that in a way that nothing else can. We should support it at all levels.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Is not theatre in Leicester exactly the sort of good cause that should receive help from lottery funds? Will the Minister confirm that £3.5 billion of lottery funds is designed for good causes but not yet spent? Will he confirm that the figure is increasing by £30 million every week and that it exceeds the total of the Department's spending for the next three years? When will the Secretary of State sack some of those responsible for that bureaucratic bungling?

Dr. Howells: I do not believe that bureaucratic bungling has occurred. Any unspent money is an effect of the success of the lottery and the hugely imaginative way in which the money has been distributed. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will succeed where others have perhaps not succeeded so well in ensuring that the money is spent and that the underspend is halved by this time next year.

Commonwealth Games

3. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): If she will make a statement on the assistance the Government are giving to the preparations for Manchester's hosting of the Commonwealth games. [26166]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Government announced on 2 July 2001 £30 million in support for the games, in addition to the £10.5 million they had already given towards the costs of the opening and closing ceremonies. Together with Sport England and Manchester city council's funding, that has removed the obstacles to Manchester's delivering a successful games. The strategy is now paying dividends. Planning and preparations are proceeding apace and a real and growing appetite for the games is developing across the country.

Almost 400,000 tickets have already been sold. The games volunteer programme has also been heavily oversubscribed in quality and quantity. We are on course for a good Commonwealth games. That is underlined by the appearance of new sponsors. The latest was Interbrew, which signed last week.

Helen Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that he agrees that the success of the games is vital not only to Manchester but to the north-west region. Will he take steps to ensure that the whole region benefits from the presence of the Commonwealth games by encouraging people who come to Manchester to visit other parts of the north-west? What support will he give the tourism board and local authorities to publicise the attractions of the north-west and draw them to the attention of those visiting the Commonwealth games?

Mr. Caborn: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. A marketing group has already been set up and consists of the major agencies in the north-west—the development agency, the North-West tourist board and the games committee. I am sure that it will examine the issues that my hon. Friend raised. The Queen's jubilee baton relay will pass through Warrington and the whole north-west as it goes round the country. My hon. Friend makes a good point, which I shall refer to the group that has been established to consider such issues.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I hope that private investors will invest in the Commonwealth games; they did when Manchester last bid for the games. However, why should I be encouraged by the examples of the dome, Wembley or Picketts Lock? Why should I believe that the Government would make less of a foul-up of the Commonwealth games than of those three projects?

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the number of sponsors who are backing the Commonwealth games. If he speaks to some of them, he will find enthusiasm and confidence that the games will be successful and credible, and the biggest multi-sporting event this year.

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): There is a growing sense of enthusiasm for the games in Manchester, illustrated by the fact that 10,000 people have now offered their services as volunteers to help to look after the athletes and make sure that the games run smoothly. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in July and August in Manchester, we shall have not only a sparkling international event, but one that is rooted in the pride of local people?

Mr. Caborn: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The figure that he has just given to the House illustrates that the quality and the quantity of volunteers are there now. Even the British media are now getting behind the Commonwealth games; the latest reports have been very encouraging. The only thing that we have to do now is to get the official Opposition on the side of the games, and we shall have a full house. *[Interruption.]* I meant the whole of the official Opposition. Their Front-Bench Members are already behind the games, but some of their hon. Friends on the Back Benches have not been as supportive as they ought to be. I am sure that we shall see them all wearing the badge at the next question time, so that we can show our support for the Commonwealth games in Manchester, which will be a great success.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): The Minister will be aware that, as well as the proposed bid for the Commonwealth games, Scotland is considering bidding for the European championships in 2008. If that bid goes ahead, will his Department support it? What assistance, if any, has he offered in relation to it so far?

Mr. Caborn: The UK Sports Council is discussing that issue. Like all such issues, it will come to the sports cabinet, where all the devolved Administrations and UK Sport get together. The next meeting is in four or five weeks' time.

Athletics

5. **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): If he will make a statement on Government support for athletics in the United Kingdom. [26168]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): UK Athletics is working with Sport England, UK Sport and my Department to create a development plan for the sport, to ensure that resources are provided to get more people involved, to improve the identification and development of talented athletes and to provide better support for our top performers.

Mr. Blunt: What is the Minister's estimate of the forgone economic benefits of the cancelled bid for the 2005 athletics championships? What was the cost of the Sheffield diversion, which the International Amateur Athletics Federation regarded as laughable?

Mr. Caborn: If the hon. Member looks at the Carter report on Picketts Lock, and at the reports produced by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, he will get a good estimate of the cost involved. If one takes into account the cost of the infrastructure and of the stadium, it was about £230 million. Even with that investment, we could not guarantee the type of facilities that had been requested by the IAAF. It is unfortunate that the IAAF did not come and visit the Sheffield site which was offered instead. At the moment, UK Sport and Sport England are investing about £40 million there, as part of the English institute for sport, which will probably give athletics one of the best centres in Europe. Unfortunately, the IAAF turned down the proposal regarding the Sheffield site without even going to look at it.

Regarding the economic benefit, the answer is clear. We did not believe that a £250 million investment from the sports portfolio would have been right, and that is why we made our decision. This is all laid out in Patrick Carter's report.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): While acknowledging the importance of putting money into grass-roots athletics, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important, in the long term, to think about having a venue in which to hold major international athletics events? Will he and the Secretary of State reconsider the option of having a multi-use stadium with retractable seating, along the lines of the Stade de France?

Mr. Caborn: So far as the national stadium is concerned, my hon. Friend will know that the Football Association is dealing with that matter, and will be reporting back to the Government and Sport England. In terms of having another national stadium for athletics, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked for a performance and innovation unit report, which we believe will be started in the not-too-distant future, to look at the question of sports facilities in the round. My hon. Friend knows that such projects are extremely expensive, and we ought to have all parties on board before we embark on any major venture, be it a national stadium, Picketts Lock, the Commonwealth games or anything else. That is the right way forward, and I hope that, when the PIU report comes out, it will be debated here and that we shall find a saner way of moving forward on these major investments.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): When Picketts Lock was cancelled, the Secretary of State said that she would want the money not being spent on it to be diverted to grass-roots athletics. What help can be given to that vital body of volunteers who go to athletics matches around the country as marshals, stewards and judges, usually at their own expense, which runs to uniforms and even starting pistols? What influence can the Minister bring to bear on Sport England to divert some of that money to those vital volunteers?

Mr. Caborn: We are discussing the legacy for athletics with UK Athletics and the hon. Gentleman is right: we hope that that plan will ensure that there is investment at the grass roots. Only yesterday, I had discussions with officials at the north of England Amateur Athletic Association indoor athletics. They are excited about the extra investment in athletics and no doubt they will discuss with UK Athletics a proper investment package that will benefit the grass roots and the officials to whom the hon. Gentleman refers as well as the elite athletes. There is a buzz in British athletics, because this Government are prepared to invest in the whole structure.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): My right hon. Friend has referred to the new stadium at Manchester. Could there be a renegotiation so that it might be used for athletics?

Mr. Caborn: Unfortunately, that could not be, as the agreement is between Manchester City football club and Manchester city council. If we could turn the clock back a number of years, we would probably approach those matters differently. That applies to all parties because mistakes have been made across the board, which is why the performance and innovation unit study is important. If we are to bid confidently for major international events, we must ensure that all parties are signed up before going ahead.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will Ministers make clear to the new members whom they approve for appointment to the Wembley National Stadium board Sport England's recommendation that the revised Wembley plans are for a stadium capable of hosting athletics? Does he agree with that advice? Given the revelation that unspent lottery funds still exceed £3.5 billion and in the light of what he has said this afternoon, can he assure all our leading athletes of the continued funding of the world-class performance programme?

Mr. Caborn: On the first point, we have no responsibility for the Wembley company. That is a matter for the Football Association, as has been made clear from the Dispatch Box on a number of occasions. We will not have blurring at the edges and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear in her statement that it is for the FA to decide who is put on the board. On the

£3.4 billion of undistributed lottery funds, my right hon. Friend is meeting officials of all the major distributors and we intend to start bringing that down to a more manageable figure. Those moneys are held against commitments that have already been made. With the National Audit Office and the Treasury, we are trying to find a better solution and we hope that the money can be spent on the good causes, which is where it ought to be going.

CowParade 2002

6. **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): What discussions she has had with the organisers of CowParade 2002. [26169]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): My hon. Friend deserves a big pat on the back for asking that question. *[Laughter.]* I shall meet the organisers of CowParade at the earliest opportunity. CowParade will give artists of all ages and abilities the chance to submit designs for decorating life-sized fibreglass cows, the best of which, I am told, will be displayed around London streets.

Mr. Pond: As long as the Minister does not accuse me of cows for questions. He is aware that more than 800 artists have already submitted their designs for those full-sized fibreglass works of art, which will soon decorate the streets of London and Gravesend. Is he also aware that the project has won the enthusiastic support of the British Tourist Authority and organisations such as London Underground, the national gallery and Marks and Spencer and that they realise that similar events in Chicago and New York were a major boost to the tourism economy? Is he further aware that, as the project could raise several hundred thousand pounds for the charity Childline, I shall continue to lobby for his support until the cows come home?

Dr. Howells: I welcome the good news that charities will benefit from this event. There is no question about that. I certainly welcome my hon. Friend's promise of lobbying until the cows come home. I assure him that I shall keep the matter udder review.

BBC

7. **Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): What plans the Government have to change the statutory framework for the BBC relating to the provision of digital services. [26170]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The provision of new BBC services is governed by the BBC charter and agreement. Any such services require the approval of the Secretary of State. That arrangement will continue under the proposed new regulatory regime, but the Secretary of State, in considering public service applications from the BBC, will seek formal advice on the market impact from the Office of Communications.

Mr. Bacon: Given the potential impact of the BBC's new digital services on the rest of the broadcasting industry, would not it make more sense for approval for BBC applications to rest with Ofcom, as it is for others players in the industry? The Secretary of State will be aware that many commentators think that that would make more sense. Is she minded to introduce such a change when the main Bill is published?

Tessa Jowell: No, I am not minded to introduce such a change when the main Bill is published. New BBC services are important in giving licence payers value for money, and they act as an incentive to drive the take-up of digital television. In making judgments about those new services, it is important to ensure that proposals are distinctive and do not gratuitously undermine the competition and the growth in the commercial market that we want.

Towards the end of last year, the BBC submitted an application for a range of new services. I approved the new BBC4, the mixed genre arts channel, and two new children's channels because they were evidently distinctive and different from what was available in the commercial market. I rejected its application to establish a young people's channel, because I was not persuaded that it was sufficiently distinctive. It is important to maintain competition and to secure value for the licence payer. In order to oversee value for the licence payer, the Secretary of State should approve new services with advice on the competition effect.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that most people who get digital television receive it through a platform where they pay for other services. One of the strengths of the BBC's digital output is that it is free to view, and it is important that it remains so. Reception via satellite platforms or cable is good, but the main platform for people who want free-to-view digital television is the aerial, and reception via the aerial is still poor and the picture crackles quite a bit. What plans have the Government or the industry to ensure that when people want to access digital television, they do not have to sign up to a package and pay for a load of other channels, and that they can get the BBC free-to-view channels on their own?

Tessa Jowell: The issues that my hon. Friend raises are taken very seriously by the industry, the Department and the broadcasters. It is important that the attractiveness of DTV is improved by securing greater consistency of signal and better quality of picture. As part of the digital action plan, which brings together the Government, broadcasters and the industry, we are testing the limit to which the signal can be increased to improve reception. My hon. Friend makes the important point that people will decide to switch to digital if they can improve their choice of viewing and if the picture quality and services that they can receive are improved. There is still a long way to go, but we have set out a clear framework of Government policy, in partnership with industry.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Has not the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) raised an important point of principle? The BBC is making a substantial investment in digital services—up to £84 million in the first year. That money comes from each and every licence payer in the country. Is it not incumbent on both the Government and the BBC to ensure that all licence payers—irrespective of where they live, and including those in rural areas—gain the benefit of the investment for which they are paying?

Tessa Jowell: Yes, that is important. Government policy—I do not think there is any great controversy about this—is described as "platform-neutral", because we think that people should be able to choose the platforms from which they obtain their digital signals. The BBC's investment in new digital services is important in encouraging people to go digital, and giving them a reason to do so.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I thank my right hon. Friend for mentioning the importance of ensuring that digital services from the BBC, and from other broadcasters for that matter, are available to all; but how can we ensure in the regulation that free, open, non-discriminatory access to audiences is guaranteed for broadcasters? If that is not done, a powerful gateway will be created through which it will be difficult for broadcasters and audiences to make their way.

My right hon. Friend may be interested to know that every sixth-former at Porth junior school claimed this morning to have a personal computer at home, and to enjoy using BBC online digital services.

Tessa Jowell: As I have said, it is important to promote take-up of digital services, and to maximise choice of free-to-air channels. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) could maintain his interest in the question that he asked.

It is important for free-to-air channels to have non-discriminatory access to platforms. As two of my hon. Friends have said, that will ensure that viewers are given maximum choice of free services, and need not subscribe to pay-TV services that they do not want.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Now that an affordable set-top box enabling analogue televisions to receive digital services should soon be available, will the Secretary of State stop dithering and announce that the switchover to digital will take place on a single date, 1 January 2006?

Tessa Jowell: I welcomed the announcement at the end of last week of new technology that will deal with one of the obstacles to the switchover. We have made it absolutely clear, however, that the process needs to be possible in terms of technology, desirable in terms of programme choice, and what people actually want. So far, one in three households has access to digital services. A job of persuasion and conversion must be done, but it is not something that Government can do; people must decide that they want this for their own and their families' viewing entertainment. That is why our policy remains that, subject to three rather than five tests, the switchover should take place between 2006 and 2010. That is still our intention.

Independent Television Commission

8. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If she will make a statement on the recent work of the Independent Television Commission. [26171]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): The Independent Television Commission, as an independent regulator, continues to fulfil its regulatory duties of licensing and monitoring commercial television services under the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Minister join me in praising the ITC's work, and hoping that it will play an active role in the formation of Ofcom?

The Minister knows as well as I do that, at times of economic uncertainty, the first thing to happen is a fall in advertising revenues. He will also know that ITV's net advertising receipts have fallen by about 12 per cent. this year, and that, if ITV is to maintain and improve the quality of its programming, the ITC must be given freedom to allow Carlton and Granada to combine. What consideration has he given to that?

Dr. Howells: We have given every consideration to that. I have discussed the matter with the hon. Gentleman on previous occasions. We should not tackle this matter piecemeal—it should be part of a properly structured communications Bill that we put before the House—but I understand what he is saying. The ITC does a very good job in all respects. Some special difficulties have hit the independent television companies, especially over the past 12 months. However, they made some very large profits in the 24 months or so that preceded that. They are pretty tough companies which have been in the business a long time and know that there are some downs as well as a lot of ups.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Why is it the policy of the Department so far to insist that the ITV companies offer their programmes to the satellite sector, without insisting on a must-carry policy for the satellite sector, which clearly creates difficulties in bargaining power between the two sectors? Can the Minister explain the Department's policy and whether he has a mind to change it?

Dr. Howells: I know that the Conservative party has become very hands on and statist in the past week or so, but it is not my business to tell the ITV companies, still less Sky, what the nature of essentially commercial contracts between those two organisations should be.

Tourism

10. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): If she will make a statement on the impact of the events of 11 September on tourism. [26174]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The terrorist attacks of 11 September have had a damaging impact on many tourism businesses, particularly businesses in London that rely on high-spending north American visitors, but some parts of the country have reported a very good autumn. There are signs that we are now in the very early stages of a recovery.

Mr. Hoban: Given that those problems come hard on the heels of the crisis in the tourism sector following foot and mouth disease, is it not time for the English Tourism

Council to be given the permanent marketing role that its counterparts in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have?

Tessa Jowell: Certainly, we want more marketing of Britain, and more professional marketing of Britain. We are working closely with the British Tourist Authority. On Wednesday, we will join it at the launch of its marketing campaign targeted at the seven top markets, north American and European. There is a joint initiative between my Department and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to promote tourism in the countryside, and there is the initiative of the London tourism action group to promote London as a tourism destination.

We have asked the English Tourism Council to look at diverting resources in the short term to marketing England. That builds on the excellent work that is already being done by the regional tourism authorities. In relation to the key part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we are discussing with the English Tourism Council whether a marketing role will be given to it in the longer run.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in respect of damage to tourism, few counties were more adversely affected than Cumbria following the atrocities in the United States of America and the disaster of foot and mouth disease? Is she aware that 2002 is the international year of mountains: a celebration of mountains, their ecology and environment and the communities that have to work and earn their livings in mountainous areas? Is she aware that the Cumbrian mountain festival will be launched in spring this year—a serious attempt to bring a resurgence of support for tourism in all its aspects in the Lake District national park and surrounding areas in Cumbria? Will she ask her officials to engage with those planning the festival to ensure that her Department maximises its support for those important and exciting proposals for Cumbria, and that, in addition to what I am sure will be words of encouragement, we get some tangible financial support too?

Tessa Jowell: We will certainly ensure that the Department provides all possible support to the international year of mountains. My hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting, himself a distinguished mountaineer, will be present at the launch.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's advocacy for Cumbria in what have been terribly difficult times for the tourism and farming industries there. We will provide all possible help to get tourists back to one of the most beautiful parts of our country. As 2002 is not only the year of mountains but the Queen's golden jubilee, we hope that that will be a tremendous draw for visitors from north America and other parts of the world who have simply been too afraid to travel in the intervening months.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): The Secretary of State will be aware that tourism is vital to my constituency, the location of Ashdown forest and the homes of A. A. Milne, Conan Doyle and, nearby, Rudyard Kipling. Is she also aware that the recovery of tourism is seriously hampered by the fact that we have no Sunday rail service, so people trying to come down for the weekend cannot get home until Monday morning? Will she ask her officials to deal directly with Go Via, to encourage it to offer a Sunday service, making her worthy words about tourism become reality?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting is meeting the relevant Ministers from other Departments to ensure that investment and policy work in concert towards the objective of promoting tourism, advertising what Britain has to offer and ensuring that one of the most successful sectors of our economy thrives after what has been a very difficult 18 months. The short answer is yes: those discussions will take place with other Departments to ensure that we work as one Government to promote tourism.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the financial packages that the Chancellor made available in the aftermath of both foot and mouth and 11 September to hotels and businesses in the rural economy and those who rely on tourism? Has she compared the figures against the increased number of flights abroad from certain airports such as Stansted? How do we ensure that more people remain in this country and benefit from our tourist attractions rather than going abroad?

Tessa Jowell: The investment that the Chancellor made in increasing the British Tourist Authority's marketing budget has been successful in bringing back some tourists, especially from western Europe. There is still, however, a major problem with north America. Our aim must be to encourage more people to come here from abroad and more people to stay here for their holidays, not out of patriotism alone but because there are so many good places to see, and to ensure that the tourism on offer is of consistently high quality. The Government have a part to play in that.

The industry is well aware of the aspects that need reform. It is important to get rid of outdated practices and raise standards. We are working with the industry on that. That will be the long haul, but we must also seize the short-term opportunities, such as the international year of mountains and the Queen's golden jubilee, in a very focused campaign to get north American tourists back to Britain.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I remind the House of my previous declarations.

The Secretary of State's reply makes it clear that she accepts that there are higher costs, in particular for security, for passengers coming into this country, but is she aware that the air passenger fund set up in 1975 has now run out of money and that the Civil Aviation Authority is anxious, and wants primary legislation, to introduce a levy to be charged to passengers to insure against the collapse of any travel companies, package holiday firms, tour operators or charter companies, and to enable passengers stranded abroad to be brought home? Will she stop the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions dithering by putting pressure on him to legislate before the peak summer holiday period, to enable those passengers to be brought home?

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Lady's question is one for the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—but of course, in the spirit of the commitment that I gave earlier, we are concerned about the impact of a range of Government policies on tourism. Where there is clearly a detrimental impact on tourism, we shall raise that with the relevant Secretary of State.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Does my right hon. Friend agree that despite the excellent work done by the London tourism council and the whole of the tourism industry within London, much more still needs to be done to link up with other tourist authorities throughout the United Kingdom, not only so that visitors are attracted to London, but so that London is genuinely perceived as the gateway to the whole United Kingdom?

Tessa Jowell: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend; that is a weakness that the industry itself now recognises. Under the leadership of the CBI, the Tourism Alliance, which brings together many of the key industry players, has now been established. Fragmentation, leading to low levels of skill, poor value for money and lack of adequate data, has been a fundamental weakness in the tourism industry. If anything beneficial is to come from the awful circumstances created for that industry by foot and mouth and the terrorist attacks of 11 September, it will be the focus on modernisation and building the capacity to be a profitable tourism industry sustainable in the long term, with modern technology and modern working practices. That is what will bring the visitors back and keep them here.

Gaming Review

11. **Mr. Nick Gibb** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): If she will make a statement on the gaming review. [26175]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): We published the report of the independent gambling review body—the Budd report—in July last year. We are now considering all the comments that we have received on it; there have been about 2,200, the vast majority of which have come from the voluntary clubs about jackpot and gaming machines. We are now considering those responses, and we will make an announcement in the near future.

Mr. Gibb: Is the Minister aware that the gaming review's recommendation that local authorities should ensure that gambling is the primary purpose of premises licensed for gambling, would effectively wipe out amusement parks in small seaside towns such as Littlehampton and Bognor? Will he overrule that recommendation?

Mr. Caborn: We have not given any decisions on any of the recommendations, but the hon. Gentleman knows that I have met a number of representatives from the seaside resorts and have listened to them carefully. We have also received their written submissions. We shall give those due consideration, and will announce our conclusions when we make the full announcement on the Budd report.

Festivals (Bristol)

12. **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): What plans she has to visit festivals taking place in Bristol this year. [26176]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I would be happy to consider invitations to visit Bristol in the near future. My hon. Friend knows that I recently attended the "Brief Encounters" film festival in that fine city—and that I was subsequently serenaded into another great cultural event by those invaluable chroniclers of contemporary west of England life, the Wurzels.

Dr. Naysmith: I thank the Minister for that encouraging reply; I am not sure whether the Wurzels see things exactly as he does, but it has all calmed down now. My hon. Friend knows that he will receive a warm welcome in Bristol when he comes. Having seen a list of the cultural events that will take place in Bristol this year, does he agree that it provides a good platform for our bid to become European city of culture in 2008?

Dr. Howells: The list of 18 festivals in Bristol is mighty, and I look forward to seeing the "Animated Encounters" short film festival, which promises to be good. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can of course make no statement that would jeopardise the bid of any city to be the European city of culture. As Cardiff is within sight of Bristol, we would be entering dangerous territory there. That said, Bristol has many high-quality festivals. It can certainly make a serious bid, and I am sure that it will.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Internet Voting

32. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the commission's plans for internet voting. [26154]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The Electoral Commission is an independent body and the remit of the Speaker's Committee is to approve its estimates and five-year plan, not to take decisions that fall within the commission's statutory responsibilities. I understand from the chairman, however, that the commission is co-funding research to evaluate the feasibility of introducing electronic voting, including internet voting. The commission will also evaluate electronic voting pilot schemes for use at local elections in May. Any such schemes will be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Chapman: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that online voting is commensurate with modern lifestyles and that its use might enfranchise those, especially the young, who have felt disengaged from the process? How does he intend the pilots to be evaluated and measured so that appropriate lessons may be learned?

Mr. Beith: As I have said, that falls to the Electoral Commission, not the Speaker's Committee. In order properly to evaluate the schemes, the commission intends not to co-pilot them. It will be involved in evaluation, and it is clear that a lot of technical and other issues will be raised. The commission has not yet formed a view on whether electronic voting schemes of various schemes will work well; that is the purpose of the pilots.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): At present, it is difficult to vote. One must go to a polling station or receive a vote through the postal system. Even for the latter, verification by an independent person is required to show that the right person has voted. What verification will there be in electronic systems?

Mr. Beith: That is precisely the type of issue that the commission is considering in order to establish whether electronic voting can make it easier to vote while still giving those who take part in the electoral process the assurance that the process is safe and sound. When the pilots are laid before Parliament, hon. Members will be able to judge them for themselves.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): It is even more difficult to vote by internet or any other method if a person is not on the electoral register. If the commission is to consider voting through the internet, will it consider whether it might be possible to get more people on to the register through the internet?

Mr. Beith: That is certainly the type of issue that the commission is considering.

Postal Voting

33. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): What review the Commission plans to carry out of the operation of postal voting in general elections. [26155]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The commission stated in its statutory report on the 2001 general election that it intended to assess the impact of extending the availability of postal voting, including any implications for electoral fraud. I understand from the chairman of the commission that that review is expected to report by the autumn. A statistical paper providing data, constituency by constituency, on postal voting at the general election was published last week. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Syms: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that encouraging response. We were all happy that it was easier to obtain postal votes at the general election, but there was some concern, because the date was so late, that many people did not receive their ballots in time to return them. There was also concern about fraud in the system. When the right hon. Gentleman reviews the budget for the commission, will he give that area more consideration?

Mr. Beith: I am sure that the commission will be grateful for the hon. Gentleman's encouragement, particularly as regards its budget. The Speaker's Committee will certainly take that into account. I know from experience that the issue of late ballots is a difficult one, although I was surprised, while preparing for today's Questions, to read evidence that some postal votes were posted to Australia and returned in time for the poll.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that, although the decision to extend postal voting last year was a very welcome simplification of the system, it was announced very late and many of the applications were submitted very late for the councils to deal with and the returning officers to send out the forms? Will the fact that people can apply for postal votes now be made much clearer on the registration forms? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that we are watching very carefully to ensure that the abuses that have taken place in the past with very much increased postal voting are not repeated in the future?

Mr. Beith: I well remember the problem of last-minute arrangements and the commission is consulting acting returning officers on many of the things that happened at the last general election, including the extent and nature of any fraud that took place, so those issues are well under consideration.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new, additional responsibilities. Following the question asked by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), first, will my right hon. Friend and his colleagues consider telling people all the options available, with all the dates, on the paperwork that is put through their doors when an election is called, so that they can leave it as late as they wish to use their votes? Secondly, will he consider having a pilot scheme which involves going back to the people—possibly in urban and rural constituencies won by each party—who did not vote at the last general election to ask them why they did not vote and what would have made them more likely to do so?

Mr. Beith: Establishing why people, particularly young people, did not vote at previous elections and what their attitude to voting is certainly an issue that the commission takes seriously. Going back to those who were recorded as not having voted would raise some rather difficult questions, as my hon. Friend would understand. His suggestion about what information can be made available when the information is first sent out and the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) are useful, and I shall certainly pass them on to the commission.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Church Repairs

34. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church

Commissioners, what recent representations he has received on the reduction of VAT on church repairs through a grants equivalent. [26156]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I have not received any particular representations following the successful launch of the listed places of worship grant scheme.

Miss McIntosh: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that English Heritage is planning to reduce its grant by the amount that the recipient of those grants receives from the Treasury? Is he not alarmed, as I am, by that development? Will he make representations to the Treasury to ensure that that unwelcome development does not continue and become an accepted practice? Will he continue to make representations stating that we should seek to reduce VAT for church repairs under the directive?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her support, and may I say how pleased I was to see her on the Front Bench a few moments ago? As she knows, the scheme provides a grant that equates to part of the VAT paid, rather than being a reduction in the VAT rate. She mentions the on-going discussions in the European Union, and the European directive on a formal reduction in the rate. Those discussions are continuing. I will ensure that the Treasury is made aware that English Heritage is withdrawing or reducing some of its grant.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I welcome the scheme. Any way that we can reduce Church costs in that way is welcome. Will my hon. Friend estimate what sort of expenditure is likely to occur in the foreseeable future? Is there any evidence that repair work has been held back, awaiting that decision, so that there may well be a quick rush in the first year or two? If so, is the scheme likely to be cash-limited, in which case a number of applications may well be turned down because there is a closed list?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. There is no real indication that schemes to repair churches have been held back or withdrawn, given the fact that, of course, the VAT directive is some way off and is being modified, but the total cost of repair work in the Church of England amounts to £120 million and the VAT on the listed building work is about £10 million, so bringing the Government scheme into action as quickly as possible will avoid the problem to which my hon. Friend refers and help us to get a move on with church repairs.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Given the figures that the hon. Gentleman mentions—the VAT on repairs cost the Church £10 million—will he or the Church Commissioners strongly press the Treasury to obtain a derogation from the sixth directive on VAT on the basis that a reduced or zero rate of VAT should be applied to the repair of community buildings?

Mr. Bell: Many of those representations have already been made in the European Union, but, as the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), will know, they did not receive an echo back. That is why the directive is being considered with a view to its being overhauled and brought into line more with the hon. Gentleman's request.

Volcanic Eruptions (Democratic Republic of Congo)

3.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the volcanic eruptions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Last Thursday at about 10 o'clock in the morning, the Nyiragongo volcano near Goma in the DRC erupted. That evening the quantity and rate of lava flow from the volcano increased, and further fissures opened up in Goma itself. Much of the town was engulfed and destroyed.

Early reports suggest that about 100 people have lost their lives, but the death toll may rise further. Hundreds of thousands of people have had to flee their homes. Many crossed to Rwanda in the east to seek shelter in and around the town of Gisenyi. Others fled west in the direction of Sake inside the DRC. Some who were trapped in the town and under threat from the heat and from noxious gasses have been helped to safety.

The volcano continues to erupt and the whole area, including Gisenyi, is subject to continuing earth tremors. There are also concerns that the gasses disturbed—especially deep in Lake Kivu—could threaten the lives of civilians who remain in or return to the area.

In spite of these dangers, many of those displaced are now moving back into Goma itself. Those affected naturally want to find out the extent of the destruction of their homes and property and to see what the chances of returning may be. It also appears that many would rather be in the DRC than seek refuge in Rwanda. Irrespective of where people choose to locate themselves, there is an urgent need for water and sanitation, health care, shelter and food. Cholera is a particularly serious threat.

The response of the international community and of the Rwandan Government has been as follows. The Rwandan Government have already provided assistance to civilians trapped by the lava flows. The United Nations has redeployed resources from the DRC and staff from Geneva to lead the relief operation. MONUC, the United Nations peacekeeping operation in DRC, has made its logistical capacity available. The International Committee of the Red Cross and major international non-governmental organisations based in the area are already working to help those affected. The major relief agencies have a presence and a capacity on both sides of the Rwanda-DRC border, and will be able to offer support where it is most needed, although the challenge is and will remain considerable.

Appeals have been made to donors for help. The Department for International Development has set aside £2 million to help fund the relief operation through Oxfam and Merlin, a UK emergency medical response agency. The British Red Cross will also respond to the UN appeal. Oxfam has been asked by the UN to take on the role of providing water and sanitation, and a flight with equipment and supplies left RAF Manston on Saturday evening. This was paid for by DFID funding. Merlin will provide health care to those affected. The organisation has considerable experience in the DRC and a large team of Congolese professionals already present on the ground. The Red Cross will continue to deliver emergency help in Goma and Gisenyi.

As the situation changes, DFID will continue to provide support to agencies already on the ground and we stand ready to consider further help as necessary. Earlier this year, the International Committee of the Red Cross received £5.5 million from DFID for its programme in the DRC, including a significant element for humanitarian assistance.

The two countries involved have already suffered a great deal from the conflict that has affected the region. This human catastrophe is another burden for the people of Goma to bear and I am sure that the whole House will wish to express its sympathies to all who have been affected and who have lost loved ones.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I thank the Minister for faxing a copy of the statement to my office. That was extremely helpful.

I express our condolences to the many families who have lost loved ones in this natural disaster and welcome the £2 million announced in immediate aid to the victims of the volcano. There is a question, however, about the flow of refugees. If they are now returning to Goma, as reports suggest, will the aid be in the right place at the right time?

The return of people to Goma makes us ask about the state of the refugee camps in Rwanda and people's experiences of them. Can the Minister comment on the number of people who have arrived in refugee camps and on the standards within them? As many people have decided to return home, what is being done to provide aid to them in their homes, if they still have them, given the lack of water or electricity in Goma? We commend Oxfam on being asked by the United Nations to help with water sanitisation, but is the Minister satisfied that adequate measures are in hand to improve water sanitisation, given that both water treatment plants in Goma have been destroyed?

The redeployment of the peacekeeping staff, to whom the Minister referred, to logistical support prompts the question of how best to uphold the rule of law. Can he confirm the reports of Congolese troops taking part in the looting? Does he agree that the compounded disaster of the petrol station shows that more measures need to be taken to protect the population who have decided to remain in Goma?

Lessons learned from previous humanitarian intervention in these areas show the need for better co-ordination between donors and the numerous agencies, especially in the areas of civil conflict. It was not totally clear from the statement who is responsible for co-ordinating that and what role, if any, the Government of the DRC will have, given that that is a rebel-controlled area.

The volcanic eruption was, to a certain extent, predictable. Is the new technology for measuring long episodes of seismic activity feasible in the long term, to improve our response to such disasters? Volcanologists warn of the very real danger of carbon dioxide poisoning where the pockets of gas are released by lava flows into the lakes. Has any measurement of that risk taken place? Finally, it is reported that the Foreign Secretary will visit the country later this week. What role will he have in the humanitarian effort?

The region around Goma has suffered so many manmade problems that this natural disaster must be particularly hard to bear. An effective humanitarian response can at least prevent the preventable aspects of the disaster, and we should refine our model for working in volcanic regions from the experiences of those who work to mitigate the impact today.

Hilary Benn: I thank the hon. Lady for her response and I shall try to deal with her points.

I understand that long-term monitoring has been undertaken on the volcano and that a team was due in the area just after the time when it exploded. It is obviously difficult to predict volcanic eruptions with great certainty. However, a team of vulcanologists, a geochemist and a seismologist is in the area. The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the concern about the rapid release of CO_2 and methane gas and the threat that that poses for the population, especially those at the lowest levels along the side of Lake Kivu.

On the conditions of camps in Rwanda, the hon. Lady will be aware that the Government of Rwanda announced their intention to establish a number of camps to accommodate those who at that stage had moved into Rwanda in the direction of Gisenyi. Given the substantial movement of people that appears to be taking place back into Goma, clearly the overwhelming priority is to ensure that relief and support and provided in the places where people now find themselves.

I share the hon. Lady's concern about the need to do more on the provision of water. According to an initial assessment in the latest situation report by the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the water intake stations on Lake Kivu and for the Goma power plant were undamaged by the eruption. However, the distribution systems, pipes and wires have suffered extensive damage, and more will have to be done to provide for people's water needs, wherever they happen to be.

I am afraid that I cannot confirm the reports about those who may have been involved in looting, but clearly there is concern about security. In the midst of such a catastrophe one would be concerned about security anyway, but the history of conflict in the region adds to that concern. It is important that all who have been party to that conflict pay attention to the need to support those who are suffering in the current emergency.

Overall co-ordination of the relief effort is the responsibility of the UN assistant emergency co-ordinator, who arrived in Kigali the afternoon of 20 January. The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the fact that the Government of the DRC are not in control of the area; it falls under the control of the Rassemblement Congolais Democratique, or RCD. It was questionable whether there was an authority in the town before the catastrophe, and that is much more difficult to determine now, but every effort is being made to ensure that those who can contribute to the relief effort are working together as effectively as possible. As I said in my statement, however, the situation is extremely difficult, and there is a large scale of need to be responded to.

As the hon. Lady will be aware, the Foreign Secretary is visiting the region. I am certain that he will take the opportunity to discuss with all those who are assisting in the relief effort ways in which we might be able to help further to relieve the suffering of those who have been affected.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As the leader of, I think, the only Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Zaire, as it then was, may I ask a rather pointed question? Is the money going to the agencies? It was the experience of that delegation that many of the provincial governors whom we met were people of great quality, but heaven help us if the money is simply sent to Kinshasa or elsewhere. Can the Minister confirm that it will go straight where it is needed?

Secondly, will the Minister pursue the question of the pipes? The carbon situation of Lake Kivu is obviously crucial, and we can do something about it. Do we have the expertise, which is available in this country, to make an assessment of what is happening to the Kivu gases, particularly CO_2?

It may be inappropriate, but may I ask a third question? At the Edinburgh international book festival I chaired the meeting for Jane Goodall. The area affected by the catastrophe is one with important world-class wildlife, including not only chimpanzees but much other fauna. Human casualties obviously take precedence, but what is being done, if anything, about the environment?

Hilary Benn: I am happy to confirm to my hon. Friend that aid is going directly to the agencies, because it is most important that we should assist those on the ground. In Goma, Merlin and Médecins sans Frontières already have two clinics operating. One was opened at the weekend, when there were about 6,000 people waiting for assistance. The Save the Children Fund is already distributing non-food relief. The World Food Programme has delivered two trucks of food today and plans more—six trucks are on their way. That is an incomplete account of what is happening because information is coming through slowly, but it demonstrates that work is already under way to help people in Goma. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is most important to send aid direct to the agencies.

Secondly, further assessment will need to be undertaken of the geology and chemistry of the interaction between the lava flows, the lake, CO_2 and the other issues to which my hon. Friend referred. I will consider his suggestion that we investigate whether any expertise available in the UK might be of assistance. I can tell him that the results of a Lake Kivu water sample are expected later today.

Finally, my hon. Friend is right to raise the impact on wildlife. There is concern about the broader impact of the volcanic flow on the countryside surrounding Goma as well as the disruption in Goma itself. Estimates suggest that 30 to 40 per cent. of the town has been destroyed. However, we need to deal with things in order of priority; I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises that the first priority must be to help people who are currently living in the most difficult circumstances.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I too welcome the statement and thank the Minister for allowing a copy of it to be made available to me. I join the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) in sending sympathy to the people of that area; I know a little bit about it, having been to Rwanda. Considering the civil war that has been raging in the area for many years, I cannot think of a greater hell than the one that those people are experiencing. It is difficult to believe what they must be going through and what they have gone through.

I congratulate the Minister and the Department on their incredibly swift response. Before I had even put pen to paper myself, the Government seemed to be making a

[Dr. Jenny Tonge]

response. I congratulate them on that and on making supplies available to non-governmental organisations to get to Rwanda, apparently within about 48 hours of the news breaking. I particularly welcome the emphasis on water purification, because cholera is a danger in that situation.

With people fleeing from Gisenyi back into Goma, how will the aid flow? Will our Government provide more money to the rebel-held territory of Goma and the NGOs operating there to help the refugees coming back, or will we rely on some sort of transfer from Rwanda? I am unclear about how that aid will flow. Will the Minister give a little more detail about disaster preparedness, which we are all keen to talk about in the House? Does he feel that we were prepared for this disaster, and what effect will the whole thing have on the course of the civil war in that area?

Finally, as a veteran of the disaster in Montserrat, following the eruption of the Soufriere volcano and the lessons learned then, could the Minister comment on the scientists' ability to detect what will happen in future in that region? Many hundreds of thousands of people in the area are in danger from further eruptions, ground splits and all sorts of natural events that could happen in the next few weeks. Is the Minister satisfied that we are investing enough in vulcanology? Is the appropriate equipment available to send to that area, and is the security available to protect it so that, hopefully, we can prevent lives from being lost?

Hilary Benn: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words about the speed of the DFID response; I will make sure that they are passed on to the officials responsible. As she and the whole House will be aware, sadly we have had a lot of experience of having to respond to emergencies. My first experience, when there was an earthquake in Peru shortly after I was appointed Minister, demonstrated clearly to me that well organised systems are in place to ensure that we respond in the most practical way by directing money at people with resources on the ground; they can deliver help to those who need it as quickly as possible.

We will, of course, give help to those agencies which can offer support in the places where people find themselves; we clearly need to do that. As we have seen in the past two or three days, the great movement of population one way now appears to have become a movement of the population back into Goma, which creates considerable challenges for the aid agencies. I am confident that in time they will be able to respond, but that movement makes circumstances more difficult, for reasons that the hon. Lady will well understand.

As for whether I am satisfied that everything was in place, the honest truth is that in such circumstances there are always lessons to be learned. To some extent, these eruptions are unpredictable. As I said, I understand that monitoring was occurring, but I am advised that one can never entirely predict when a volcano may erupt. I am sure that those with responsibility for that monitoring will reflect on the experience of the past few days and see what more can and might be done.

As I said with regard to the impact on the civil war, I hope that those involved will focus their attention on helping the people who have been affected by this terrible catastrophe. The concerns expressed by the hon. Lady and other hon. Members about the added impact of security worries on the ability to deliver aid effectively merely demonstrate the force of the argument that the region needs stability above all else, so it is in everybody's interests—not least those currently affected by the catastrophe—that the Lusaka peace process should be taken forward.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I add my congratulations to those of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on the speed with which the Department responded to the disaster. I believe that the first aeroplane took off at the weekend.

Is not the situation in Goma perilous not only because of the potential for further eruptions or splits in the side of the mountain, but equally because of toxic gases? Are people attempting to return because they do not know of the dangers that may await them, as they do not trust the information that is being delivered to them? Is not there a case for suggesting that the international aid effort should address the issue? In the light of the terrible use to which radio was put in Rwanda in the past, could the BBC World Service be incorporated in the effort, to ensure that up-to-the-minute, reliable and trustworthy information is delivered to the refugees?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. In these circumstances, people are torn between concern about what they may find if they return to their homes and a great desire to see what has happened, especially after one group has begun to return and word has been spread saying, "We managed to make it back, others may follow." With the best will in the world, while I entirely accept her point about the need for proper information on the risks and dangers to be made available, I point out that it is not always easy to persuade people that they should stay where they are.

Today's situation report from OCHA suggests that the seismic situation may be improving, as the last major tremor was reported early on 20 January. However, as I said earlier, there is serious concern about the possibility of the gases having a toxic effect, especially for those on the lowest lying land down by the lake. I shall take away my hon. Friend's point about whether it would be possible to do more to persuade people to have regard to the genuine concern about those dangers, while recognising that if people choose to move in very large numbers, as we have seen them do over the past couple of days, it can be very difficult to persuade them to do otherwise.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I too pay tribute to the rapid response of the Department for International Development and to the fact that it is making use of experienced NGOs in the region, which is clearly the right way forward. Although we all agree that this has been a spectacular natural disaster that has again focused the world's attention on the region, does the Minister not agree that the real disasters faced by the people of the DRC and that region have been the years, decades and generations of civil conflict, insecurity and corruption? Will he do all that he can, especially in view of the Prime Minister's personal passion and the Foreign Secretary's presence in the region, to ensure that our Government seek to use the events as a catalyst to give further momentum to the peace process going on there? Is it not right that while natural disasters come and go, we must strive to ensure that peace and good governance are established for these lovely people? It is no more than they deserve.

Hilary Benn: I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Gentleman. As he will know, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited the DRC towards the end of the summer. Britain has been actively involved in trying to get precisely the message that he articulates across to those who have been parties to the conflict. As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, we are contributing in several practical ways through supporting the national dialogue and providing a radio infrastructure to enable the Congolese people to have information about both the peace process and the dialogue. That links with the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) made. We are also giving various other forms of support, to provide humanitarian assistance to those who have suffered through the conflict.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman completely that, in the longer term, the greatest contribution to helping the people of the DRC and Rwanda will be finding a resolution to the conflict that has scarred the region for so long.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I appreciate my hon. Friend's comments about the difficulty of getting aid into an area where there are vast population movements one way and then the other. Are not people going back to Goma more quickly than they might otherwise do through genuine fear of the way in which they might be treated in Rwanda? Have any contingency plans been drawn up in the case of reports from Rwanda of human rights abuses? Action should be taken quickly so that no further destabilisation occurs.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to anxieties that have clearly played a part in leading the people who initially moved to Rwanda to return to the DRC. We have received no reports of the sort about which she expressed anxiety. I suspect that we would first hear about them when people moved back to the DRC in even larger numbers—that would be the quickest response to such anxieties.

As I said in answer to earlier questions, we need to be guided by people's decisions, notwithstanding advice, about where they choose to locate. They will move to a place where they feel safest even when an objective assessment does not confirm its safety. In those circumstances, the overwhelming priority is to ensure that the aid agencies that are active on the ground and gearing up are able to support people wherever they choose to go.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Having visited Goma some years ago and climbed the volcano when it was dormant, I want to make two suggestions. First, it would be unwise to concentrate the aid effort on the side of the Congo that is close to Burundi because of the terrific problems of ethnic strife to which other hon. Members have referred.

Secondly, I want to take up the point that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) made about animals. Does the Minister know that one of the most important, world-famous gorilla colonies is located on the slopes of the volcano? Many wildlife specialists have tried to save it over the years. It is likely that some disruption has occurred there, that poachers may move in or that many animals have been killed. Will he bear that in mind? Will he also bear in mind the fact that Twycross zoo, in my constituency, has offered to take any orphan gorillas if they are flown to Leicestershire?

Hilary Benn: I am grateful for those two points. The hon. Gentleman is right about the need to ensure that the aid is provided on both sides of the border so that those who suffer in the emergency do not feel that they have to move to one place or another to get access to it.

I am grateful for the information about the potential impact on the gorillas that live on the south side of the volcano. An assessment of the full impact of the catastrophe will clearly take time. However, I shall ensure that the offer that the hon. Gentleman has conveyed is passed on to those who are looking into the matter.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Like others, I welcome the statement. Will the Minister tell us a little more about the precise use of the £2 million of aid? Is it all for short-term use? Further to the question of the hon. Member for Linlithgow, will he confirm that all the money will go the aid agencies and none of it to the central or regional governments of the Congo or Rwanda?

Hilary Benn: I am happy to confirm that DFID money is going directly to NGOs or through the United Nations appeal. As the hon. Gentleman will know from the statement, Oxfam has a specific responsibility for water and sanitation. Relief supplies went out on the plane on Saturday night. Merlin plans to establish several clinics, and, with Médecins sans Frontières, has already done that in Goma. Save the Children is providing food relief, as is the World Food Programme.

The money is intended to support agencies in establishing a presence on the ground as quickly as possible to meet immediate emergency needs: water, first of all; sanitation, because we are concerned about the potential impact of disease; and food and shelter. In the medium term, all those involved will need to consider how they can help in the reconstruction of Goma, if that is possible. Clearly, that will depend on the outcome of further assessments that will need to be made in due course, when we know the full impact of this terrible catastrophe.

British Detainees (Guantanamo Bay)

4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I should like to make a statement on the British nationals detained at Guantanamo Bay; my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A team of British officials visited Guantanamo between 17 and 20 January and saw the three British detainees. We received a full report this morning. The team asked the detainees questions about their identity, nationality and welfare. The officials' report confirms that the three are British and that they are all in good physical health. During lengthy discussions, they spoke without inhibition. None complained of any ill treatment. None said that they had any medical condition requiring treatment. Medical facilities are available in the compound. All three asked for messages to be passed to their next of kin, which we have undertaken to do. The identity of one of the men, Feroz Abbasi, is already in the public domain. It is not our intention to reveal the identities of the other men, pending contact with their families.

The International Committee of the Red Cross now has a permanent presence at Guantanamo Bay, and ICRC officials have access to the detainees at any time. The detainees are free to conduct religious observances. They have prayer mats, and calls to prayer are broadcast over the Camp X-Ray public address system. They are given as much drinking water as they want, three meals a day and food that complies with their religious practice if they require it.

During the visit, our officials received full co-operation from the camp's commander, who said that the more lurid allegations about torture and sensory deprivation were completely false. The recent pictures of detainees featured in the media were taken on their arrival at the base, when security needs were paramount. The House should not forget that we are talking about some of the most dangerous men in the world, who have in the past displayed murderous and suicidal tendencies—often both together.

Our officials report that, as the number of detainees grows, there will be a need for more scope for exercise, and every effort is being made to provide all inmates who want one with a copy of the Koran.

Conditions at Guantanamo Bay have attracted a great deal of parliamentary and media interest. On the basis of the detailed report that I have seen today, I am satisfied that the accusations were premature and that the detainees are being treated in line with international humanitarian norms, in conditions in which security is paramount.

We are fully satisfied with the co-operation that we have had from the United States authorities on this issue. We and the Americans are well aware that we will be judged by a higher standard than the Taliban and al-Qaeda. On the basis of the report that I have seen today, I can confirm that these standards are being met.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Given the unusually short notice that we received of this statement, may I ask the House to accept the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) for not being here to respond?

We—and, I am sure, the entire House—expect the highest standards of treatment to be accorded to the prisoners. The current interest in them as they are held by the US military in Cuba has largely been provoked by photographs that perhaps represent a PR setback, but that, it seems, do not reflect the full truth. We are pleased to learn that the prisoners—in particular, those from the United Kingdom—have no serious complaints about their treatment. They are not suffering the abuse of their human rights that many commentators have asserted; that assertion now appears to have been unfounded. Indeed, in considering that issue we must remember that the very fact that our free press can publish the pictures, ask questions and express opinions is an enduring testimony to the free, democratic society in which we live and which we are fighting to defend.

As the Minister said, we should be under no illusions. The people who have been transported to Cuba are, more likely than not, highly dangerous terrorists who are part of a network that has shown utter contempt for human life and who have raped and tortured women and innocent civilians, subjugated their own people and even denied those whom they pretended to govern access to life-saving humanitarian aid.

The prisoners probably have information about their organisation and they could have information on the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden. We must remember that, by extracting it, we could prevent terrorist outrages and the loss of more innocent lives. If all their human rights had been removed, and if they had been brutally treated when coalition forces captured them in Afghanistan, they probably would not be in Cuba now. There is no reason to suspect that they are likely to receive any worse or harsher treatment than that which they received on capture.

I am grateful to the Minister for his statement, but I would welcome clarification of a number of areas. Does he have any indication of the circumstances in which the British prisoners were apprehended? What jurisdiction do they fall under? Is there any case for bringing them back to this country for trial? What charges are likely to be filed against them?

Does the Minister have any specific information on whether the detained Britons are al-Qaeda or Taliban members? During questioning over the past two or three days, what indications have any of them given about the nature of their involvement or activities in Afghanistan? I respect the Government's decision not to reveal names until the next of kin have been contacted, but can the Minister offer any indication of where in the United Kingdom the prisoners are from?

Does the Minister share our view that there must be firmness and fairness in this matter? We want the highest standards without risky naivety, which is what we look for in his answers to our questions.

Mr. Bradshaw: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's supportive comments. He asks about the circumstances of the arrests of the three men, but I am afraid that I cannot give any more details. Even if we had them or if I had seen them, military activity is still going on in Afghanistan and any details that I revealed could jeopardise other people's security. I simply stress to him and to the House that at no stage during their long interviews with British officials did they complain about their treatment, from their arrest to their transfer to Guantanamo and since.

In terms of a trial, we should not get ahead of ourselves. One problem of the public debate in this country over recent days is that people have assumed things that we are not yet sure about. Until we have had a chance to interview all those concerned, and until we have more details about exactly what went on and the prisoners' circumstances, we should not speculate about their status or where their trial might take place.

The hon. Gentleman also asks whether I can give some idea of where in the United Kingdom the prisoners come from, but I am afraid that I do not intend to give any more details that might reveal their identities until we have spoken to their families.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): If some reports on the treatment of prisoners are exaggeration, that is welcome, but is my hon. Friend aware that disquiet will undoubtedly remain in this country over the British and other prisoners being held? I fully supported the campaign in Afghanistan and believed that it had to be waged, but is he aware that the democracies must accept at all times the necessity of civilised values, which are the opposite of the values of the terrorists and the Taliban? I have no illusions—these are very dangerous people—but, as in 1945, prisoners must be apprehended, questioned and interrogated in accord with civilised values and norms.

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that, by our statement and by giving details of the interviews that British officials conducted, some of the disquiet to which he rightly referred will be dispelled.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): As other hon. Members have said, there is great concern in the United Kingdom and elsewhere because of the pictures and reports of the treatment of prisoners in Camp X-Ray. There are continuing worries about how the United States should treat the prisoners. The Minister says that the Red Cross will have a permanent presence at the prison, but will he give an assurance that some form of reporting—independent of the Governments—on the prisoners' conditions will be given to those outside the camp? Is he able to place extracts from the report in the Library of the House of Commons, and make it his habit to do so while the prisoners are kept in detention?

Although the Minister says that it is too soon to determine the legal status of the prisoners, does he acknowledge the great concern about whether they are being held under the Geneva convention and under what international law they will be tried? Does he accept that there is a damaging contrast between the treatment of John Walker, the United States citizen, who will be tried in a federal court, and the others, including British citizens, who are likely to be tried in a secretive, military tribunal? Does he agree that justice must not only be done, but be seen to be done in these circumstances?

The United States, along with the United Kingdom, made much of the moral case for the war against terrorism. Will the Minister tell us what assessment he has made of the impact of the prisoners' treatment on coalition opinion? Is not there a danger that America's treatment of the prisoners at best sends out the wrong signals, and at worst undermines the moral authority of the coalition against terrorism?

Mr. Bradshaw: I should have thought that the Red Cross was an eminently independent enough organisation to be able to make its own judgment. It will report to the United States Government in the usual way. The hon. Gentleman asks for more details of the report. We will release as many details as we can, and I have done so today, but I shall not give a running commentary. Much of the detail of the report is confidential material that we cannot put in the public domain, not least because it contains details of the identities and backgrounds of the people involved.

We have had assurances from the United States that the detainees will be treated in accordance with the Geneva convention. Like me, the hon. Gentleman will be well aware that the definition of a prisoner of war is an extremely complicated matter on which it is not easy to make a judgment. What is important, and what matters, is that detainees are treated humanely in accordance with international norms, which is the case, and that if they are brought to trial, they are given a fair trial.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asks about the impact on coalition opinion. I suspect that the impact has been far greater on some elements of the press in this country than it has been on our coalition allies. As Minister with responsibility for the whole of the Muslim and Arab world, I have not had a single representation on this issue. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is as well aware as I am that public opinion in the Muslim world changed dramatically on the day of the liberation of Kabul, when ordinary people in the Muslim world saw the Taliban in their true colours.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): The Minister painted a far rosier picture of the situation in the camps than the American Secretary of Defence did, and for that I suppose we should be grateful.

What will happen to the British citizens who have been captured? Unless they can be directly connected with September's events, under the Geneva convention they are, surely, prisoners of war or the equivalent. In that case, should not they be tried in this country for offences under our legislation? Have the British Government made representations to the United States that British subjects not accused of crimes in the United States should be tried in the United Kingdom, and that if tried in the United States they should not be subject to the death penalty or to a military tribunal?

Mr. Bradshaw: My statement was based not on any opinions expressed by politicians from other countries, but on an account given by reputable British officials after a detailed visit and interview.

I am afraid it is too early to speculate on what will happen next. That depends on the outcome of the interviews with those in captivity. It is certainly too early to speculate on what might happen to them—on whether they will be tried in the United States, or deported.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Should we not be careful to avoid confusion over the status of the detainees? Some—for example, members of the Afghan forces—may well be entitled to prisoner of war status; others, for example, members of the bin Laden organisation, are persons against whom criminal offences have been alleged. It is difficult to see on what basis those persons could be entitled to prisoner of war status. They are, however, entitled to the kind of protection that would be afforded to any citizen charged with criminal offences before any civilised court.

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

Should not our message to the American Government be that no one being held should receive treatment worse than that afforded to those charged with criminal offences before an American court, but that some—probably a minority—are entitled to the higher status of prisoners of war?

Mr. Bradshaw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely correct about the difficulty of arriving at a definition of "prisoner of war". We have made exactly the representations that he suggests to the United States, as well as the representation on the death penalty suggested by the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara).

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I was in Geneva last week, talking to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the president of the Red Cross. There was no doubt that they felt the detainees should be designated prisoners of war. If there is any dispute about the issue, however, it should be determined by a court of law—an independent tribunal—and certainly not by any one man: not by Donald Rumsfeld, Ben Bradshaw, or any other single person.

Can my hon. Friend say how many other British prisoners are on their way to Cuba? Why can British prisoners be taken out of Afghanistan without, apparently, any consultation with the British, who did not seem even to know that there were British prisoners until they arrived in Cuba? Can we be assured that that will not happen again?

As Kofi Annan said last week, human rights cannot be cherry-picked. For 50 years we have fought for a definition of human rights, and I thought that we had arrived at one. I supported the war. I hope that we can persist in our dealings with the United States, and say that—although we support that country—we have standards in Britain, and we do not want them to be dropped.

Mr. Bradshaw: First, let me congratulate my hon. Friend and say how much I admire her work on human rights and similar issues. Secondly, let me repeat what I said to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg): it is not possible to make a blanket declaration that the detainees are prisoners of war, whatever some organisations may want, because under international law the status of any detainee must be considered in the light of the individual case. That is why this is such a complicated issue. What matters is that all the detainees, regardless of whether they are prisoners of war, are entitled to humane treatment and, if prosecuted, to a fair trial.

I also cannot speculate on whether more British detainees are likely to be on their way, or soon to be on their way, to the base at Guantanamo Bay; but we have good channels of communication with the Americans, and they will continue to operate if that turns out to be the case.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the Minister be kind enough to send a copy of his robust, sensible statement to the editors of all those newspapers who published such scurrilous stories yesterday? Will he remind them that the United States and Great Britain yield to no one in their defence of truth and observance of the highest possible standards in these matters?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, which the Foreign Office news department may like to take up, particularly as I wrote the statement myself.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that my constituent, Mr. Abbasi, is one of the detainees in Camp X-Ray. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his reassurance that Mr. Abbasi should be treated both humanely and in accordance with international law. He will know that Mr. Abbasi's mother, Mrs. Juma, fears that her son will face the ultimate breach of human rights: the death penalty. With that in mind, has any progress been made in respect of extradition, particularly given that American detainees will face a federal court? Does he agree that that underlines the case for the establishment of an international criminal court, where these things can be sorted out even-handedly?

Mr. Bradshaw: I can give most of the assurances that my hon. Friend has asked for, but it is too soon to speculate about what charges his constituent may face. We regularly, not just on these issues, make plain our views on the death penalty to our friends in the United States. Although the Government and I fully support the idea of an international criminal court, he will know that the jurisdiction of an international criminal court cannot be retrospective. Some people call for these people to be tried in international criminal courts or ad hoc courts, but those are not supposed to replace national jurisdictions. They are used only when national jurisdictions are unwilling or unable to prosecute.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): The Minister should be warmly commended by the House for coming at the first possible opportunity to report and to put the minds of many of us at rest after we had read what now appear to be singularly ill informed comments in Sunday's newspapers.

I ask two specific questions. First, will the Minister confirm that many of the prisoners held in Cuba were among the prisoners who murdered 300 Afghan guards before Christmas; and, secondly, that many of them have openly and publicly said that they wish to do the same to their American guards?

Mr. Bradshaw: I do not want to give too many details about those who are in Guantanamo Bay but I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's support. I can confirm, however, that those who are held there are in the highest category of seriousness in terms of what they have done and the responsibilities that they have had. Some are the most senior foreign al-Qaeda fighters.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): May I also congratulate my hon. Friend on volunteering the statement so early? I well understand why he says that we should not speculate about where the prisoners will be tried. Wherever they are tried, however, the British subjects should have proper legal safeguards, including access to lawyers, knowing the nature of the case against them and having an appropriate appeal procedure. Can he give the House the undertaking that, whatever the forum in which they are tried, those basic legal safeguards will be upheld?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, I can. Again, it is too early to speculate about what charges the prisoners may face, but if the detainees face prosecution, under international norms they will be entitled to legal representation.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Is the Minister aware that, if the prisoners had been held under the Geneva convention, none of the intrusive media and press photography and comment would have been allowed? Under article 13,

> "POWs must at all times be protected particularly against . . . public curiosity".

The last prisoner of war camp in the United Kingdom was at Rollestone camp in my constituency during the Gulf war. The press and media were forbidden from taking any photographs or approaching the camp to take photographs, which could indeed be taken to humiliate those prisoners.

Mr. Bradshaw: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point for those who think that this is an issue of definition rather than of how the detainees are actually treated. He is absolutely right: there are some ways in which, if they had prisoner of war status, their conditions would be seriously worse. He spoke about press intrusion, and the other aspect is that it would be allowable to hold them indefinitely, until the end of hostilities in Afghanistan.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my hon. Friend aware that we in the House always expect that all prisoners should be treated according to the highest standards expected of western parliamentary democracies, far beyond what these people would have experienced if they had been prisoners of al-Qaeda or the Taliban? Will he confirm that these men are where they are because they were where they were? They were in Afghanistan, and if the charges against the British prisoners are proven, they were there to fight against their own country and its interests, and if possible to kill many of their own fellow citizens.

It is extremely important to abide by our own standards, but will my hon. Friend take into account the fact that there are already reports that one of the prisoners has attacked a guard at the camp? In view of the fact that such people have attacked and killed guards in Afghanistan and tried to hijack planes, should not we take a very measured approach indeed?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right. While we should of course insist on treatment that is in accord with international norms, we should never forget who these men are, what they are responsible for, and what many of them have done while in captivity in Afghanistan, including exploding grenades on their bodies to kill themselves, their captors and others. An ITN journalist was killed in one incident. These are highly dangerous fanatics who have absolutely no regard for their own safety or that of others.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I note what the Minister said about the three Britons having no complaints about their treatment. Is he in a position to tell us whether their treatment differs from that of the other detainees?

Mr. Bradshaw: We have absolutely no reason to believe that that is the case, but our officials, quite rightly, were involved in detailed discussions only with the British detainees.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): We have got to remember that not so long ago these al-Qaeda people were shooting our soldiers in Afghanistan. Anyone who goes abroad to fight for another country is nothing more than a mercenary, and we know what mercenaries were like in Africa. When we talk about these people's human rights, we should remember the people on the planes in America. They were not accorded any human rights.

Mr. Bradshaw: I completely agree. Some of the first tranche of Royal Marines returned to my constituency of Exeter last night, having been away from their families and loved ones over Christmas, bearing the brunt of these people's aggression.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I congratulate the Minister on his statement and on the answers that he has given. Does he accept that al-Qaeda is still out there, plotting further outrages? If so, does he accept that information gleaned from the interrogation of al-Qaeda prisoners will be essential for the prevention of such outrages? If so, does he further accept that it would be absolute madness to accord the protection of the Geneva convention to people who are not regular forces, allowing them to answer only name, rank and number? Finally, does he accept that when these people are brought to trial, we must avoid what happened after the 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre, when important secrets were revealed in a civilian court that led bin Laden to know that his telephones were being listened to and may well have contributed to the success of the attacks on 11 September?

Mr. Bradshaw: The hon. Gentleman is right to make the point that if too much information is revealed, there is always a danger that other people's lives and security will be put at risk. He is also right to say that many of the people currently detained may have a great deal of useful information that could prevent horrific events such as those of 11 September from being perpetrated again. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, through the information that we have gathered in Afghanistan, we already know much more about the nature of al-Qaeda and its intentions than we did two or three months ago. We have every reason to believe that we have already foiled a number of potentially fatal operations, including one in Singapore recently, as a result of that information.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): We shall soon be commemorating the holocaust, whose horrors surpassed in scale and cruelty even those of 11 September. After the second world war, our US allies played an honourable role in persuading the international community that we should demonstrate civilised values in our treatment of prisoners, and in submitting them to proper judicial process. Would the Government commend that example to our US allies now?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes I would, and I reiterate to my hon. Friend that we are satisfied that the Americans are

[Mr. Bradshaw]

working in accordance with those international norms—which, as several right hon. and hon. Members have pointed out, was never the case with the Taliban, who did not recognise a single international law.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I welcome the Minister's statement and the replies that he has given. May I tempt him to go further? The Government are content to allow suspects to be taken to Guantanamo Bay, where they may be subject to US military tribunal process, possibly including the death penalty. Is it not odd, therefore, that they do nothing about article 3 of the European convention on human rights, the interpretation of which now stops us deporting anyone who may threaten this countr—Abu Qatada, Abu Hamza or anyone else—to a jurisdiction where they may be wanted?

Mr. Bradshaw: That is an irrelevant point. The Government would consider every request from the United States for the extradition of any such person on its merits and according to the individual case.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Does my hon. Friend accept that we have fought a long, difficult and risky war against terrorism and have emerged victorious, but that one staggeringly incompetent misjudgment by the American authorities may throw that gain and that victory away and give incredible propaganda value to the enemies of the free world? Will he make every effort to inform our American friends that the treatment of even the most vile human being must meet the standards for which we fought?

Mr. Bradshaw: No, I would not agree with that. I am afraid that my hon. Friend has come here with a pre-written question based on rushing to judgment. He does not seem to have listened to a thing that I have said, or to what I have reported from the interviews conducted by the British officials in Guantanamo Bay. I would also caution him about his claim that we have already been victorious against terrorism: the campaign against terrorism will be very long, and will continue well after peace and security have returned to Afghanistan. I would be extremely cautious about jumping to premature victory.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): From which Department of State did British officials go to speak to the British prisoners in Guantanamo Bay? When the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross meet British citizens there, will their findings be made public, as I understand that the ICRC does not publish its findings? Are there representatives of the Red Crescent within the group representing the Red Cross? May I remind my hon. Friends that the photographs of what has been dubbed torture were taken, and released, by the American authorities? What was happening may not have constituted torture, but it certainly constituted a gross infringement of human rights. If we are indeed committed to tackling international terrorism and defeating it, examples of western powers not taking Muslim religion, or Muslim lives and human rights, as seriously as others will work against success.

Mr. Bradshaw: The officials came from my Department. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that Red Cross reports are always confidential. That is the whole point of them; they are not publicised, and they are not used for grandstanding, but are taken extremely seriously by those Governments to whom they report. It is not up to us to publish them. If the Red Cross wishes to do so, it may. The American Administration are under the same constraints as we are in that respect. I have no doubt that, as usually happens, details of such reports will come into the public domain in some way.

My hon. Friend asked about Red Crescent representatives, and I must confess that I do not know the answer. I shall write to her on that as soon as I can.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Would it not be wise to be a little cautious about the assertion in the statement that no complaints were made by any of the British prisoners? If the Under-Secretary had been a prisoner, given human nature—particularly American Marine human nature—would he have thought it prudent to complain? Did the prisoners assert in private that there were no complaints?

Mr. Bradshaw: As I said in my statement, for which I chose my words extremely carefully, none complained of any ill treatment. There is an important difference there. Points were made about exercise facilities, and I made it clear later in my statement that those facilities would not be adequate if the number of detainees in Guantanamo Bay increased dramatically.

I am not prepared to give my hon. Friend details of exactly who was present, but our officials spoke to detainees for a long time and were quite satisfied that the detainees spoke without inhibition.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Should we not openly recognise that we are dealing with two important and conflicting sets of principles? First, security is imperative, and that may lead to people being treated toughly. Secondly, there are humanitarian considerations, and we are supposed to have standards that differ from those of the people we have been in conflict with. We must try to reconcile those two different sets of principles.

Should we not say that the people who are being detained are prisoners of war? President Bush himself began the argument about war by declaring a war on terrorism. The prisoners are the consequence of the action taken to defeat terrorism, and that is one ground on which we could be clear about humanitarian considerations.

Mr. Bradshaw: I think that I have already answered that question in several of my earlier replies. The definition of "prisoner of war" is complex. What matters most is that detainees should be treated humanely and in accordance with international norms, and that if they are brought to trial, the trials should be fair.

Orders of the Day

Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I must inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill represents the biggest overhaul of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland for at least 30 years. Despite all our difficulties, the real progress that we have seen in Northern Ireland society during the past few years deserves to be matched by a modern, progressive, forward-looking system of justice. The criminal justice review proposed how that should be done, and the Bill realises the key aims of the review—the delivery of a criminal justice system that is fair, impartial, effective and joined up. It occurs, of course, in the context of the Belfast agreement. That agreement was the catalyst, but such a review was needed in any case. The real test of a criminal justice system is whether it makes people feel safer in their own localities; the real test of the Bill is whether it will improve the system's ability to do that.

I am satisfied that the review's measures will help to foster public trust in the system, to enhance transparency and openness and to promote more effective ways to reduce crime and the fear of crime. They will do that through reform of the prosecution process, the creation of a chief inspector of criminal justice and the modernisation of the juvenile justice system.

The Bill will safeguard the independence and impartiality of the system, while maintaining a focus on the real issues and concerns of the community that it serves. The new arrangements will increase public understanding of the system and public confidence in it. They will retain the best of the old system and integrate international best practice to ensure that services are delivered in a more effective, transparent and accountable way in the future.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for interrupting the Secretary of State. I also apologise for not being present at the beginning of his remarks, but that has come about because the debate in Committee on a statutory instrument on a fairly important issue relating to police evidence in Northern Ireland was scheduled for precisely the same time as this business, and I have had to interrupt my remarks in replying for the Opposition in that debate to get here. It was not possible to sort things out, despite attempts on our side to do so in the ordinary way, so could you let it be known that that is unacceptable and a discourtesy not only to my hon. Friends the Members for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois)—who have also just come into the Chamber, having served on the Statutory Instrument Committee—but to the other representatives of the Opposition parties who want to take part in both debates?

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) is right to raise this issue. May I ask you to find out whether, in future, such things can be organised so that those of us who have understandably stretched resources can make the full contribution that we want to make to two very important subjects? Surely it would have been possible to organise our proceedings so that those who care about and are actively involved in those subjects could have contributed to both debates without having to prioritise one above the other?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I very much understand the concern that hon. Members are expressing, but it is not a matter for the Chair; it should be taken up through the usual channels, and I suggest that hon. Members do so. I trust that the usual channels will have heard the points made in the Chamber this afternoon.

Dr. Reid: I merely respond by saying that I note and understand the difficulties that have been caused. I can assure the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) that if things have ended this way, it is not because any discourtesy was intended, as I am sure he will realise. I understand that these things were discussed through the usual channels. However, business in the Chamber is extremely flexible—correctly so—and it causes inconvenience not only for those with limited resources, but for those of us in government, with all the Government's resources. This afternoon, I had to cancel an engagement in Belfast, and then unexpectedly found that I could have carried it out. I note what the hon. Gentleman says; these things are not very satisfactory, but I hope that he accepts that there was no intention of discourtesy, and we shall try to ensure that there is not such a chronological coincidence in future. I extend those remarks to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), who speaks on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

The Bill also occurs, of course, in the context not only of modernising our justice system in Northern Ireland in the wake of the Belfast agreement, but of devolution. The changes in the criminal justice system for which the Bill provides are important in their own right, but they will also help to pave the way for the ultimate devolution of those functions to the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland.

The Government believe that devolution throughout the United Kingdom has been one of our greatest achievements—certainly, it is one of our most historic achievements—and nowhere more so than in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive have already been able to take great strides in bringing politics home to Northern Ireland. We are not complacent at all about the challenges that face us in that direction, but we are committed to seeing that process and the process of devolution of power, as well as responsibility, continue.

Policing and criminal justice are currently reserved to Westminster but, in the Belfast agreement, the Government signalled their willingness in principle to devolve responsibility for policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. We remain committed to that aim. Our target is to devolve policing and justice after the Assembly elections scheduled for May 2003. Obviously that decision to devolve can only be taken at the time, taking account of security and other

[Dr. Reid]

relevant considerations. It is thus a target, not a deadline. I make that clear just in case anyone at a future stage should misinterpret anything that I have said.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am not worried about the deadlines, but am more concerned about the principle in the light of the fact that the Justice Minister in the Dail, John O'Donoghue, has made it abundantly plain that Sinn Fein cannot share in the responsibility for such affairs of government because of its inextricable links with an active terrorist organisation. However, in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein will be put into a position into which it is privy to security issues. Is the Secretary of State therefore saying that the measure will not be implemented in Northern Ireland until things change and there has been a complete break from terrorism and decommissioning has been completed?

Dr. Reid: First, the hon. Gentleman will realise that certain parties in the Republic of Ireland and the spokesman for the Government in the Republic of Ireland have made it plain that there is no question of Sinn Fein taking part in government there in any area—security or otherwise—as long as it is linked to a private army. That is worth saying, and it is my understanding of the statements that have been made over the past few weeks.

Secondly, people recognise that the problems that we are dealing with in Northern Ireland are unique and not exactly comparable with those in the Republic of Ireland. That is precisely why the Belfast agreement allowed for inclusive politics that includes the republican movement. That was done under the premise, of course, that the imperfections in the democratic system—namely the link with a paramilitary organisation that was holding on to weapons—were related to a transitional tolerance and to the assumption that the process of decommissioning would run parallel to the process of changing the democratic structures and social conditions in Northern Ireland.

Thirdly, although I have given a target date for the devolution of power to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, that will be subject to satisfactory progress being made in a whole number of directions. One of them is the carrying through of the reforms that are currently being carried through for policing.

That is as full an answer as I can give to the hon. Gentleman. My view is quite plain and I will place it on the record again. Sinn Fein should participate in support and responsibility for policing. That is worth saying at a time when Sinn Fein spokesmen continually tell us how much more the police should be doing to safeguard the citizenry of Northern Ireland—Catholic and Protestant. It is not difficult for anyone to see the inconsistency between demanding that the police be more effective in what they are doing and the people who demand that withholding their support from policing. Indeed, in some cases people in the community have attacked the police both physically and verbally. People will notice the inconsistency in what they say.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I think that the Secretary of State is asking why Sinn Fein-IRA do not take up their places on the Policing Board and support the new police service, and I thoroughly agree with the sentiments that he expresses. However, as he keeps making concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA—one every week at the moment, some of which we shall discuss later—why does he not use that opportunity to say to them, "Look, if you want all these special arrangements for yourself, the quid pro quo is that you come out of the closet and accept the new Police Service for Northern Ireland and join the Policing Board"? Why does the right hon. Gentleman not have that negotiating relationship with them? Why does he not take advantage of all the concessions that he keeps giving them?

Dr. Reid: First, if the hon. Gentleman does not know that I have been pressing Sinn Fein to join the Policing Board, he has not been listening carefully to what I have been saying for the past nine or 10 months not only privately, but very publicly. Secondly, if he persists—I make this as a general comment—in trying to square the circle of saying that he supports the Belfast agreement as a whole but opposes every element of it on the basis that it is a concession to republicanism, the inconsistencies of his position will become even more apparent than the inconsistencies of Sinn Fein's position of demanding a more effective police force at the same time as it withholds support for that force.

Mr. Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: I will give way but, after that, I want to make progress. My speech is longer than I should have liked because I want to go into detail. I also have to do the hon. Gentleman the discourtesy of leaving soon afterwards because of today's statements.

Mr. Davies: I must set the record straight. We are serious in our support for the Belfast agreement, and that is why we support the new police service. We also want to urge all parties to take up their seats on the Policing Board and actively support the service, which shows our support for the agreement. Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, however, we are prepared to use some linkage. Instead of just expressing the vague hope that others might fulfil their commitments under the Belfast agreement, we link that to the concessions that Sinn Fein-IRA are seeking. He seems to shy away from the essential element of linkage.

Dr. Reid: I am glad for the clarification that the hon. Gentleman supports the practical implications of the Belfast agreement. Presumably he also supports the Patten review of policing on the grounds not only that it is an integral part of the agreement, but that it was carried out by a former Conservative Minister. So I look forward to the time when he and his colleagues stop referring to the changes arising from the Patten recommendations as concessions or the destruction of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Depending on what he and his colleagues say in future, we will, no doubt, discover whether that is the case or whether the inconsistencies will continue to be laid before us.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The right hon. Gentleman explained how Sinn Fein-IRA can join the Policing Board. He made it plain to my party and the other parties that if they did not join by a certain time and abide by it, they would not be able to join until later on, after the next election.

Dr. Reid: The answer, as the hon. Gentleman says, is that Sinn Fein-IRA could join the Policing Board by applying to join it. They did not do that when we sent out the original invitations, so the opportunity was missed. At the moment, as he knows, a process is under way in which local councils will nominate people for the district policing partnerships. It remains to be seen whether Sinn Fein, while demanding more effective policing, again refuses to take up that opportunity at the level of councillor. The hon. Gentleman is right: the vacancies on the Policing Board have been filled and, unless there is a change in legislation, the opportunity to serve on it will not occur for some time.

However, it is not just a case of joining the main Policing Board or even the DPPs. Joining the Policing Board is the public and practical symbol that a party is committed to making the police in Northern Ireland effective.

My main point—on this occasion, perhaps unusually, the hon. Gentleman and I are in agreement—is that it is inconsistency bordering on hypocrisy to demand more effective policing, continually to upbraid the police for not getting the results that they should be getting and, at the same time, not only to withhold support from but to oppose the policing service. Those who do so are not only eschewing their responsibility but attacking the police at every opportunity. I hope that that obvious inconsistency can be overcome, and we all look forward to the day when not only the nationalists and Unionists but the broader community, including republicans, take the responsibility for supporting the implementation of the means of law and order in a society to which they now say they are committed.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Secretary of State is sending to my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) the mixed message that he sent to the Ulster Unionist party. It appears from what he just said that if Sinn Fein wanted to participate in the Policing Board, he would consider making the opportunity available, and that would include passing legislation to allow it on to the board before the date that has been laid down. He is sending a mixed message to the House.

Dr. Reid: I am saying no such thing. The hon. Member for North Antrim asked me what was the position in law, and I told him the position—it is as simple as that. I also told him that under existing legislation Sinn Fein councillors could, if they wished, be nominated for the district policing partnerships. Both of those are the case. That is not a mixed message; it is a factual statement of the present position.

I thought that it might be possible, just for once, for hon. Members to concentrate on the main message. I should have thought that the main message on which Members from both sides of the House have a common view is that when people demand rights, they have to be matched by responsibilities. There is therefore a gross inconsistency in demanding the right to have an effective police force and complaining that the police are failing, through incompetence or conspiracy, to achieve an extremely difficult task while saying, "We will neither support the police force nor succour it. Indeed, we will go out of our way, in every way—verbally and in other ways—to impede its effectiveness."

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman and then I will try to make some progress.

Mr. Campbell: For the avoidance of doubt, my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim asked the Secretary of State about the date by which Sinn Fein and other parties had to nominate people to sit on the Policing Board. That issue has been raised with my party and other parties. The Secretary of State replied to us, as he did to others, that if Sinn Fein had not made nominations by a certain time, we would move on. Is he saying that that is still the case or that if Sinn Fein wanted to make nominations now, next week or next month, legislation would be introduced to allow it to do so? Has it missed the boat?

Dr. Reid: The position in law has not changed. People have not made nominations. If the hon. Gentleman has any indication that Sinn Fein is about to join the Policing Board in return for anything, I hope that he will share it with the House. I stated that, unless the law is changed, there is no way in which Sinn Fein can join the Policing Board at present, and that is a fact.

The hon. Gentleman may be aware that a review of the implementation of Patten and ancillary aspects, which will run for several months, is about to start. That review was discussed with the hon. Gentleman and his party and the Ulster Unionist party. That is public knowledge. It is public knowledge that we have said that if legislative changes are required as a result of that review, they would be put through. The position has not changed, nor has my view that Sinn Fein should join the Policing Board. I am not quite sure what the hon. Gentleman is implying. I hope that he is not saying that he does not want republicans on the Policing Board; I am sure that that is not his intention. If it is, I should be obliged if he would let us know, because it changes the complexion. I thought that we all wanted Sinn Fein to take up responsibilities on the Policing Board; I certainly do. I want it to play a full part in meeting the responsibilities that naturally go along with rights in a modern, civilised democratic society.

Lembit Öpik: *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I shall give way once more, then have a long run, I hope, without interventions.

Lembit Öpik: I am sorry to detain the Secretary of State and am grateful for his forbearance.

Will the Secretary of State provide clarification? Am I right in understanding that at the moment there is no opportunity for Sinn Fein to take up places, even if it wanted to do so? Is the Secretary of State therefore saying that the issue is about focusing the next time that members of the board are appointed?

Dr. Reid: That is the case in law. Everyone is keen on hypothetical scenarios and conspiracies, so let me put it to the hon. Gentleman that if the republican movement

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turned around tomorrow and said, "We made a mistake, we would like to join the Policing Board," I would feel duty-bound to go to the parties on the board, including those of hon. Gentlemen who have spoken today, and say, "Sinn Fein wishes to join the Policing Board. Is there a way in which we can allow that through common consent?" What I would not do—but an objective observer of comments that have been made would feel that hon. Gentlemen are forcing me to do so—is say to Sinn Fein, "That's very nice and historic. Would you mind going away for two years, and perhaps then we will consider allowing you the privilege of joining the Policing Board."

Mr. Gregory Campbell: Quite right.

Dr. Reid: That is not an entirely constructive way forward. If anyone wants reassurance that there is no conspiracy and that I have no inkling about whether those events are likely to take place over the next couple of weeks, I should be obliged if they would accept my assurance.

Perhaps we can now proceed with the reform of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, although I have a funny feeling that I am not going to be allowed to do so. However, while I have a window of opportunity, I shall proceed. Policing and criminal justice, as I was saying, are currently reserved to Westminster, but in the Belfast agreement the Government signalled their willingness in principle to devolve responsibility for policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly.

I was saying that we remain committed to that aim; I think that I was about distinguish between a target and a deadline. A target for devolving policing and justice would be after the Assembly elections, scheduled for May 2003. For our part, we recognise that that is undoubtedly a challenging target, but we are committed to doing everything that we can to meet it. We want to ensure that good progress is made in implementing the review before then, so we have a formidable programme of work ahead of us.

The terms of reference of the criminal justice review and the composition of the review group were set out in the Belfast agreement. Implementation of the review therefore represents continued progress in implementing the agreement. Indeed, it is true to say that it was the last element of the agreement that had to be started; that has now been accomplished. On the implementation plan, the Bill gives effect to many of the recommendations of the review of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland which was published in March last year. Other recommendations do not require legislation and are being implemented separately. Details of all the steps being taken are set out in the criminal justice review implementation plan, which is the Government's formal response to the review.

The implementation plan was published for consultation, along with a draft version of the Bill on 12 November 2001.

We intend to continue consulting on the proposals in the plan in the coming months.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North) *rose*—

Dr. Reid: An updated version of the plan will be published after the Bill receives Royal Assent, by which time we will be in a position to give further details on how we intend to implement the review recommendations and more precise time scales in that regard. I shall now give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. McNamara: My right hon. Friend has answered my question.

Dr. Reid: If other hon. Members could signal to me in the same way, we might avoid interventions.

In publishing the draft Bill, the Government have done their best to ensure fullest scrutiny of the key proposals. I know that some would have preferred a longer consultation period. Indeed, we, too, would have welcomed that, but we needed to ensure that the proposals were well developed before publication. We are not claiming to have got everything right, which is why we have committed ourselves to consultation with politicians, practitioners and others. In any case, it is questionable whether we could have increased scrutiny by publishing the draft Bill earlier this year, when the parties were rather preoccupied with the future of the institutions. We now have revitalised local institutions. With the Good Friday agreement back on track, we can now turn our attention fully to these important proposals.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): The Government's first 16 recommendations regarding the criminal justice review are concerned with human rights. Is my right hon. Friend aware that concern has been expressed by certain parties about the fact that the Bill does not include human rights in full? Is he content that the Bill as it stands covers human rights in full?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend has shown impeccable and choreographed timing, as that is precisely the matter with which I was about to deal. I hope that I shall answer his question.

The review group recommended that human rights be made central to the justice system. In formulating its recommendations, the group considered not only the European convention on human rights, but 15 other international human rights standards and instruments. The entire review is drafted with those principles in mind, just as the Government's Human Rights Act 1998 puts human rights at the heart of policy making and operations for all public authorities. The lessons that we drew from study not only of our own procedures, but of international procedures and standards, permeate our whole approach. The issue will arise again to some extent during consideration of the detail of the Bill, to which I should now like to turn.

The Bill has six parts and 13 schedules. Part 1 covers the courts and judiciary and reinforces the primacy of the merit principle and the continuing independence of the judiciary. It makes provision for a Judicial Appointments Commission, which, in the new context of devolution, will help to ensure the transparency of the judicial appointments system. Part 1 also amends the eligibility criteria for judicial office and requires all new appointees to the offices listed in schedule 6 to take the new oath proposed in the review. Clause 13 provides for the Lord Chief Justice to replace the Lord Chancellor as head of the Northern Ireland judiciary following devolution. Schedule 5 transfers to the Lord Chief Justice some of the

Lord Chancellor's administrative functions in relation to the courts. In addition, part 1 contains provisions for the creation of the office of lay magistrate, which may be brought into force either before or after devolution.

Part 2 covers Law Officers and the new Public Prosecution Service. It provides for the appointment of a local Attorney-General for Northern Ireland and the creation of a Westminster-based Advocate-General for Northern Ireland. Both posts are to be commenced on or after the devolution of justice functions to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Attorney-General for Northern Ireland will become a figure responsible to the Northern Ireland Assembly and will carry out many of the existing functions of the post and some new ones, but not all the functions of the current Attorney-General fall within the devolved field. That is why we will create the new post of Advocate-General for Northern Ireland, mirroring arrangements in Scotland. The Advocate-General will be responsible to Parliament for those of the Attorney-General's current functions that are within the reserved and excepted fields in Northern Ireland.

The Bill provides for establishing a chief inspector of criminal justice in Northern Ireland and a Northern Ireland Law Commission. Those new institutions will ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the agencies and legal framework of the criminal justice system. They will facilitate its evolution into a more clearly defined, modern and joined-up system of justice.

Part 4 deals with youth and restorative justice. It sets out the principal aim of the youth justice system as the prevention of crime committed by children. It also provides for two new youth justice orders: a community responsibility order and a reparation order to broaden the number of measures at the court's disposal for dealing with young offenders, and for custody care orders when detention is appropriate for children under 14.

The Bill provides for dealing with persons under 18 as children in the criminal justice system in line with international practice and the internationally accepted definition of a child. Part 4 also allows for a youth conference system as a diversionary measure or a court-based disposal. Youth conferencing is a model that has a notable international pedigree. It is already being used in a pilot form in England and Wales as part of referral orders under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

The youth conference system for which the Bill provides tries to repair the damage to social values and relationships that crime causes. It does that by giving the victim, the offender and the community a stake in the official response to crime. The young person is given an opportunity to learn the way in which his behaviour affected the life of the victim and to make reparation for his crime.

Part 5 contains a range of provisions, which include giving victims enhanced rights to be informed about the release of offenders. It provides for the Secretary of State to devise a community safety strategy and paves the way for the establishment of new local structures to take the matter forward in future.

Part 5 regulates the use of the royal coat of arms in courtrooms and outside courthouses. It empowers the Lord Chancellor to direct that exceptional legal aid may be made available in specific circumstances, including for inquests. It also empowers the Lord Chancellor to transfer the functions of the Northern Ireland Court Service after devolution and requires that service to provide security in courts.

The Bill has comprehensive and far-reaching provisions to modernise the landscape of criminal justice in Northern Ireland and to help ensure that impartiality and respect for all remain central to its ethos, aims and processes.

Part 6 covers the commencement arrangements for the Bill and its extent.

The Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General are responsible for several provisions. It is only right that I express appreciation for their work. We have worked closely together on preparing the Bill. We continue to do that in driving forward implementation.

Hon. Members will know about the review of the criminal courts in England and Wales—the Auld report—which is currently subject to public comment. The Auld report and the criminal justice review undertook a fundamental examination of parts of the criminal justice system. However, overlap is relatively limited. We shall keep a close eye on the decisions that were made in the light of public comments in England and Wales, especially given the similarities between the two legal systems.

It is too early to ascertain the final decisions on implementing the Auld report in England and Wales. That is even more true of deciding whether it would be appropriate to extend any changes to Northern Ireland. Consequently, the Bill is unlikely to be the appropriate vehicle for change. If legislation is required to extend reforms into Northern Ireland, we will consider the best way forward with colleagues in England and Wales.

Let me say a word about the extent of the Bill. With some technical exceptions, it applies only to Northern Ireland. The only substantive point is the creation of the new Westminster office of the Advocate-General for Northern Ireland, who, as I said earlier, will carry out the functions of the current Attorney-General for Northern Ireland which are excepted matters. The Bill deals with reserved or excepted matters as defined by schedules 2 and 3 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The prospect of the devolution of justice functions means that we will need to consider the way in which the relationships between Westminster and the devolved Administration will operate in practice. We shall work closely with the Northern Ireland Executive on the arrangements for future administrative co-operation in this field.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I take it that the Secretary of State is now dealing with part 2—clause 23 and so forth—which deals with the appointment of the Law Officers for Northern Ireland. Am I right in thinking that the intended holder of the office of Attorney-General for Northern Ireland need not necessarily be a Member of the Assembly, and will be an extra-parliamentary officer? Is that right?

Dr. Reid: If I heard the hon. and learned Gentleman's question correctly, I can say yes, not only will that officer not be a Member of the Assembly, he will be independent of it. Does that answer the hon. and learned Gentleman's question?

Mr. Garnier: Clearly, the Attorney-General of England is independent of Parliament.

Dr. Reid: He is independent of Parliament, but accountable to it.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Under the old system, when Stormont was in existence, did not the Attorney-General

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

from here look after those matters that were not devolved to the Stormont Administration? Why must we have an Advocate-General? Can the Attorney-General here not continue with his duties of dealing with matters that are not devolved?

Dr. Reid: A number of things have happened since the days to which the hon. Gentleman refers—I would not question his memory on those former arrangements—one of which is devolution to other parts of the United Kingdom such as Scotland and Wales. Nevertheless, the Advocate-General for Northern Ireland could be the Attorney-General, as the hon. Gentleman has suggested. I hope that that answers his question.

I want to say a few words on the outcome of the consultation process. There has been pretty extensive consultation on these proposals, before and after the review group's report was produced. In addition, there has been a consultation process on the Bill. We have taken the outcome of that consultation carefully into account when shaping the legislation. We have consulted the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly on the policy areas in the draft legislation that have implications for the devolved Administration, and we will continue to consult and co-operate with them as we make our preparations for devolution.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I am grateful to all those who submitted responses to the consultation, and I shall now give way for further consultation with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blunt: Will the right hon. Gentleman enlighten the House as to whether Members of the Assembly thought that the period of consultation was acceptable?

Dr. Reid: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman missed my earlier remark that we, too, would have liked a longer consultation period. Nor will he have missed my making the point that there will be further consultation as the Bill goes through the House, some of which will no doubt take the form of contributions from him and his hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench. Yes, there could always be more consultation, but I am trying to make the point that there has been a genuine degree of consultation, both before and after the publication of the report. I would also like to point out that the review group's recommendations were in the public domain for a prolonged period before they were formally put out to consultation.

Mr. Blunt: An important principle is involved here. The early part of the consultation on the review process was perhaps a model for how this business should be carried out. However, the latter part, with the rush from the review stage to the draft Bill, and the very short opportunity for the Assembly and for the Opposition to consult the officials taking the Bill through Parliament, has not been a model. The most deleterious part of this process is that, although we have the chance to have consultations through debate on the detail of the Bill in Committee, we face a programme motion that will limit those consultations to 12 sittings. That is short of what the officials believe in necessary, and well short of my assessment of what is needed, particularly as there are four other Opposition parties, which I hope will be represented in Committee if the House chooses to send the Bill into Committee having given it approval on Second Reading. I implore the Secretary of State—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This intervention is becoming a speech. The hon. Gentleman will have his opportunity to contribute later.

Dr. Reid: Emollient as I always am, I must say that the hon. Gentleman has a damn cheek. First, the review recommendations have been in the public domain for almost two years. Secondly, he and his Opposition Front-Bench colleagues have had unparalleled access to our officials and to information, which I cannot recall being given when we were in opposition, even under a bipartisan approach. Thirdly, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary met the Chairman of the relevant Assembly Committee and, specifically at his request, yet again extended the consultation period. Finally, we are still in the consultation process in that judgments and changes can be made, and we are sensitive to that.

I am now well aware that the hon. Gentleman seems to think that my officials report to him rather than to me. I am aware of his views and those of everyone else, including my officials, but our efforts to make available information and consultation facilities have been such that it is churlish to say that this is hardly a model process. He has no experience of trying to take such a Northern Ireland measure through the House. The situation is in flux and there are deadlines, some of which he helps to create, with which we have to cope in the general ebb and flow of events. Given all the circumstances, we have done damn well to extend the consultation as we have.

Mr. Blunt: I do not want the Secretary of State to be under any misapprehension. I commended him and the Northern Ireland Office for the way in which they handled the early part of the process—indeed, I said that that was a model—but it is an enormous pity that the final stages, which are taking place in the House, face a programme motion that will seriously shorten consultation in Committee. That is a great problem. Otherwise, this would be virtually a model process. I implore the Secretary of State, even at this stage, to consider withdrawing the programme motion so that we can finish consideration in Committee in a way that is acceptable all round.

Dr. Reid: I accept the hon. Gentleman's accolade that this has been a model process, at least up to this point. I did not interpret the burden of his remarks in that way, but I accept that that is what he is saying.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May I put it on record that the Secretary of State's gratitude is overwhelming? Like me, he was a shadow spokesman for years and years, working on the Floor of the House and considering many Bills in Committee. I did not have access to civil servants in opposition, so the very fact that access has been provided during the consultation is a compliment to the Government. Not once as Opposition Members were we given such access.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Secretary of State responds, I must tell the House that the matter has been well aired. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will return to the Bill.

Mr. McNamara *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I shall do so with great zeal, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but first I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. McNamara: I risk straining my right hon. Friend's emollience, but will the Government itemise the Northern Ireland Assembly's recommendations—I think that they number between 13 and 17; I have not seen the full list, although I have read the Assembly debate—and give their decision on its more or less unanimous request? It would help matters considerably if the Government responded to that request, and the only real bone of contention was the question of symbols.

Dr. Reid: We will consider those recommendations in some detail. My hon. Friend will appreciate that, although the consultation has been going on for some time in an informal capacity, we have had this document for only a few days. We shall certainly give serious consideration to what my hon. Friend has said.

We have consulted the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly on those policy areas of the draft legislation that have implications for the devolved Administration. We will continue to consult and co-operate with the Executive and Assembly. The spirit in which that has taken place has been unusually constructive compared with our discussions on some items. There has been a degree of common support for the proposals, which has not always been apparent in everything the Government have tried to do in Northern Ireland.

I am grateful to all those who submitted responses during the consultation exercise, which were, on the whole, positive and came from a wide range of interests. There now appears to be a broad consensus that the policies in the Bill represent the best way forward. Some helpful suggestions have been made during the consultation on the detailed operation of these policies. We shall take a number of comments on board by making the necessary amendments in Committee.

The great bulk of the comments that we have received thus far have been constructive. There is a great deal in the review on which the parties in Northern Ireland can agree, although I recognise that some issues are more difficult than others.

Inevitably, perhaps, the part of the Bill that has aroused most concern has been the provisions on symbols. The Bill proposes a number of changes in the light of the review's recommendations. This is obviously a highly sensitive area, and the review would probably have been criticised whatever outcome it came up with.

We fully endorse the review's recognition of the need to strike a balance between recognising the sensitivities of the various communities in Northern Ireland and confirming the courts' position within the agreed constitutional framework.

We are considering all the representations we have received, including a number expressing concern on heritage grounds about the removal of certain symbols. We will consider whether any changes are needed in the light of the responses to the consultation exercise, and the views expressed in the House. We are open to any constructive suggestions, particularly those capable of attracting cross-community support.

Another subject on which we have received a number of submissions is community safety. There was widespread support in the local government sector for a provision in the Bill to give councils clear statutory authority to undertake community safety work. I very much welcome the councils' intention to play an active role in community safety, which will contribute to reducing crime and the fear of crime in their localities. In order to facilitate that, I am minded, subject to consultation with the Northern Ireland Executive, to bring forward an amendment on those lines.

The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 sets out the crucial role of the Policing Board in the development of district policing partnerships. It will have an important role to play in ensuring that the police contribute effectively to the partnerships necessary to deliver community safety.

We do not envisage that the district policing partnerships will have the lead role in community safety, as that is not an issue for the police alone, and the other organisations which contribute to the delivery of community safety, such as housing and social services, are not included in the membership of those partnerships.

I am also conscious that the Executive have announced in their "Programme for Government" a review of public administration. They are also developing an important resource in the new local strategic partnerships. Both those initiatives could have major implications for the longer-term structures that we adopt for taking forward work on community safety, and I look forward to discussing those with the Executive.

Many of our proposals are dependent on having legislation in place before they can be fully implemented. However, that will still allow us to make early progress on areas that can be taken forward administratively, or for which we can usefully undertake some preparatory work. We have already published a document setting out the purpose and aims for the criminal justice system, as recommended by the review. We have appointed a Judicial Appointments Commissioner for Northern Ireland. We will shortly be publishing for consultation a community safety strategy, so as to stimulate further public debate on this important area of work.

Work has already begun to prepare the department of the Director of Public Prosecutions for the handling of the new responsibilities envisaged by the review.

I have tried to explain the burden of the Bill, discussing some aspects in broad terms and others in more detail. The Bill, and the other steps that we are taking as a result of our decisions on the review, are designed to create a justice system for the 21st century. We are combining best practice in the United Kingdom and the rest of the world with innovative approaches to old problems.

In many areas, such as that of prosecution, the steps that we are taking will bring practice in Northern Ireland more closely into line with that in England, Scotland and Wales. In other areas, such as youth conferencing, we will

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develop UK practice by learning from other countries. I believe that if others have experience that is worth taking on board, we have a duty to take the opportunity presented by the review and use it to best effect.

We will of course ensure that we incorporate appropriate safeguards. The justice system is too important for us to take a leap of faith. We will use pilots and evaluation to build up our own experience of how the measures fit the particular needs of Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland, however, deserve the opportunity to match their criminal justice systems with the best in the world. I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

5.31 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill because it infringes the principle that justice flows from the Crown throughout the realm; because it introduces aspects to the judicial system which depart from the principle that Northern Ireland is fully a part of the United Kingdom for judicial as well as other purposes; and because it represents a further stage in the policy of unilateral and unbalanced concession to republicanism in Northern Ireland."

Let me begin by saying something about consultation, as there seemed to be some confusion about it a moment ago. The issue of consultation between Government and Opposition is very important to the way in which our parliamentary system works, although it is not always understood outside.

Although other Members may not believe it, I am an optimist. I think that half a loaf is a good deal better than no bread, and I am grateful for the partial consultation that took place. Once the Bill had been published, the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), kindly gave me an opportunity to go through it with his civil servants and put our points to them. The civil servants were very able, and took us through the Bill clearly and thoroughly. We expressed our views candidly, for what they were worth; so if the Bill is given a Second Reading, which I rather hope it is not, a number of the detailed amendments that we may table in Committee will not be unfamiliar to the Under-Secretary of State.

To some extent, then, we put our cards on the table as well. We played fairly. What we did not have was consultation of any kind before the Bill's publication. The Government did not suggest taking us into their confidence in regard to measures that might or might not be in the Bill, or the rationale for its presentation—or its presentation at this particular time. Had such an invitation been issued I would have accepted it on the Opposition's behalf, on the same basis. If the discussion was to be confidential, we would have respected that confidentiality; if not, we would have played by whatever rules of the game the Government proposed. What we had, however, was "half-consultation"—although, as I have said, we are extremely grateful for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) made a reasonable point when he said that the process had been rushed. During an extraordinarily long period—about 20 months, between March 2000 and November last year—the Government did nothing following the report's publication; then they suddenly produced the Bill. The Secretary of State must be a bit sensitive about the delay, because he mentioned it in his speech, no doubt pre-emptively. He said that it had happened because of distraction with the building of institutions. I do not think that that should have interrupted progress on something involving justice, and the Secretary of State's remarks may have been more in the nature of an excuse.

Suddenly the Bill was produced, following a consultation process that was far too rapid. To give him his due, the Under-Secretary of State recognised that and extended the consultation over Christmas. I pay tribute to him for that, but the process was still rather rushed. By contrast, for 20 months nothing apparently happened. We could have had some pre-publication consultation during that time.

I wholeheartedly endorse the complaint about the timetable motion. The whole House will be aware of our objections in principle to that system. The imposition of a timetable motion is particularly damaging when fundamental constitutional issues are raised.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has put on record the level of co-operation that he has had from civil servants in the Northern Ireland Office, from me and from my fellow Ministers. I say unequivocally that in my experience, although it is limited, the degree of access to civil servants that he and his colleagues were given was unprecedented, but before March 2000, when the review was published, there was a period of consultation by the review itself. The Conservative party took part in that consultation and submitted an extensive memorandum. Following the consultation on the review, my predecessor engaged on a consultation, which I know the Conservative party took part in for a period. Given that there have been effectively 20 months of consultation since the review was published, and given how consistent the Bill and the implementation plan are with the provisions of the review, which part of the Bill came as a surprise to the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have allowed the Minister to make a very long intervention. I think that the matter has been thoroughly aired. I will allow the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) to respond to the point, but we should then get on to the content of the Bill.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the Minister. In fact, we did not know what the Government were going to do about restorative justice and about some of the more technical penal aspects. We hoped that they would not take on board the recommendations relating to the royal coat of arms and the oath of allegiance. I will come to those matters in a second.

Today has been a memorably bad day for Parliament and for Northern Ireland. Not content with the dubious initiative by the Government before Christmas, using their majority to introduce a motion in the House to create a special status for certain types of Member of Parliament that was designed to accommodate the demands of Sinn Fein-IRA—

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to raise matters that are not included in the Bill during this debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must leave these matters to the occupant of the Chair.

Mr. Davies: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Not content with that, the Prime Minister decided today to make a great display of it, to roll out the red carpet and to provide the unprecedented platform—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should now come to the content of the Bill. He must not pursue lines that are outside the limits of the Bill; otherwise, he may have seriously to curtail his speech.

Mr. Davies: I hope to persuade the House that the Bill and the concessions in it are part and parcel of a general policy that has been pursued by the Government with increasing intensity over the past few months. Today's rather disreputable charade in Downing street was part and parcel of that.

May I be permitted to comment on the fact that no one will be taken in by the theory, which I gather has been put about by the Government, that the press conference in Downing street and meeting with the Prime Minister have nothing to do with Sinn Fein-IRA Members arriving here for the first time to claim their new privileges? It is claimed that it was just a routine meeting. One talent that all of us would concede to the Government is that of great sophistication in manipulating the media. The idea that it had never occurred to them that, if they had a meeting in Downing street, there would be a press conference, and if they had that on the day when those Members were coming to claim new privileges, that would greatly enhance the propaganda victory of Sinn Fein-IRA, seems so naive—

Dr. John Reid *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I hope that the Secretary of State is not about to ask the House to swallow that.

Dr. Reid: I would have thought that reforming the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland was an important enough subject not to have to spend a lot of time on what is a bit of a cheap soundbite, but since it has been brought up to catch the news, let me make it absolutely plain that the Prime Minister's meeting with Sinn Fein today was arranged weeks ago and is a normal meeting exactly like our meetings with the leaders of the Ulster Unionist party or other parties at their request. This may not have struck the hon. Gentleman, but it is not beyond the capabilities of any political party, when it has a meeting with the Prime Minister, to choreograph other events to maximum advantage. That would have been done had the meeting been last week, next week, next month or whenever.

If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should not meet Sinn Fein in case the press might be interested, I suggest that he is unable to distinguish between the great project of trying to bring peace to Northern Ireland and his own petty assessment of what is real politics. I assure him that the meeting was arranged weeks ago. On the decision itself—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State's intervention is now too long and I must insist that we get on with the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Davies: It seems to me that the Secretary of State, in pleading innocence, is saying that the Government were outmanoeuvred by Sinn Fein this afternoon, which is a very revealing admission.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Does not the hon. Gentleman realise how disappointing it is to listen to his statement? I know that he has abandoned the bipartisan approach, but when we are debating a Bill that contains more than 200 measures to improve the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, it is sad that he confines himself to partisan issues. Does he not have anything to say about the Bill's actual content?

Mr. Davies: If the hon. Gentleman is patient, he will find that I have quite a lot to say about it, and not least about the agenda, hidden or otherwise, under which the Bill has been introduced. It is extremely important that the House should focus on that.

Lembit Öpik: Just out of interest, I have tended to assume, for all the differences in the House, that all three main parties have the primary agenda of securing peace in Northern Ireland. If it does not digress too much from tonight's discussion, I would be interested to know what the hon. Gentleman thinks other parties' agenda is.

Mr. Davies: We have been through this before. We all have the objective of peace and I have paid tribute many times to the sincerity of all parties in the House in wanting peace in Northern Ireland, but we differ strongly as to the methods that are likely to produce it. The Government have made some very peculiar errors of judgment, already with disastrous consequences on the ground. It is absolutely clear that it is not we who have abandoned the bipartisan approach. The Government did that, by moving away from the strict lines of the Belfast agreement and making all sorts of new concessions before it had been implemented. That was extremely irresponsible and dangerous.

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is a distinguished Member of the House to whom I always listen with great attention on Irish matters, but I must first make some progress, as he will otherwise have every justification for saying that I have not grappled with the substance of the Bill.

Two very obnoxious provisions are buried in the mass of technical detail in the Bill, but 90 per cent. of it or more, by length, covers matters to which we have no fundamental objection of principle, although we have a lot of questions and there are some problematic issues.

[Mr. Davies]

If the Bill were limited to the provisions covering the arrangements for devolving justice to Northern Ireland and the new measures in youth justice, for people up to and including the age of 17, we would give it its Second Reading and discuss our detailed reservations and proposals in Committee.

Let me go through those two aspects relatively briefly. We do not merely accept, but are, of course, very much in favour of, devolving justice to Stormont—and police affairs as well, but those are not covered in the Bill. However, so far as I know there has never been any suggestion from any party, or any other source, that such devolution should take place before the elections in May 2003. It has always been thought a good idea for the new Stormont Executive and Assembly to have one term of office and experience before we contemplate devolving more power to them.

There is therefore no need to legislate for these provisions in this Session. The subject could be covered next year, which would clearly be of some advantage, not least because it might then be possible to be more precise about some of the matters that have been left rather vague and open to the Secretary of State's decision by edict or instrument. In my view that has always been an undesirable state of affairs. There is far too much Henry VIII legislation going through under this Government, and it is often justified on the ground that it is impossible to predict the circumstances that will arise in two or three years' time, when the provisions need to be implemented. The nearer we are to the enactment of the provisions, the less weight that excuse has, so we see some advantage in waiting until next year.

We also have a general concern, because it is important that before we carry out the devolution we should have an opportunity to discuss matters with the Northern Ireland Assembly, and to consider the matter even more fully than has been possible over the past six weeks since the Bill appeared.

In my view, the consultation process that we have mentioned should be triangular, involving the Government and the Opposition in this House, and the parties at Stormont. As we have had the Christmas holidays in between, I do not think that there has been enough time since November for that process to take place to the extent that might have been desirable.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not a fact that in the first part of the consultation, which the hon. Gentleman described as a long period, the Northern Ireland Office issued statements from time to time commenting on what Northern Ireland politicians had said? For example, there was the idea of taking away the Queen's crest and insignia, which we were told was only a proposal, not something to be seriously considered. All such matters were brushed aside during that period of so many months, so how can it be said that it was really consultation?

Mr. Davies: The House will be grateful for that intervention. I was not around at the time—at least, not in my present role with responsibility towards Northern Ireland—whereas the hon. Gentleman was intimately involved in the discussions. The Secretary of State has left the Chamber, but I trust that he will be back shortly; in the meantime, if the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) does not feel that the consultation process was adequate, I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State will have taken that on board.

The second major area covered by the Bill consists of new provisions for child and youth justice, especially reparation orders, community responsibility orders, youth conferences, and increasing the age for those regimes to 17.

Those are interesting ideas, and as I have already said, the Conservative party is interested in imaginative new ideas for youth justice—indeed, we are interested in imaginative new penal ideas in general. One of the questions that arises is why we are starting by applying those concepts to child justice rather than starting with adults and rolling the process back to children. There is no logic behind doing that—at least, none has been made clear to me—and the change might more sensibly take place the other way round.

We have some reservations about making Northern Ireland the locus for an experiment of that kind. Some of the review's provisions require "community leaders" or "appropriate adults" to take part in the youth conferences and other forums to be established by the Bill. There is legitimate concern about the real danger in many areas of Northern Ireland, particularly in the inner cities, that such leaders will themselves be, or will be the nominee of, the local gang or paramilitary boss, be he republican or loyalist. Those responsible for administering the process will no doubt take great care to avoid that corruption of the process, but there might be more confidence in the proposals if they were piloted elsewhere in the country—perhaps in England—before being rolled out more widely. They should not necessarily be started in Northern Ireland.

It is extraordinary to be told in the review that the system has already operated in New Zealand and that one or two members of the review committee visited New Zealand. They did not produce a report on their visit, or if they did, it has not been thought worthy of publication or inclusion in appendix B of the review. Apart from a few jejune paragraphs describing the position in New Zealand, the review contains nothing on which we can base a judgment about whether we should simply apply to our country an experiment operated there. The complete lack of assessment of results is extraordinary. The review contains no quantitative data, making it impossible to find out from the document how long the regime in New Zealand has been in place or how many children have passed through it, let alone what the results have been or the recidivism rate or any of the other obvious questions.

The Government's decision to introduce the Bill in the absence of any serious preparation is highly suspect. Is the Bill really intended to provide for the devolution of justice to Northern Ireland? Very probably, the answer is no. It might not be necessary this year, and there might be great advantages in waiting until next year. Is the purpose of the Bill really to provide a new regime for child justice in Northern Ireland? Again, the answer is very possibly no. The system has not been piloted and will be applied in Northern Ireland although there is no particular rationale for adopting that part of the country for the pilot.

Clearly, there has been none of the fundamental preparatory work that the House of Commons should demand before beginning to take seriously any suggestion that we should alter our system of child justice in any part of the country and adopt wholesale an experiment undertaken at the other end of the world. No proper assessment has been made for the public or for Parliament before asking us to take that decision.

Mr. Browne: Before the hon. Gentleman suggests too seriously that we are taking a leap in the dark, may I point out that he will be aware from his reading of the implementation plan and other documents published by the Government that we intend to pilot the system of restorative justice in the greater Belfast area, to assess the pilot and to go forward from there? He urges us to pilot the system, and that is what we intend to do.

Mr. Davies: The Minister provides me with a good soundbite: the phrase "a leap in the dark" sums up the Bill very well, and I thank him for it. He has no defence against the charge that I have just made. His intention is to pilot the scheme, but in Northern Ireland. We think it bizarre, given the troubles in Belfast, to pilot a system of restorative justice in Belfast that will involve members of the community.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): The hon. Gentleman has outlined two motives that he claims the Government do not have for introducing the Bill. What does he believe is the Government's motive for doing so?

Mr. Davies: I am glad that I have the hon. Gentleman's attention and to know that he will listen carefully to the rest of my speech. An audience of at least one Member will wait in suspense for that important part of my speech. I shall come to that point, but I shall not quite yet be driven off the issue of the preparatory work for the new proposals for youth conferences, restorative justice, community responsibility orders and so forth.

The hon. Gentleman's intervention has confirmed my feeling that the Government have been thoroughly unbusinesslike about the Bill. One does not decide to change the system of criminal justice for anyone, and least of all for children, without thorough preparatory work. We cannot pass a Bill that takes lots of new powers and sets up many new systems, and then say that we will merely pilot it in Northern Ireland.

Before we take a decision, we need a thorough evaluation of the New Zealand experiment. The Government appear to have spent a lot of public money on that, even sending people to New Zealand, but we have had no proper analysis of the working of the system in New Zealand. That is surely elementary. What did those people do in New Zealand? I am sure that they had a lovely time—I gather that it is a beautiful country—but there was a time when people who had a jaunt at the taxpayer's expense were expected to produce some sort of report. If their report was detailed, thorough and convincing enough to make a respectable contribution to our debate, I should have expected it to be published. It has not been published, either in the review or, as far as I know, anywhere else. The fact that the Minister, who is usually quick to intervene, is sitting tight confirms me in my fears.

Mr. Tynan: The hon. Gentleman obviously opposes pilot schemes. Did he oppose or comment on the pilot scheme in Scotland when the poll tax was introduced?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman will not lead me back to the controversies of the 1980s, and particularly not to a controversy that occurred even before I was a Member of the House. Far from being against piloting, I believe that it should be done systematically and thoroughly. We should not take a decision on rolling out a system until it has been properly piloted.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman will recollect that, during one of his meetings with my officials, he was given a copy of international research into restorative justice, including in New Zealand. Has he read it?

Mr. Davies: I do not recall seeing the report to which the Minister refers. I should be interested to see it. I have no idea whether it was produced by his officials who went to New Zealand or by others. If that report was germane to the decision to roll this system out in Northern Ireland and to change the law in the way that the Bill proposes, I cannot understand why it was not included in the review or at least referred to in appendix B so that we might have known that it was one of the documents on which the Bill was based.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that one of the supporting documents was the paper I have in my hand—"Restorative Justice Options for Northern Ireland: A Comparative Review". It includes references to the very matters that he says are absent from the review.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman has not given me that report; I have not seen it. It is certainly not listed in appendix B. Perhaps he will point to precisely where it appears in appendix B, to show that we might have known that it existed and been able to ask for it. Page 445 of the review contains no reference to the assessment of New Zealand that he now claims exists. If the Minister wants some time to look at that page, he is welcome to it.

I have said enough to make it clear that I do not think that the Government can rest their case for the Bill on the provisions relating to either restorative justice or devolution of justice to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I know that the point may be becoming tedious to some of his hon. Friends, but I should put the record straight. On page 445 of the review report—the page to which the hon. Gentleman himself referred—item 10 is the report to which I referred: "Restorative Justice Options for Northern Ireland: A Comparative Review". I cannot be responsible for the hon. Gentleman's copy of the review report, but if it is missing page 445, he can have mine.

Mr. Davies: What I have asked for and what the hon. Gentleman has not provided—he does not even suggest that it exists—is an assessment of the position in New Zealand. I have not seen such an assessment—nor, as far as I know, has any other hon. Member. We ought to read it, and we ought to have a chance to discuss it, before we change the law. My point is made.

The fact remains, however, that the Government would not have introduced the Bill this year if it were not necessary to camouflage two rather nasty and extremely significant provisions. Many parts of the Bill—restorative justice, merits, demerits and what happens around the world—may be discussed academically, which would be absolutely fascinating, but it represents a Trojan horse for

[Mr. Davies]

two very nasty provisions: the abolition of the Oath of Allegiance in Northern Ireland and the removal of the royal coat of arms from courtrooms and new courthouses in Northern Ireland.

The Minister does not like my placing the focus on those two provisions, which is not surprising because they are very momentous provisions. I think that I am right to say—I hope that someone will correct me if I am wrong—that they must be the most overtly, explicitly republican provisions introduced in the House since the time of Oliver Cromwell. Someone cannot be much more republican than to suggest that we break the link between the judiciary and the Crown, that we no longer have the Crown at the apex of our constitution, legislative system, Executive and judiciary and that the doctrine on which the common law has always been based—that the administration of justice flows from the Crown—should be breached in part of our country: Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on two matters? First, the police in Scotland take no oath of allegiance to the Crown, and, under legislation that flowed from the Good Friday agreement, with which he agreed, neither do new recruits in Northern Ireland. Secondly, the Conservative Government supported Britain's joining and subscribing to the European convention on human rights, under which legal decisions come from the Strasbourg court and do not flow from the Crown, and from the Luxembourg court—which Mr. Heath took us into, as well as the European Community—which do not emanate from the Crown either.

Mr. Davies: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman is just thrashing around, desperately trying to find some shield to protect the Government, and his desperation shows. First, he knows perfectly well that I referred to the judiciary. I am not talking about the police, but he tries to switch the discussion to the police. Secondly, he talks about courts set up under international agreements to which we are party. Clearly, that has gone on for a long time. We set up the International Court of Justice at The Hague some time before the first world war. It is obvious that if we set up an international court and are part of the convention, the international court is not subject to the Crown, but under all the systems of law in the United Kingdom—Scottish law, English law and so forth—the principle has always been that justice flows from the Crown, and the hon. Gentleman knows that perfectly well. He also knows perfectly well that the Bill will cut that umbilical cord in respect of Northern Ireland, which raises enormous constitutional and juridical questions that he wants to shield the Government from facing up to.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does my hon. Friend agree that the position of the Strasbourg and Luxembourg courts in this country's judicial system flows entirely from a decision of this Parliament?

Mr. Davies: Indeed. My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and what Parliament grants, it can take away. Parliament is sovereign—another principle that, like justice flowing from the Crown, most of us thought immutable. It is now under attack, at least in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I am grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for giving way. Earlier, I was almost tempted to say:

"Be sure your sin will find you out."

Things come back to haunt us, as we have already discovered from previous interventions, but is not it a fact that, instead of respecting mutual traditions, things have moved further and some people no longer respect the fact Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom under the sovereign?

Mr. Davies: Indeed, that is absolutely true. I am afraid to say that the Government appear to be so embarrassed that the Secretary of State has done something unprecedented—to have absented himself from the Chamber during a debate on a fundamental constitutional issue. Absenting himself from the Chamber and not waiting to hear the Opposition's response in any context, let alone a debate on Second Reading, is pretty unprecedented. I have several questions to ask him, but they will have to be answered by the Minister, if he is prepared to do so.

I place on record the fact that that is not only an extraordinary discourtesy to the House—I am certainly not worried about discourtesy to me personally—but it reflects the slighting way in which Government regard Parliament these days. They regard it as something of a burden, a nuisance and less important than other things that they might prefer to do. There could be no more graphic example of that than the Secretary of State's conduct this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) is right to say that those provisions raise fundamental constitutional issues. Do the Government glory in making this concession? Are they closet republicans? Do they feel that this would be a wonderful thing to do if only it could be rolled out across the whole United Kingdom and that it is absolutely splendid that they have an opportunity to do so in Northern Ireland, they hope? Are they introducing the provisions more in sorrow, thinking that they reluctantly have to do so in Northern Ireland? To use the Secretary of State's phrase, is this a concession; or are the Government introducing it on its own merits? Perhaps we could have some answers. I should be happy to give way to the Minister, who normally likes to jump to his feet to interrupt, if he has an answer.

Mr. Garnier: While my hon. Friend is waiting, may I give him a little reassurance? I broadly agree about the motives behind clause 20(2) and (3), but I have absolutely no doubt that the judges who take the oath in Northern Ireland will deliver justice as dispassionately and with as much sense of justice as any holder of judicial office who has taken the existing oath. We need not worry about the quality of justice that will be provided by judges or holders of judicial office in Northern Ireland, but I wholeheartedly accept the point that my hon. Friend makes about the symbolism of the original oath and the message that the Government are trying to send by removing it.

Mr. Davies: My hon. and learned Friend jumps to his feet to defend the integrity of the legal profession. I hasten to add that I had no intention of impugning its integrity, and I am certain that judges will indeed try to administer justice impartially. Nevertheless, as he will concede, some serious constitutional questions have been raised.

Let me put those questions to the Minister, who sits on the Government Front Bench in default of the Secretary of State, who ought to answer. The Secretary of State bears the responsibility for introducing the Bill, but he made a long speech, lasting more than 50 minutes, and then walked out of the Chamber, so he is no longer able to answer any question that the House may have. Hon. Members could not have a clearer example of the way in which the Government are treating Parliament. It is absolutely monstrous and absolutely scandalous, and if that is what happens when a party achieves a majority of 200 over the other parties, it is a wonderful example of the working of the Acton principle that power corrupts and greater power corrupts further.

I shall still ask those questions. If the Queen is no longer to be the apex of our justice system, who is? No one is substituted under the Bill. Will it be the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? Will it be the Prime Minister in a new regal role? Will it be the legal profession itself, enjoying some sort of platonic hegemony by virtue of its own specialised knowledge? Will the Minister resort to the mantra of Marxism-Leninism and say that justice will be done in the people's name? That is remarkable. We are removing the Crown from the apex of the judiciary in Northern Ireland, but the Minister will not tell me what the Government are putting in its place. How can Parliament possibly pass the Bill, which removes the relationship between the Crown and the judicial system in part of our country, without the Secretary of State being here to answer questions and without the Government being prepared to tell us what they are putting in its place?

Mr. Tom Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: There is no point my giving way to the hon. Gentleman. I want the Government to give me an answer. I do not want them to be saved from answering a necessary question by interventions from their Back Benchers. The Government must respond, because there is simply no way that the House can vote for the Bill tonight unless we have an answer to that elementary question.

Will the Minister intervene? Does he want me to count up to five? He has no answer; the House can draw a clear conclusion from that.

Mr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Davies: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He wants to act as a foil to save the Government from complete and utter embarrassment. They do not want to answer the questions, or they do want to tell the House that they have no answers. Ministers are simply sitting on the Front Bench and are not answering the most fundamental question that is raised by the Bill.

Mr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Davies: No, I have said that I will not give way. I have said that I will not allow anyone to speak for the Government on this particular matter. I will take an intervention from the Minister or from the Secretary of State should he return to the House and fulfil his duties by defending his Bill.

Mike Gapes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, I am very consistent. You have known me a long time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you know that when I say that I will not give way, I will not give way. Normally, I enjoy giving way on such occasions and the hon. Gentleman knows that I often enjoy giving way to him. However, I will not give way to anyone on the Government Benches who simply wishes to obfuscate. The issue cannot and will not be obfuscated. We require an answer from the Government. Who or what will replace the Crown, which is being removed from the apex of the judicial system in Northern Ireland?

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: Exactly the same goes for the hon. Gentleman. I will take no further interventions from Labour Back Benchers until I get an answer to the most fundamental and pertinent question raised by the Bill.

Mr. Browne *rose—*

Mr. Davies: Ah!

Mr. Browne: To spare hon. Members a repetition of this ill-informed contribution to the debate, I point out to the hon. Gentleman that he will find the answer to his question in proposed new section 12 of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978. The words appear in clause 4 of the Bill, which states:

> "Whenever the office of Lord Chief Justice is vacant, Her Majesty may . . . appoint a qualified person".

It is perfectly clear that there is no change to the structure of the judiciary in Northern Ireland or to its relationship with Her Majesty the Queen. She will remain at the apex of the judiciary in Northern Ireland. In the same way as the hon. Gentleman did not get to the appendices in the review, he may not have reached clause 4, but that is the answer.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman has, in fact, said that the Bill is complete nonsense. If the oath of allegiance is removed, judges will no longer have to accept that the Crown stands above justice in Northern Ireland. Their allegiance to the Crown will be abolished and they will apparently be beholden to no one. However, the Minister tells us that, for certain purposes, the role of the Crown is being emasculated but retained. What is the logic of that?

If the Minister wanted to introduce a purely republican measure, he would presumably have cut all the links with the Crown. However, he does not have the courage to do that or does not want to that, so he cuts some links and removes the oath of allegiance that is absolutely key to the relationship between judges and the Crown and that sets it out clearly in a way that no other procedure could.

Mr. Tom Harris *rose—*

Mr. McNamara *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I may give way in a moment, but the hon. Gentlemen have to be a little patient. They are trying to do a good job of defending the Minister from my strictures.

[Mr. Davies]

If the Minister is suggesting that the Crown still has a role in Northern Ireland as an overarching authority for the judicial system, why is the oath of allegiance being abolished? Why is the symbol of that relationship—the royal coat of arms in courthouses—being taken down only in Northern Ireland? If he thinks that is desirable, I return to the question that he refused to answer earlier. Why does he not roll out the measure in the rest of the Kingdom?

Mr. Browne: I am sure that hon. Members will be relieved to be relieved from the tedium of the hon. Gentleman's repeated assertions, none of which has any basis in fact, in the review or in the Bill.

In the time that the hon. Gentleman had to prepare for the Bill—however long that was—I take it that he read the review. The arguments for the changes to the oath in the special circumstances of Northern Ireland are set out in the review and they are accepted by the Government. The arguments and discussion about the symbols in courtrooms and outside courts are set out in the review, and they are accepted by the Government. That is the raison d'être for the Bill. It has nothing to do with republicanism or non-republicanism, and the hon. Gentleman does not know which it is anyway.

Mr. Davies: The Minister has now betrayed himself completely. He is essentially saying that the arguments for the proposals are contained in the review. However, it is not an independent review. It was set up by the Government, packed by the Government and run by the Government. It is the Government speaking to themselves.

I refer the Minister and the House to the constitution of the review and to paragraph 1.5 on the composition of the review group. The chairman of the group is Jim Daniell. Who is he? He is the director of criminal justice at the Northern Ireland Office and chairman of the review group. The chairman is a civil servant who works for the Secretary of State and is on the payroll of the Northern Ireland Office. The next member is Glenn Thompson, director of the Northern Ireland Court Service, and another, Brian White, is the head of the criminal justice policy division at the Northern Ireland Office. In no sense is this an independent review.

Mr. Browne *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I will finish my comments before I give way to the Minister—then he can answer.

The whole structure has been an expensive charade that has been pursued at the cost of the taxpayer and has been designed to bamboozle the public. The Government decided what they wanted to do.

Mr. Browne *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I will give way to the Minister only when I have finished my argument.

The Government clearly decided what they wanted to do. They produced and packed the review, and its chairman reported directly to them. Other members of the review group are directly on their payroll. The second half of the charade is that they then produced a response to their review. Who drafted the response? Perhaps the Minister would like to tell us. I suppose it might well have been the director of criminal justice at the Northern Ireland Office—he is the chairman of the review group—or one of the other civil servants on the body. It would be very odd if the director of criminal justice at the Northern Ireland Office had nothing to do with the drafting of a document that admittedly goes out in the name of the Secretary of State. It is a thoroughly incestuous procedure, and it will fool no one.

Mr. Browne: It is now clear how far the hon. Gentleman read into the review document: he read to the bottom of page 2. If he reads the top of page 3, he will see that there were another five members of the review group, all of whom were independent of Government. The majority of the group were independent, so why did he stop reading the names at the bottom of page 2 and not continue to read those of the five independent people on page 3?

Mr. Davies: Simply because I was reading out the names of the people who report directly to the Minister or to his boss, the Secretary of State. They packed the review group with their civil servants and they nominated the chairman. Of course, they can have one or two outside members—as, indeed, they do—to provide the fig leaf, but that is simply part of the charade.

Another part of the charade relates to a serious abuse. The Government tend to justify the Bill and the particularly obnoxious provisions about the oath of allegiance and about the presence of the royal coat of arms in courtrooms and on new courthouses by saying that they have something to do with the Belfast agreement. I am sure that, like me, the Minister has read the Belfast agreement; I have read it several times. Therefore, he should know that there is nothing in the agreement about these two provisions. It provides for a review of the justice system in Northern Ireland. It also sets up the terms of reference for the criminal justice review in one of the appendices, and I can tell the Minister where that is if he wants to know. Nothing is included about the oath of allegiance or the royal coat of arms. The beginning—the fons et origo—and the end of the proposal lie with the Government. They came up with the idea and are responsible for establishing the review group and packing it with their people. They got the proposal from the review group; it has nothing to do with the Belfast agreement. They responded in the review document and put the provisions in the Bill, and they alone can take responsibility for them.

David Burnside: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government's track record on independent reviews since the Belfast agreement is not particularly impartial? Will he comment on the track record of the Patten report, which, under the Belfast agreement, was meant to recommend changes that would receive widespread community support? Instead, however, the Government recommended removing the "Royal" from the title of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. There is a republican tendency within the Government.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman's last point is all too evident, and it is a cause of concern. The Patten report at least had a greater pretension of being independent.

As the Secretary of State said, Chris Patten was not on the Government payroll and not a member of the Government party. He was in a key position as chairman, as indeed is the chairman of this review group, although he is also part of the hierarchy of the Northern Ireland Office.

The hon. Gentleman's comment on republicanism brings me back to the question that I asked, which has not been answered. If it is desirable to remove the oath of allegiance and take away the royal coat of arms from courtrooms, why is that not being done in the rest of the United Kingdom? Why do the Government not have the courage of their convictions—if, indeed, they are convictions?

Lembit Öpik: I have listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's conspiracy theory on republicans in the Government. In that context, who will appoint the Advocate-General in the new system, and what will his continuing responsibilities be for Northern Ireland?

Mr. Davies: We had an interesting revelation on that when it was suggested that the Advocate-General might be the same person as the Attorney-General in this country.

Mr. McNamara: May I refer the hon. Gentleman back to the oath, over which he has taken such grave exception? It states:

> "I . . . do swear that I will well and faithfully serve in the office of"

whatever it is

> "and that I will do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will according to the laws and usages"—

I stress the final part—

> "of this realm."

Mr. Davies: I noticed that, and it shows how mealy-mouthed the Government are. They do not have the courage of their convictions. They have been incapable of explaining the logic of leaving the reference to realm but removing the reference to oath of allegiance. I ask again: what is the logic in that? There is no logic. We have established that clearly.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that there is no such thing as a United Kingdom legal system? The fact that Scotland has had her own legal system for 300 years has not contributed to any great wish for Scotland to become independent.

Mr. Davies: Of course I realise that; indeed, I think that I referred to that earlier. We all know that Scotland has a different legal system. It is based on Roman law and was in place at the time of the Act of Union 1707.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Davies: I will give way, but I cannot take any more interventions because I must make progress.

Mr. Francois: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for giving way; I shall be brief.

My hon. Friend initially put his question to the Minister five or six times, but the Minister sat in his seat looking blank until inspiration arrived from elsewhere. The Government cannot hide behind the review. It is their Bill that is before the House and they must stand or fall by what is in it. They cannot palm responsibility off on others.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend scores a bull's eye, as he would know if he had seen the Minister shift in his seat as he spoke. As he says, the Government are responsible for the anomalous mess and the disreputable concessions. They might go three quarters or even 90 per cent. of the way towards republicanism, but they do not have the courage of their convictions and go the full 100 per cent. The Government cooked up the Bill. They were responsible for the review, which they dominated. They packed the review committee with their people and produced their own response. The procedure has been incestuous and I do not believe that it will confuse anyone.

Why have the Government gone in for this particular exercise? We have established that, and the debate has been a good one. The Government's decision is not based on a conviction, because if the measures were so virtuous and desirable in themselves they would be extended to the whole of the UK. We all know the answer. The Bill has been introduced for no other reason than to provide one more set of concessions to one of the parties in Northern Ireland. Every time we have a Northern Ireland debate, at least one new concession is made and it is always tailored to the same beneficiary—Irish republicanism. It is impossible to get more republican than the Bill. It cannot be a coincidence—or, if it is, it is a revealing one—that the Bill comes before the House on the day when Sinn Fein-IRA MPs are claiming their privileges for the first time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been over that course before and been reproved from the Chair.

Mr. Davies: It was a passing reference, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I remind the Minister, and he does need reminding, why we believe that the course of offering endless concessions in one direction in Northern Ireland is inept, irresponsible and dangerous. First, the concessions are not linked to a counter move by the other side. The Government give away their negotiating currency and, when they run out of that, they try to raise more at the expense of the integrity of our institutions—Parliament, the system of justice and the Crown. They then throw away the new concessions without getting a quid pro quo. That is a hopeless way to conduct a negotiation.

The second problem with the tactic is that, far from speeding up the implementation of the Belfast agreement, which is an objective that we all sincerely share, it can only do the reverse. Sinn Fein-IRA have every incentive to spin out the agony on decommissioning because the longer it is spun out, the more concessions they get from the British Government. That is a lamentable state of affairs.

The third problem is that by making the concessions all in one direction, the Government are destroying the essential balance that is fundamental to a successful peace

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process. We will have permanent peace in Northern Ireland only if all communities believe that there is something in it for them. In the case of the Belfast agreement, everyone made concessions and everyone legitimately believed that it contained something that was important and positive for them. That is why the Opposition supported and continue to support the Belfast agreement.

By moving beyond the Belfast agreement and making a stream of concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA without waiting for it to be implemented, or even insisting on its implementation, other parties are increasingly feeling that they are being made fools of in some way because it is a one-way street. It is not just the Unionist community that is affected, although it is the majority group. What about the Social Democratic and Labour party? After all, the SDLP and its predecessors have for generations persistently and bravely fought for human rights and equal opportunities in Northern Ireland and, quite legitimately, for their ideal of a united Ireland. In doing so they have always stuck to constitutional principles and adopted peaceful methods. The SDLP has acted in the finest traditions of its predecessors—O'Connell, Parnell and Redmond.

What has the SDLP got? It has not received any great bouquets from the Government. It has not been given a specially crafted concession or a special status here at Westminster. It has not had the Government rolling out the red carpet and allowing it to hold press conferences in Downing street. It is entitled to feel as aggrieved by the Government's handling of the matter as are the Unionist parties. Ultimately, the Government's policy is not only inept but extremely dangerous. They must change course before it is too late.

Sometimes the Government like to ask me what I would do in their place. The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), did so the other day. It is quite simple. First, we would state that there would be no unilateral concessions at all. Nobody would receive concessions without making some effort in return. Concessions might be related to decommissioning. They ought to be related to decommissioning in present circumstances because it is running over a year and a half late, which is a serious matter.

Concessions might, however, be related to other matters. When the Secretary of State was still here, we discussed policing. I put the question again: why, when the Government are to give bouquets to Sinn Fein-IRA, did they not take the opportunity to say, "You can't have this unless you do your part on policing"? I am extremely worried about the summer parades season in Northern Ireland. No progress is being made in negotiations, so perhaps the Government could ask for concessions on parades. It is essential that when the Government have something to offer they do not throw it away. They must make sure that it is bargained for concrete progress in the peace process.

Secondly, we would try to have a programmed process involving all parties, so that everybody knew exactly what needed to be done, when it needed to be done and what the end of the line was. The desperate situation in Northern Ireland today is that nobody knows where the end of the line is. Nobody knows how many more concessions the British Government might have to make before there is further progress on decommissioning. Nobody knows where this process will end, and that is extremely demoralising and worrying.

Mr. Tom Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, I cannot take any more interventions at this stage. I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Gentleman will catch your eye later in the debate.

Mr. Browne *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He would not answer my key questions, and he had plenty of opportunities to do so. I asked him questions five or six times and he would not answer them. Now it is too late for him to intervene because I am about to wind up my speech.

Finally, we recognise that there may be occasions on which it is a good idea to consider symbolism. Clearly, in this case there is an important issue concerning the royal coat of arms in courtrooms. Our approach would be not to take away an existing symbol but, where it seemed a good idea, to add another. A wonderful example of how that can be done has been set, no thanks to the Government, by the Policing Board, which has decided on a new cap badge and uniform for the new police service. As we know, the Government's contribution was to try to screw that up that by including the wrong photographs in the order put before the House of Commons.

That is a good example of how it is possible to make progress in accommodating groups and making them feel a sense of ownership of institutions in Northern Ireland without at the same time insulting or humiliating other groups. That is the way forward, but it does not seem even to have occurred to the Government to try to solve the issue of the royal coat of arms in courtrooms on that basis. If it had occurred to them, I trust that we would have heard about it because they would have pursued the suggestion and had discussions. They never even thought of it because their instinct, which is purely destructive and unbalanced, is to get rid of the royal coat of arms. I do not know whether that is because they are closet republicans or whether it is because they just did not think beyond their noses.

Mr. Browne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, Ministers have had many opportunities to intervene on me.

I particularly resent, as will the whole House, the fact that the Secretary of State has absented himself from this debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That must be the third or fourth time that the hon. Gentleman has made that point. He has said enough about that.

Mr. Davies: The Government have no answer to the key questions that I have asked. Why, if these measures are so desirable, are they not being rolled out in the United Kingdom as a whole? Why are the Government continuing to give away concessions without getting anything in return? The Secretary of State is not in a position to answer those questions; the Minister declined to do so when I put them to him, and the House can judge from that whether or not it is right to give the Bill a Second Reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Do I take it that the hon. Gentleman has moved the Opposition amendment?

Mr. Davies: My first remarks, which were made before you took the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were that I moved the amendment in my name and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. That was not picked up by my predecessor in the Chair. I am glad that we have clarified the point.

6.35 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Despite my reputation, I welcome today's debate and the Bill as a further demonstration of the Government's commitment to the Good Friday agreement and a further stage in its implementation.

We are having this debate against a background of considerable violence in north Belfast: the fire-bombing of a pensioner, the abiding cruelty towards the girls and families of the Holy Cross school and the casual murder of a young father, Daniel McColgan. All that reminds us that the road on which we travel is beset with risk and danger, as it has been over the years, but I believe that we have come a long way and that we are making progress.

The second paragraph in the declaration of support for the Good Friday agreement reads:

> "The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust, and to protect the human rights of all."

At the outset, it has to be said that the Bill begs the question of the continued existence of emergency legislation, the failure to reform the inquest system and the persistence of no-jury courts. It begs the question of the past, and in important respects, particularly on the all-Ireland dimension, it begs the question of the future.

The past runs like a cancer through the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. One can try, like Lord Widgery, to paper over the cracks after Bloody Sunday, but the truth has to be addressed eventually. The cost of 30 years of delay can be counted in bodies on the streets. It is no use now complaining about the cost of Lord Saville's inquiry.

The roots of the failure to bring to justice the murderers of Pat Finucane, Robert Hamill and Rosemary Nelson lie in the corruption of the police and the criminal justice system by what nationalists believe was a fundamentally flawed and self-defeating practice of counter-insurgency—of pursuing a clandestine war against terrorism through the institutions of the state. It is for historians and politicians to argue about whether that was successful or necessary. One thing we all have to understand is that confidence in the rule of law and the institutions for upholding the law were critically undermined in the process.

We need a fresh Act and a new beginning. That is the reality that we have to address, and the Government are partly doing so today. The Good Friday agreement envisaged that, following the establishment of the new institutions, within a relatively short time it would be possible to create a new police service, reform the criminal justice system and transfer responsibility for law and order to the Northern Ireland Assembly. In that scenario the promotion of rights would be balanced with the nurturing of a new sense of collective responsibility. There would be no winners and no losers. The process would move on.

We can argue about who was to blame for delay, but delay has occurred. The Bill is clearly only a half-way house. It introduces a number of important reforms that prepare the ground for devolution, but it does not take that step. Consequently, it is more difficult to establish the balance between rights and responsibilities. I wish to underline at the outset the fact that balance will not be achieved by taking half measures in reform. It should have been introduced sooner, but I welcome the Government's target for devolving policing and justice as quickly as possible after May 2003.

The legislation that we have now got must create confidence in the justice system across the whole community. For that reason, I question why the Government in their publication on the purpose and aims of the criminal justice system have dramatically departed from the aims of the criminal justice system set out in the Good Friday agreement. The aims, in the agreement, of being

> "responsive to the community's concerns and encouraging community involvement where appropriate"

and having

> "the confidence of all parts of the community"

do not appear in the text of the Government publication. I have no great disagreement with the aims as published, but regret to say that I can see no reason to jettison the aims that appeared in the Good Friday agreement, which have been voted on by the House and by the people of Ireland, north and south.

The Good Friday agreement and the criminal justice review that was established as a result both set great store by recognising the centrality of human rights and the framework provided by international human rights standards. However, they have no place in the Government's exposition of the aims of the criminal justice system, although my right hon. Friend partly dealt with that in his speech. It is a major defect that that recognition is not implicit on the face of the Bill. I share that position with the Northern Ireland Assembly, which adopted it by unanimous agreement.

The Bill should have regard to rights highlighted by the Good Friday agreement, particularly given the recent history of communal conflict, as they address parity of esteem. The right to pursue democratically national and political aspirations and the right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means should be given legal expression; consequently, those parts of the Treason Felony Act 1848 that still prescribe that activities such as felony should be punishable by life imprisonment should be repealed.

I welcome what the Bill says about the rights of the child, which are increasingly important in the international framework for the protection of human

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rights. I welcome the clauses that deal with youth justice and am pleased that the Government are moving into line with international best practice by bringing 17-year-olds into the orbit of the youth justice system. The United Nations convention on the rights of the child provides that in all actions concerning children undertaken by

> "courts of law, administrative authorities of legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

In that light, I am surprised that the aims of the youth justice system set out in the Bill are drawn even narrower than the aims of the criminal justice system as a whole. The Government are right to set out the aims of the youth justice system, but it cannot be right that clause 53(1) states:

> "The principal aim of the youth justice system is to protect the public by preventing offending by children."

There is no reference, despite the three subsequent subsections, to rehabilitating youth and child offenders; that should have been addressed, as its importance parallels that of the principal aim. At a minimum, the Bill should require all persons and bodies within the system to have regard to the UN convention on the rights of the child.

The Bill must pass three critical tests if it is to meet the challenge of creating a fresh start for the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. Will the structures of the system make it accountable to the community that it serves? Will its composition make it representative of the community that it serves? Will its ethos make it sensitive to the need for tolerance and reconciliation in a divided society?

On accountability, the Director of Public Prosecutions is no less controversial, albeit less public, than the Chief Constable, formerly of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, but now of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I should prefer greater accountability and a new name, especially in light of the Finucane fiasco, in which murderers walked free in the interests of national security; Stobie was originally acquitted 10 years ago and Herard, allegedly the man who pulled the trigger on Pat Finucane, was recruited to the security services. I certainly want to ensure greater transparency in decision making when it is decided not to prosecute, especially bearing in mind the decision of the Attorney-General not to prosecute the policemen involved in shootings in South Armagh—the alleged shoot-to-kill policy—who were to have been charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. I believe that, as a general principle, although not necessarily in those particular cases, that is the attitude of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

On the composition of the new institutions, I am disappointed that the Government have so far failed to bring the component parts of the criminal justice system into the purview of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which would place on them a statutory duty to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that that is the Government's intention when he makes his winding-up speech. I fail to understand why it is not important to ensure that the recruitment and promotion practices of the court service or the prison service should not comply fully with the law on providing equality of opportunity. I fail to see why the composition of the work force should not be monitored to protect against discrimination on the grounds of gender, community origin or any other prescribed basis. I fail to see why a programme of affirmative action with goals and timetables should not be put in place.

The process of change and renewal requires the bringing-in of new people and influences. There is much greater scope for lay involvement in the proposed Law Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission. It should be possible to create neutral symbols for the Northern Ireland Court Service that represent the system's aim of providing justice for all. The issue of members of oath-bound organisations came up in relation to the new police service, and it is no less important for those appointed to judicial offices and other positions where trust is all-important. The judicial oath is incompatible with that taken by the Orange Order; we must deal with that. The judicial oath is improved beyond measure by removing the sovereign from the equation, but for some reason, the proposed text retains "the realm" where "the jurisdiction" would serve as well. However, I am sure that we can address that in Committee.

I find the galloping republicanism, of which my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench are accused, rather startling. It would be helpful if, in his reply, my hon. Friend the Minister would explain how many new courthouses will spring up round Northern Ireland, perhaps like a rash of measles, none having a coat of arms outside. Members of the legal service, such as solicitors and barristers, and other people may find it difficult to have a coat of arms in court. The suggestion that justice comes from the sovereign is a rather quaint idea—a leftover of mediaeval and legal history—which bears no resemblance to considerations in other modern states, but we retain it.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): What the hon. Gentleman regards as something that has survived does one important thing. If justice flows from the Crown, which is at the apex of the justice system, it is divorced from party politics. The Crown stands above party politics. If we wish to indicate that the arrangements that are put in place are not influenced by party politics, as the legal system should not be, we can do that by putting them under the Crown. That is important symbolically in ensuring the independence of the judiciary of political influence. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would wish to see that.

Mr. McNamara: I very much want the judiciary to be independent of political influence. For example, I wish that there had been independence at the time of the Widgery inquiry into Bloody Sunday, but the Lord Chief Justice, with all his powers emanating from the Crown, took his orders from the Prime Minister, as the revealed minute showed. I suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that the Crown may or may not be useful for the purpose that he describes. There are other systems that manage to make the distinction without using the Crown. For people in Northern Ireland who have found the concept of accepting allegiance to the Crown difficult, as well as dispensation of justice under the Crown, it was proper to remove the coat of arms.

I should like now to deal with some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), who spoke about concessions being made to Sinn Fein. The people who spearheaded the reforms that are being introduced in terms of the nationalist community were the SDLP and my hon. Friends the Members for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) and for South Down (Mr. McGrady). The people who demanded the reforms at the height of the unrest, killings, bombings and shootings and asked for the impartial delivery of justice were my friends in the SDLP. Other people may come on board, but my friends in the SDLP were asking not for concessions, but basic rights that should be given to every person. By regarding those rights as concessions, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford is not only lifting the position of Sinn Fein in the eyes of the community, but, more importantly, doing a base disservice to the SDLP and to the people who have stuck to the constitutional issues throughout the troubles. I say to him that the more he makes a bogey man out of the provisions and uses the word "concessions" to describe the basic rights for which the SDLP and others have worked so hard and long while facing such great difficulties, the more he is defeating his own purposes.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the important thing is to make an effort, achieve some mental clarity and distinguish between concessions, which are made reluctantly as the price for achieving something else, and things that are done for their own sake. We have had some discussion about that distinction in recent Northern Ireland debates, as it is very important that people make it. He is trying to manoeuvre me into a position in which I appear to have criticised the SDLP. Far from it. I accept exactly what he said: the aims for which the SDLP campaigned for so many years largely—there may be small exceptions that I cannot think of—rightly qualified as rights. However, the concessions are being made to somebody else: Sinn Fein-IRA. Concessions such as amnesties for terrorists who are on the run or special status for their Members of Parliament do not, by definition, apply to the SDLP, so he cannot possibly distort my position to the extent of supposing that I criticise the SDLP in the way that he describes.

Mr. McNamara: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, in his speech, he referred to the provisions as concessions to Sinn Fein. I am pointing out that they were being demanded as basic rights by the SDLP even before we had the policy of the Armalite and the ballot box. The SDLP, as Irish nationalists, wanted these rights. The Bill contains the right for people to go into a court and to accept that the justice done there is administered to them as citizens, and not on the basis of dispensation by—as they see it—a foreign country's monarch.

Mr. Tynan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Northern Ireland are no different from the people of Scotland, England and Wales with regard to their need for justice and a system that will create equal opportunity in Northern Ireland for all people? Does he agree that we do Northern Ireland and the Bill a disservice when we speak of concessions to Sinn Fein and the IRA?

Mr. McNamara: I thank my hon. Friend for the promotion that he gave me. I agree with him thoroughly. It is very sad that so much of the speech of the Opposition spokesman was taken up on these matters. This is a big Bill; indeed, it is a great reforming Bill. It does not go as far as I want it to, but it is a fresh step and should be received in that light. I hope that, on mature consideration, the Opposition will seek to withdraw their ill-conceived reasoned amendment and give the Government the fair wind that they deserve on the Bill, which can then be improved in Committee.

6.55 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): On balance, the Liberal Democrats welcome the Bill, as it implements reasonably faithfully the recommendations of the review of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. Let those of us who have consistently claimed to support the Northern Ireland agreement remember that this debate has arisen directly as a result of that agreement. One of the most important aspects of the debate must be the fact that the Bill finally introduces international standards of human rights in legislation for Northern Ireland. I intend to concentrate on parts 1, 2 and 3 of the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and have the opportunity to deal with the other parts.

I should like to deal first with the extremely interesting speech of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), who made some serious criticisms. For example, he criticised the degree to which we had all been consulted and suggested that there had been only partial consultation. In my view, in politics, actions speak rather louder than words. Although, thankfully, I was not in the House to endure the years of the former Conservative Government, my predecessors with the Northern Ireland portfolio have assured me—indeed, I have checked this point tonight—that they had almost no opportunity during that time to contribute to legislation before it appeared on the Floor of the House. It was almost a consultation dark age, during which my hon. Friends saw the lights going on and off as the Bills were drafted, but simply felt impotent because the Government refused to consult.

In that context, any criticisms made by the Liberal Democrats about consultation may have some currency. However, I am very dubious about the hidden agenda—to use a familiar phrase from the debate—of the Conservative party in seeking to find fault with almost every detail of a Bill that one should support in principle, if one steps back from it, in the context of the Good Friday agreement. It is slightly disappointing that the Conservative spokesperson can at the very least be interpreted as having made a party political speech rather than one that sought to contribute constructively to our debate.

Mr. Francois: In fairness to my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford, he said that he agreed with many aspects of the Bill. He sought to take issue not with a lot of detail but with specific aspects. I listened carefully to what he said and I am pretty sure that that was his approach.

Lembit Öpik: I am grateful for that intervention; we are now slowly flushing out the shields protecting the official Opposition's Front Bench. In fairness to the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have a high regard, I recognise that he makes a degree of sense on that point. None the less, the tone of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford could be interpreted by the casual onlooker—if any casual onlookers follow these debates of ours—as an unequivocally negative attack on the Bill. My worry is that perception is tremendously important in respect of

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Northern Ireland matters. In assessing the effectiveness of the measures and of what we are doing, a number of individuals will take their lead from what is being said, which will affect the mood music of the process.

I have a great deal of personal affection and respect for the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford because he is genuinely trying to drive the Conservative party back towards a more consensual position. I therefore counsel him to consider the message that Conservative Members wish to convey about what needs to happen in Northern Ireland, and the way in which they want to be portrayed in the context of such an important Bill.

The Liberal Democrats believe that, in time, policing and justice should be devolved to Northern Ireland and the Assembly and that a department of justice should be created roughly along the lines of that in Scotland. We also believe that that should happen in Wales, not because we are rabid republicans but because we are keen on devolution, which is the right way forward. At heart, we believe that, although local politicians should not interfere with police operational matters, local and correctly formed structures could enhance accountability and introduce a sense of cross-community and democratic ownership of the criminal justice system. That is the great strength of devolution and it can work as well in Wales as in Northern Ireland. However, we are discussing the Province tonight.

When devolution occurs is primarily a matter of debate between the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Government. However, I believe that we should adopt the strategy that I have outlined after a substantial period of stability. To be fair to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford, he correctly stated that maintaining the independence of the judiciary is of paramount importance in that context. For obvious reasons, Northern Ireland is a highly politicised society and we must be careful to ensure that any measure that we pass here cannot be blown off course by the especially sectoral nature of politics in Northern Ireland. We cannot allow political creep to enter the judiciary.

Chapter 6 of the report of the review covers the recent development of the role of the judiciary, especially in relation to judicial review and the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into United Kingdom law. The report rightly states:

> "All of this reinforces the need to ensure judicial independence from the executive and to enable the judiciary to act, and be seen to act, in a dispassionate way, free from any sectoral influence, real or perceived."

If the Bill did not provide for that, I should be worried that the Government had missed the point. However, I am glad that clause 1 states:

> "Those with responsibility for the administration of justice must uphold the continued independence of the judiciary."

I shall not go into detail now—I am sure that we shall revert to the matter in Committee—but the Bill appears to provide for safeguarding against the danger that I described.

How appropriate is it to legislate for devolving judicial appointments before devolving responsibility for all aspects of the justice system to the Assembly? How reasonable is it to do that in stages? Again, hon. Members may have different views on the matter, although the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford did not specifically comment on that point. I therefore assume that Conservative Members are not especially anxious about staged devolution. It makes sense because we can manage the process without changing too many aspects at once. There is great danger in moving too fast. Furthermore, we might create monsters that we cannot destroy without a great deal of work.

I welcome the establishment of a Judicial Appointments Commission for Northern Ireland. The recommendation for creating such a commission goes a long way towards ensuring a more transparent appointments process. I agree with the parts of the review that call for that. A staged, responsible approach can coherently change the judiciary and the legal system in Northern Ireland without causing too many problems. Furthermore, because transparency is heavily emphasised in the Bill, I believe that we are starting in the right place.

Paragraphs (a) and (b) of clause 3(5) provide that the five judicial members of the commission are appointed by the Lord Chief Justice and that the General Council of the Bar of Northern Ireland and the Law Society of Northern Ireland must each appoint one member of the legal profession to the commission. That shows that representation will be fairly wide.

However, will the Minister explain why the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister are to appoint the lay members of the commission? That contravenes the recommendation in the report to which I have already drawn attention. It suggests a mechanism that is similar to that prescribed in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 for appointing the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Why has not such a provision been included to ensure the same independence for the Judicial Appointments Commission? If we took that approach, we could ensure that the lay members reflected the community. The Secretary of State appoints the independent members of the Northern Ireland Policing Board so that they reflect the community. Again, we may wish to consider the matter in Committee.

The lay members of the Judicial Appointments Commission cannot afford to be seen to be political appointees. The Bill contains no guidance for the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister about the way in which they should appoint lay members. Who is allowed in and who is not? Assembly Members and Members of Parliament are excluded, but what about councillors or members of the police? What about district policing partnership members and those involved in community safety organisations? How will the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister ensure that lay members do not suffer a conflict of interest? That is a potential weakness in the Bill, although I am ready to stand corrected.

Without providing for the guidance to which I referred or for consideration of gender and representation from ethnic minorities, which the report suggests, the Bill lays itself open to a difficulty that is easy to avoid, and perhaps to an element of sectarianism, which has been institutionalised in the Assembly by, for example, the voting system for First Minister. Furthermore, appointments to the Judicial Appointments Commission do not appear to be in line with the suggestions of the Good Friday agreement.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I do not often agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I do in this case.

Does he recall that the review stated clearly that the lay appointees should reflect the community? How can five people reflect a community?

Lembit Öpik: I am stunned and delighted by the good news that the hon. Gentleman and I agree.

Mr. Browne: On a point of information, the review recommended four or five lay members.

Lembit Öpik: I had been about to say that, although I was stunned and delighted that the hon. Gentleman agreed with me, I do not necessarily agree with everything that he said. I escape on a technicality.

The list of questions, excluding the question about numbers, is salient and requires a reply. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) correctly suggested that one method of ensuring the perception of the independence of the Judicial Appointments Commission was to allow the Crown to make the appointments. I do not entirely agree, not least because I support devolution. However, it is understandable that those who are uncomfortable say that, in the absence of a convincing response, the Crown should continue to be in charge. The Government are obliged to provide an assurance, especially to those who are worried about bias.

Appointment for five years is perhaps too long because, even if we solve the problems in Committee, we need to review the matter sooner. Does the Minister believe that we should have an interim review, perhaps after one or two years, to ascertain how matters are settling down?

Moving on to clause 5, I agree that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister should have the ability to refer an initial recommendation of an appointment back to the Judicial Appointments Commission. Paragraph 6.107 of the criminal justice review makes it explicit that if the same name were resubmitted to the First Minister or Deputy First Minister, it would have to be accepted. However, that is not made clear in the Bill. As it stands, we do not know whether the commission can reconsider an application only once, or whether the First Minister and Deputy First Minister can refer a recommendation back a number of times. I am pleased with the thrust of the provision, but that point needs clarification. I am also pleased that the officers are to be appointed entirely on the basis of merit, but that does not take away this slight confusion, and we should not leave the matter to be decided by precedent.

Mr. Browne: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on, I want to reassure him that the Bill is clear in its recommendation that, the first recommendation having been refused, and following reconsideration, the provisions of the review are to be followed and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will be required to accept the second recommendation, even if it relates to the same person.

Lembit Öpik: Okay. In that case, I was in error and I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying that point.

Clause 20 specifies a new oath. It is right to modernise that practice, and this is a good time to do it. I also welcome the appointment of a local Attorney-General for Northern Ireland, as set out in clause 23. Again, though, the Bill provides little guidance on how that person should be appointed, other than to state that they should have been a barrister or solicitor for at least 10 years. Should the First Minister and Deputy First Minister be able to consult the Law Society, for example, or the General Council of the Bar before the appointment is made? Should they be mandated to carry out that kind of consultation? Or should those bodies be making recommendations to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister? This, too, requires clarification and I would welcome the Minister's perspective on it. If we leave things as they are, this will be established by precedent, and we need to be clear that that is a positive decision with which the First Minister would be comfortable.

Clause 28 establishes that the Attorney-General for England and Wales should be the Advocate-General for Northern Ireland. It is right that someone should adjudicate on whether a piece of legislation is within the competence of the Assembly. Although that is not mentioned in the report of the criminal justice review, it is implied, in terms of what the Bill is expected to achieve. Have the Government given any thought to the working relationship between the Attorney-General and the Advocate-General? Are there precedents involved, or are we—and the Government—happy to leave that question to be determined by the appointees?

We also welcome the establishment of a public prosecution service for Northern Ireland. That is essential to maintain consistency through the Bill. I agree with the arguments in the criminal justice review for the need to separate the prosecution function carried out by the police from the organisation responsible for carrying out investigations. Indeed, the report states:

> "Securing the independence of the prosecution process for cases at all levels of seriousness should assure the public that decisions on whether to proceed"—

with a prosecution—

> "are made against consistently applied criteria by legally qualified staff."

All of us will have heard of cases in which the independence of the process between police and prosecution has been brought into question. The overwhelming majority of officers always conduct themselves with probity, but if there is doubt as to whether there is a conflict of interest, or an opportunity for actions that might compromise the justice of the system, that issue will need to be resolved. We have found ourselves in terrible messes in the past, in which individuals have argued that the system itself prosecuted them for a crime that they had not committed.

We further welcome the establishment of the office of a chief inspector of criminal justice in Northern Ireland with a view to carrying out inspections of key organisations in the criminal justice sphere, such as the police, the public prosecution service and the probation board. There is a lack of clarity, however, as to what the chief inspector's role should be. That is highlighted in clause 46(2) and clause 47(6). His or her role should be either to investigate all the organisations mentioned and take an overview of the situation, or to investigate specific problems within an organisation that are likely to have to come to his or her attention through an individual case.

I am curious about clause 49(3)(b). Why should the Secretary of State be able to exclude parts of the chief inspector's report on the ground that it

> "might jeopardise the safety of any person"

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if the chief inspector is unable to investigate or review individual cases? That can probably be explained, and the Government's thinking on the matter should be expressed and placed on the record of the House. As it stands, confusion exists and the matter needs to be clarified. I see the Minister nodding, and I look forward to hearing his clarification later.

I turn to some of the very interesting comments by the Opposition spokesperson that I have not already covered. I was confused by what seemed to be a number of inconsistencies in what he said. He referred to the Government's hidden agenda. When I intervened on him to ask him to clarify that, he said that there was not a hidden agenda but a difference of view with regard to methods. Later on, however, he returned to the theme of the hidden agenda, and I was horrified to learn that, in his view, there was little short of a republican conspiracy going right up to the top on the Labour Back Benches—in the form of the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara)—that is trying to throw away all that is noble and wonderful about the monarchy, and to provide us with the freedom to change the world as we know it.

I have to make a confession. Well, it is not a confession; it is a boast. I am a true monarchist, and I have always been a monarchist.

Mr. Tom Harris: Shame!

Lembit Öpik: I hear calls of "Shame!" coming from the Labour Benches. I shall goad the closet republicans over there by saying that I believe that we have a fine Queen who conducts herself in an honourable fashion, and that the Prince of Wales will one day make an honourable and fine King and I look forward to being one of his subjects.

Mr. Harris *rose—*

Lembit Öpik: At this point, I shall give way to the closet republican who, I have spotted on the Labour Benches.

Mr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman referred earlier to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson's comments. Would he care to comment on the failure of the Conservative spokesperson to explain the hidden agenda to which I referred, regarding the youth criminal system and the pilot project to be undertaken in Northern Ireland? The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford mentioned that he was coming to that, but he never got to it and would not take any more interventions. Does the hon. Gentleman have any views on the matter?

Lembit Öpik: That shows just how easily youth passes us by. Of course the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford was entitled to focus on his primary concerns, and it is not for me to question his omission. Perhaps he was saving that point for his colleague to make, just as I am saving points for my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle to make. Should she catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, she will expand more on that question.

The considerations in the Bill are genuinely interesting and stimulating, and it is perfectly appropriate to try them out in Northern Ireland. The honourable republican on the Labour Benches does not distract me from the important point that I am making. I look across at the hon. Members who sit opposite me tonight and I know that there are republicans lurking there who would rob people such as me of my royal birthright, my right to be a citizen and subject of the Queen. On that, I stand four square with Unionism in its simplest and most traditional form and, for once, I feel that I do not have to watch my back.

Mr. McNamara *rose—*

Lembit Öpik: I say to the hon. Member for Hull, North that I will fight, fight and fight again to save the monarchy that I love. I give way to him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Not on this point. We have heard enough on this.

Mr. McNamara: I do not wish to intervene on that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was merely going to say that the hon. Gentleman should look not to the fourth row of the Opposition Benches, when worrying about watching his back, but to the second row.

Lembit Öpik: I note the hon. Gentleman's fifth columnist point and it will be dealt with appropriately, but not in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have fears regarding the hon. Gentleman's anti-monarchist principles and I have sought to satanise him, but the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford accused him of being a shield for Ministers. I have often regarded the hon. Member for Hull, North as little short of a Cromwell, bringing his roundhead supporters—

Mr. McNamara: Not a Cromwell!

Lembit Öpik: Okay. The hon. Gentleman, to use his own phrase, is a fifth columnist, but the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford sees such a republican and Front-Bench conspiracy that he chooses to offend the hon. Member for Hull, North, as we can see from the rage seething within him.

I have raised concerns, but in no sense can the Bill be regarded as a conspiracy to pander to the republicans. Any objective analysis surely shows that, even if aspects need to be improved and amendments need to be made, the Bill is a genuinely progressive effort to create independent, free-standing, transparent and effective human rights oriented legislation in terms of justice for the citizens of Northern Ireland. That is why I am dubious about the claim made by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford.

We have heard a great deal about how the Bill represents giving up sovereignty and losing the Queen's right to own and run all that she surveys, but that shows deep misunderstanding of what it will do. I am not joking now: for the Bill to be republican oriented legislation that detaches Northern Ireland from Her Majesty's empire, it would have to detach the prosecution service, the inspectorate and the judiciary from Crown involvement. Let us consider the Bill. It does not do that, but instead ensures that the Queen will appoint the Advocate-General and the Advocate-General will still be in charge of the reserved matters involving international relations, defence, tax and national security.

Of course, Stormont will appoint the Attorney-General, but the Attorney-General and the Advocate-General—that is a royal appointment—will appoint the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. There will be devolution, but there will also be an intimate relationship between that appointment and the existing structures.

Let us consider the inspectorate. The Secretary of State, acting for the House and, by implication, the Queen, will appoint the chief inspector with the Attorney-General for Northern Ireland. The chief inspector will appoint the inspectors. Once again, the Secretary of State will be intimately involved in appointments. If I understand the procedures correctly, those appointments will not be devolved outside the existing system.

Let us consider the Lord Chief Justice. The Prime Minister will consult the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, but, ultimately, the appointment will be made by the Queen. The First Minister and Deputy First Minister must advise the Queen of appointments to the judiciary. Perhaps that is a formality, but they must do so none the less. There is sufficient assurance for me, as a non-republican, that the Bill does not dismantle existing structures and will not send Northern Ireland sailing off into separate republican status, so I am comfortable that that should not be a key issue for tonight's debate. Of course, hon. Members may draw their own conclusions.

I refer to the Opposition's reasoned amendment. Once again, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford confused me. He said that he is not opposed in principle to the legislation, yet the amendment, which carries his name, says:

> "This House declines to give a Second Reading to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill because it infringes the principle that justice flows from the Crown throughout the realm".

If I understand that correctly, he opposes an element of his own amendment. Perhaps he is considering whether to vote for it or not.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The hon. Gentleman has completely misunderstood me, as he will discover if he reads *Hansard* tomorrow morning. I said that we do not oppose in principle 90 per cent. by length of the Bill, which covers devolution of justice to Northern Ireland and the establishment of the new restorative justice for child offenders. We are, of course, very much opposed in principle to the two pernicious points buried in all that, to which I drew particular attention: the provisions relating to the oath of allegiance and the royal coat of arms in courtrooms.

Lembit Öpik: Okay. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for misrepresenting him and thank him for his clarification, because it is indeed important clarification. It shows that the Conservatives oppose the Bill in only two key areas of 294, which is a much better hit rate than 90 per cent. Were I even 90 per cent. satisfied with legislation, I would probably vote for it. Were I 98 or 99 per cent. in favour, as it seems the Conservatives are, I would not table a reasoned amendment saying that the legislation is wrong and encourage hon. Members to vote against it.

Mr. Davies: Now I am able to correct the hon. Gentleman. I did not bother to interrupt his point about a hidden agenda, but I said that those two pernicious provisions are the hidden agenda in a large Bill that deals with other matters. Therefore, we are right to focus on that unacceptable double kernel.

Lembit Öpik: I am even more confused. I may have a rogue copy of the reasoned amendment, but all hon. Members can see that it says, in black and white:

> "This House declines to give a Second Reading to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill because it infringes the principle that justice flows from the Crown throughout the realm".

If the hon. Gentleman expects us to accept that those two key points are sufficient grounds for us to believe that Northern Ireland's justice system is genuinely, not theoretically, being detached from the existing structures in the rest of the UK, he must also explain why he does not believe that Scotland is already a republic. Scotland has far greater autonomy and is far more detached from the Crown than Northern Ireland will be following any conceivable change under the Bill, even if it is implemented by a fanatic. The hon. Gentleman may still think that he can vote for the reasoned amendment, but I ask other hon. Members to read it for themselves and think about what message the Conservatives are putting out.

My other concern about the reasoned amendment involves the words

> "and because it represents a further stage in the policy of unilateral and unbalanced concession to republicanism in Northern Ireland."

I have made the body of my points perhaps slightly lightheartedly, but I make a serious point here: the Conservative party is increasingly unclear about where it stands on devolution. Very recently, a Conservative Member of the Welsh Assembly said that there should be more devolution to the Assembly and other Conservatives believe that more rights should be given to devolved Assemblies. Is it now Conservative policy to support devolution for Wales, and perhaps more so for Scotland, or to oppose it?

If the Conservatives accept that at least a proportion of them support Scottish and Welsh devolution, why are they so afraid of it for Northern Ireland? I suggest that they want to imply a conspiracy that does not exist. The Conservative party needs to clarify its strategy on devolution and, if it does, it will be able to play a far more constructive role in debates such as this.

Let me in all humility say that I am not here to lecture the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford, who has more years of experience in the House than I do, nor do I cast any negative aspersions as to his intent. However, if the hon. Gentleman and his party are serious in their support for the Good Friday agreement, they should think about the messages that they are sending. He has said that the Conservatives were pulling out of the bipartisan agreement, and that was implicit in his remarks in this debate. With measures such as the Bill it is hard to see what that means. Does it mean that, de facto, the Conservatives will oppose every piece of legislation, even if it has merit? We have been told that, even if they agree with 90 per cent. of the legislation, they will oppose it.

I can assure the House that the bipartisan arrangement continues, but it is between the Government and the Liberal Democrats. Not long ago, I was encouraged when the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford and his hon. Friends were so persuaded by the Liberal Democrat arguments that they chose not to vote against the

[Lembit Öpik]

extension of the amnesty for decommissioning weapons. It was to the hon. Gentleman's credit that he showed bipartisanship at least towards the Liberal Democrats. I ask him once again to show the reserve and judgment that he showed on that evening. Can he honestly look himself in the mirror and say that by voting against the Bill he is making Northern Ireland a more just place?

The Bill has limitations and weaknesses, which I have asked the Minister to deal with, but it is fundamentally a good measure. I should be very surprised if anyone who, in the fullness of time, sees the intent of the Bill being implemented would disagree.

7.31 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): My party has worked for many decades to have a review of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, primarily because of its evident flaws and because it did not have the support of the entire community. It is not for me to go into the pros and cons of that, I merely to declare that this issue was on our agenda long before the Good Friday agreement and long before the review and the Bill were published. I would like to think that the substance of the part of the Good Friday agreement pertaining to criminal justice came from the papers, attitudes and arguments that we used at that time.

The criminal justice review and the Bill are not a destroying mechanism, but rather a reviewing, modernising mechanism that will bring our system into the 21st century. I hope that it will show many other jurisdictions that, out of the chaos in Northern Ireland and the horrors and injustices that we have witnessed, a judicial system can be produced that is the envy of all who observe it.

It was with great sadness rather than anger that I heard the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) try to divert the debate from the reality of the situation by means of some cheap publicity and point scoring—I do not like saying that. The Conservatives have tabled an amendment, which says that the Bill represents

"a further stage in the policy of unilateral and unbalanced concession to republicanism in Northern Ireland".

That it definitely does not do.

If the hon. Gentleman wants proof of that, he need not listen to me. He should examine the work of the Assembly's ad hoc committee on the review and the draft Bill. That committee contained members of the Ulster Unionist party, the Social Democratic and Labour party, Sinn Fein, the Democratic Unionist party and the other minor parties, none of whom said that this was a republican plot or a concession to republicanism. There was a great deal of consensus on the joint report, which contained valid, constructive criticism of the Bill and suggested how it could be improved so that the judicial system could be improved. At no time in any of the comments made at any of the meetings of that multi-party committee was there any implication or declaration that this was a republican agenda. We all know what the extreme republican agenda is in Northern Ireland—I describe myself as a republican, but that description has been besmirched by violence over the years to such an extent that I can no longer use it without paragraphs of clarification.

In our consideration of the Bill, my party wants to cover four major areas. We will deal with the Bill only in general points, because I took note of what the Secretary of State said, and it is on the record that this is an on-going review process. The Assembly's report will be part of the review that the Government are taking forward into Committee and out of it.

The four points that highlight our attitude to the Bill could be summarised as a fully accountable judiciary, an independent prosecution service based on disclosure, the enshrinement of human rights in the justice service, which has been touched on by several hon. Members, and the establishment of a Judicial Appointments Commission, which we hope will have a majority of lay members, and we shall table an amend to that affect. We also hope that the chairman of the commission will be a lay person.

We are committed to the principle of ownership of the administration of justice by the community that it is serving. Unless the community right across Northern Ireland has a sense of proprietorship of the judicial system, the process will remain flawed. We are looking for a more fundamental review.

Many of the headings have already been touched on, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) spoke at length on the youth provision, so that topic has been adequately covered. I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks about my party and its history, and about me.

I should like to comment on restorative justice. The Assembly's ad hoc committee gave much consideration to the innovative idea of restorative justice, to which everyone in the community can contribute, and which is important for the prevention and cure of juvenile crime. We felt that new approaches were required. There was agreement that the various provisions for restorative justice were not as clear as they could be, were sometimes vague, and certainly required clarification.

We want to be assured that there is transparency in the appointments system, and that the judiciary reflects that. All aspects of the appointment system must be open, and must be seen to be just and caring. It should have some reference to broad representation of the community as a whole, although not through precise diktat.

We would like to think that the Judicial Appointments Commission will not just advise, but will make appointments. Unlike the current system, the judicial and legal membership of such a commission should not have undue power and influence through their numbers, and should not impinge on the independence of the appointments.

Mr. Trimble: I am sorry to be a little dilatory in making this point, but unless I misheard the hon. Gentleman, he said that the Assembly's ad hoc committee on the criminal justice review was favourable to the concept of restorative justice.

The committee expressed concern about the whole area of restorative justice, considering that further work was required

"to take on-board the experiences of existing restorative justice programmes . . . determined that the proposed Standing Committee on Criminal Justice could further investigate this crucial area of reform."

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the committee tried to operate on the basis of consensus. On that point, it was very cautious.

Mr. McGrady: There was indeed a degree of caution, but there was no rejection. There was, in fact, a seeking of clarification, and of better ways of accomplishing it. Although, as several other passages in the report show, the ad hoc committee was not always unanimous—the parties indicated their separate differences—there was a consensus in favour of achieving a new beginning in the criminal justice system. Indeed, if I remember rightly, not one amendment was tabled when the report reached the Assembly, and not one vote was forced. That was the extent of what I will call co-operation, intended to achieve the best possible result.

The Minister, and the Government, should take on board the concerns, differences, suggestions and criticisms presented by the divers parties constituting the ad hoc committee, and incorporate what was agreed in the Bill by way of Government amendments reflecting the wishes of the people whom the judicial system will serve. What better yardstick could there be than cross-party consensus?

The question of symbolism is a thorny question, which distracted the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford. For my party, the guiding principles are parity of esteem and parity of symbolism. At best that can, perhaps, be achieved through a degree of neutrality. Opposition Members may not know that the symbols of state, such as flags and emblems, have been so grossly abused in Northern Ireland—used not as symbols of the sovereign or the state, but as party political symbols—that they do not attract the esteem, respect and regard that they should attract, because they have been besmirched for decades by party connotations of the worst sort. We are trying to approach these delicate, sensitive issues by way of understanding; perhaps some neutrality could be introduced as well.

A short time ago it was said that we would never be able to acquire a symbol for the new police force, and that that would be the most divisive aspect of the board of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It took precisely 10 days to achieve, with the agreement of the whole board and, to a vast extent, that of the public. Many of us do not like this little bit, many of us do not like that little bit, but I think it fair to say that this is now accepted as a reasonable symbol of the people of Northern Ireland. Perhaps we should be striving for the same objective to deal with the problems that emblems give us in the Northern Ireland Court Service.

We are not entirely satisfied that the proposals for the prosecution service will involve full accountability. I think that we want a system rather similar to the Scottish procurator fiscal system. The Northern Ireland committee—I have referred to it constantly, but it serves as a useful baseline—says that

> "greater transparency should be a feature of the decision-making process of the new Public Prosecution Service."

That does not suggest that the reasons why cases do not result in prosecutions should always be disclosed. We are arguing for a presumption that disclosure will be made, except when it could cause injustice and prevent the protection of victims and others.

Much has been said about the future of the devolution of reserved matters after the elections of 2003. That represents a relatively short time in the political history and experience of any country. I think that the amendments presented by the community of Northern Ireland—particularly through the Assembly's report, although my party will table amendments that we think will improve the modernisation of criminal jurisdiction—will be presented with some justification, and with some clarity.

Let me say this to Opposition Front Benchers, in the light of what was said by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and in the light of the amendment: if the House observed the exhortations of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford and rejected the Bill, it would send the very message that the hon. Gentleman wants not to send. How crazy can we get? I know that it is a lot for a Back Bencher to ask of the opposite side, whether Government or Opposition, but sanity dictates that the amendment be withdrawn.

7.47 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I do not agree with the closing remarks of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), and I hope he will bear with me if I explain why later. First, I ask him to accept that Opposition Members are not indulging in cheap publicity or political stunts. We object to the Bill on a point of principle so fundamentally important to us that—I understand—we will oppose its Second Reading, although some parts may have merit and others may deserve scrutiny in Committee. So serious is that point of principle that I feel it would be wholly wrong of us to support the Bill.

As with a number of other developments in Northern Ireland, when it comes to criminal justice there is an official and an unofficial context and background. The official context and background of the Bill were explained by the Secretary of State: it is the policing and justice section of the Belfast agreement, particularly paragraphs 4 to 7, and the subsequent work of the review group. Those who accepted the agreement will therefore have accepted those paragraphs as well, and may not be over-surprised by what has emerged from them.

Those of us who had reservations about the agreement held them for many reasons, just one of which arises from paragraphs 6 and 7 of the agreement. It was by no means our main objection; it was just one of them. Our argument was that national systems of justice are the responsibility of sovereign states and not automatically the business of neighbouring states. Obviously, the exercising of national sovereignty can extend to and include negotiating with neighbouring states, but it was arguably wrong in principle of the Government, in paragraph 6, to commit themselves in advance and unconditionally to discussing with the Irish Government the implementation of the recommendations of the Northern Ireland criminal justice review group. It was certainly wrong in principle of the Government, in paragraph 7, to commit themselves in advance and unconditionally to consulting the Irish Government before devolving within the United Kingdom responsibility for policing and justice issues. Those are rightly and properly matters for the United Kingdom Government.

Mike Gapes: What the hon. Gentleman says confirms his long-standing opposition to the Belfast agreement. Paragraph 7 was agreed to by his party as an Opposition

[Mike Gapes]

party, by the Government, by the majority of the people in Northern Ireland and in the referendum in the Republic. He is just restating his long-standing position. The reality is that his side lost the referendum, and the Belfast agreement was passed by the House and supported by the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hunter: I rather regret that I gave way for that somewhat meaningless intervention, which does not take the debate any further forward. My views of the Belfast agreement are known and irrelevant to this debate, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would no doubt advise if I were to embark upon announcing them.

That then was the official context and background of the Bill. As for the unofficial context and background, at least of key parts of the Bill, they are perhaps best summed up in the words of Brian Cowen, the Irish Foreign Minister, in a leaked Northern Ireland Office document that was first printed in the British press in May 2000. Mr. Cowen was quoted as saying:

> "Beyond the constitutional acceptance that Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom, there should be no further evidence of Britishness in the governance of Northern Ireland."

It was therefore only a matter of time before the Government made their formal move to neutralise constitutionally the institutions, structures and procedures of justice in the Province.

The Bill should be seen in its wider context. When the Minister launched the draft Bill last November, he rightly spoke of the imperatives of fairness and impartiality. Those are, or should be, at the heart of any criminal justice system. Moreover, as qualities of justice, they are absolute and timeless, but he muddied the waters somewhat by also speaking about delivering a

> "modern, progressive and forward-looking"

system of justice. If he regards the Bill as progressive, we are entitled to ask in which direction he thinks it is progressing. If he thinks it forward-looking, we can likewise ask what it is looking forward to.

The erosion of the cultural, historical and constitutional Britishness of Northern Ireland is a reality. Further manifestations of it are found in the Bill. Many people see it as another step in establishing a de facto united Ireland, so that a de jure united Ireland is not a quantum leap into the unknown but merely the formal acknowledgment of a reality that has already been created.

There is no question of a hidden agenda: it is clear from Government words and writing. There are fears that the Bill plays its part in the Government's reform and harmonisation programme, which is central to their programme towards a united Ireland.

On judicial appointments, hon. Members will know that the appointment processes in Northern Ireland are broadly similar to those in England and Wales at the more senior levels. The differences at less senior levels reflect the different court systems in the two jurisdictions.

The Lord Chancellor has been responsible for making or advising on all judicial appointments since 1973. As the review group commented at paragraph 6.16:

> "The transfer of these responsibilities to the Lord Chancellor was driven mainly by a desire to secure and demonstrate the independence of judicial matters and courts administration from any political office".

The proposal now is that political responsibility and accountability for judicial appointments should lie with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. They will take over responsibility for making recommendations to the Queen for all appointments to the level of resident magistrate and for making appointments below that level.

There will be a Judicial Appointments Commission, but the presence of lay people on that body, and their number, are a concern. It is legitimate to ask what pressures or influences they may be subject to, or what pressure they may bring to bear.

The key test of any judiciary must be that people are appointed on merit. Leaving appointments largely in the hands of the judiciary and the two legal professions provides greater opportunity for ensuring that the key test is merit, rather than some form of political balance or correctness. Where a new department of justice is being created and where the role of the Lord Chancellor is being removed, important questions should be asked about who makes decisions about the legal profession. Independence from political interference must be preserved or, even better, enhanced and reinforced. I am far from convinced that in that respect the Bill has got it right.

Much has been said already with regard to the royal coat of arms and the judicial oath. The Bill not only undermines the Britishness of Northern Ireland, but in its implementation, challenges the constitutional status of the Province. In the words of the amendment,

> "justice flows from the Crown throughout the realm".

Constitutionally and traditionally, the monarch is the source and fountain of justice in the United Kingdom. That is unaffected by devolution in Wales and Scotland, and it should be unaffected by devolution in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the United Kingdom, the sovereign's majesty is deemed always to be present in court. It was in recognition of that that the practice of displaying a royal coat of arms behind the judge's chair evolved. The royal coat of arms symbolises the monarch as the source and fountain of justice, and it symbolises the presence of the sovereign's majesty.

The criminal justice review group rightly argued that the removal of all symbols from courthouses would be inconsistent with Northern Ireland's constitutional position, but it was wholly illogical of the group then to argue that removing the royal coat of arms from inside courthouses while maintaining them outside would be consistent with Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the United Kingdom. It is illogical because the significance of the royal coat of arms inside a courthouse is greater than its significance outside. Its removal from the inside of a courthouse is therefore a far greater challenge to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. The review group acknowledges the principle that removing the royal coat of arms would be inconsistent with Northern Ireland's constitutional position, but proposes a course of action that fundamentally challenges that constitutional position.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman has revealed by his contribution to the debate so far a level of research and understanding of the position that is significantly greater than that revealed by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. To that extent, I congratulate him. The review board took a lot of advice on the constitutional implications of its recommendations and was satisfied that the consequences are not as he says they are.

Perhaps from his researches the hon. Gentleman can tell the House how long the constitutional position of putting symbols in courts has been established throughout the United Kingdom. When I started practising in courts in Scotland, by no means all of them displayed royal symbols on the walls.

Mr. Hunter: On the Minister's first point, I was making the point that I disagree profoundly with the conclusion reached by the review board. He summarised the board's findings, and I am trying to explain why it was wrong.

I do not know precisely when the practice of displaying the royal coat of arms started, but I know of courthouses dating from the end of the 17th century where, if I recall correctly, Charles II's coat of arms is to be found. I believe that the practice may have started with or after the restoration in 1660.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Perhaps Scots thriftiness is one reason why the royal coat of arms is not displayed in every court.

One of my constituents, who has practised for 20 years, has never heard any objection from any side to the presence of the coat of arms in the Northern Ireland courts. Rather than doing away with it, should we not encourage people to recognise it and accept with respect what it stands for?

Mr. Hunter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that informative intervention. I certainly agree with him.

The Bill's proposals on this matter are indications not of Northern Ireland's legal and constitutional Britishness but of the fact that Northern Ireland is being moved by the Government, quite deliberately and in flagrant disregard of the wishes of the majority of its inhabitants, into some sort of constitutional neutrality. The Secretary of State said in a speech quite recently that he did not want a "cold house for Unionists" to be created. To allow the Bill to become law will create arctic conditions for Unionists.

It is relevant to recall that political developments in nationalism in Scotland have not led to the removal of the current symbols of justice. The Scottish court system has its own distinctive characteristics but devolved government has brought about no such changes.

Mr. Browne: When the hon. Gentleman draws Scottish comparisons, he should be complete about it, and two of them are very important to his argument: first, judges are appointed on the recommendation of the First Minister in Scotland, without any of the constitutional implications that he infers; and secondly, it is now proposed to appoint a judicial appointments commission there, without any of the constitutional implications that he says there will be for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hunter: It is early days to draw such conclusions. If the political composition of the Scottish Parliament changes significantly, the Minister may find that the very problems that he says do not exist will emerge in some force.

If enacted, the Bill will politicise judicial procedures in Northern Ireland as never before. In attacking the symbols of Britishness, it undermines Northern Ireland's constitutional status within the United Kingdom. It harmonises the legal system of Northern Ireland with that of the Republic of Ireland on an unprecedented scale. It incorporates a restorative justice system that could fall into the hands of terrorist organisations or otherwise be influenced by them. And it creates a new layer of quango and bureaucracy.

I have no doubt at all that the Bill should be resisted.

8.4 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Before the start of this debate, I read for the first time the exact wording of the amendment. The Conservative party is making a major mistake by continuing, or even accelerating, its break from the cross-party consensus that prevailed through Conservative and Labour Governments.

The complaint is that the Government are making

"unilateral and unbalanced concessions to republicanism".

Such language is not only inflammatory and irresponsible: it is unworthy of any party that aspires to lead the Northern Ireland peace process in government one day, and I hope for the sake of all the people of Northern Ireland that that day is a long way off. Such language is more suited to student politics than to a debate in the House. I have little doubt that, had the Conservative party been in government at any point over the past five years, the peace process as we know it would already have been dead and buried.

After berating the Secretary of State for not being in the Chamber, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) has now left the Chamber.

Lembit Öpik: The peace process might have been dead and buried, or a Conservative Government might have made exactly the same decisions as the Labour Government have made.

Mr. Harris: I agree: being in government often concentrates the mind on a more responsible attitude, and I hope—no one can be sure—that that is what would have happened.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford spent some time describing what he would do as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland but neglected to mention two of the Government's achievements, which he clearly has no regard for and no ambition to emulate: a three-year IRA ceasefire and the decommissioning of a substantial quantity of illegally held arms. Make no mistake: the Conservatives may claim to support the Good Friday agreement—and God knows they mention it often enough—but they are most definitely opposed to the Northern Ireland peace process. I hope that they will reconsider their strategy on the issue in the very near future.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his ministerial team for introducing the Bill and for their wider efforts in pushing forward the peace process. The Bill represents yet another Labour party manifesto commitment honoured and another piece of the Good Friday agreement implemented.

[Mr. Harris]

I am disappointed that the hon. Members for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams), for Mid-Ulster (Mr. McGuinness) and for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Michelle Gildernew) are not here in the Chamber—I understand that they are in the Palace of Westminster—to debate an issue that is of great importance to their constituents as well as those of the hon. Members who have chosen to be here to represent those who elected them.

When almost everything we hear about developments in Northern Ireland revolves around terrorism, intimidation and weapons decommissioning, it is easy to forget that here is a part of the United Kingdom where normal life must go on and is going on, and that Government policy in Northern Ireland goes beyond the headlines to address the everyday concerns shared by people of all communities. The Bill is no less important to the people of Northern Ireland for the fact that it deals with measures that are not especially headline grabbing.

I warmly welcome the Bill and I want to raise a few points—salient ones, I hope—about it. In England and Wales, and in Scotland, the development of the criminal justice system has been the subject of constant though often understated debate, and where change has been necessary, appropriate legislation has followed. The Bill is the first major criminal justice reform in Northern Ireland for more than 30 years. I accept that that is an illustration of what happens to a community that is thrown into chaos and violence, and political debate focuses almost exclusively on questions of security, nationality and religion. I hope that the House will welcome the Bill as a sign that normal politics in Northern Ireland has been, if not resumed, at least rescheduled for a date in the not-too-distant future.

I especially welcome the establishment of the rights of the victims of crime, who will be kept informed, for example, of the time scale for the release of offenders. Such information, I understand, has been available to the victims of terrorist crimes, who are informed about the release of members of paramilitary groups, and I am sure that this reform is welcomed by the whole House.

Most important of all, the Government have made known their desire for responsibility for criminal justice to be devolved to where it belongs—the Northern Ireland Assembly—within a definite time scale.

The Bill makes it clear that the future development of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland must be seen as part of a politically neutral process. That is fundamental to many of the reforms that have taken place since the Good Friday agreement, and has been the cornerstone of the Government's policy. I have always believed that in Northern Ireland it is utterly impossible to please all the people all the time—but at the very least, if we are displeasing everyone at the same time, we must be doing something right.

As for symbols and oaths, I accept that it is always difficult for those of us who do not live in Northern Ireland to make judgments on those who have lived with terrorism and violence in their communities for their whole lives. However, let me say in all sincerity that it is difficult to understand why the question of emblems has to take up so much of the debate, and why it took up so great a proportion of the speeches made earlier from the Conservative Benches.

I appreciate that, in Northern Ireland, history is just not a record of the past, but, although invisible, almost a living thing, which is at the table whenever any party, Government body or courthouse meets.

Mr. Trimble: There is a very simple answer, and it has nothing to do with delving into the past; we only have to consider the past three years. The Belfast agreement recognised that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, but the problem is that since then the Government have not been implementing the agreement; they are failing to implement it. It is as simple as that. If the Government were keeping to the agreement in that respect, the Bill would have a much easier passage.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that contribution, but I am afraid that I disagree with him. I believe that the Government are implementing the spirit of the Good Friday agreement, and have worked tirelessly to keep the peace process on track. They must be commended for that.

Mr. Francois: If the hon. Gentleman's argument is that the Bill is implementing the Good Friday agreement, will he tell the House what paragraph of the agreement says that the royal arms will be removed from courthouses in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Harris: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a commitment in the Good Friday agreement to review the justice system—*[Interruption.]* That is exactly what the Bill is doing. There was also an understanding in the agreement that, following the positive votes in the referendums, there would continue to be as normal a process of governance as possible. Not everything to be produced before the House of Commons was to be specifically included in the Good Friday agreement. This, however, is specially provided for.

We are here tonight to talk about yet another major step forward for the people of Northern Ireland. The Bill will have a profoundly positive impact on civil life there. I acknowledge that whether there are crowns or other such symbols inside or outside courts is important to some Opposition Members and their constituents, but we in the House would do the people of Northern Ireland a disservice if we dwelt on such a matter at length. It is not the most important issue facing us tonight. The Bill is about addressing the real fears and problems of real people. It is not about symbols, and although everything that happens in Northern Ireland is done within a historical context—I respect the history that has been referred to earlier—we cannot allow history to dictate our actions or debates.

I completely condemn the wording of the amendment proposed by the Conservative party. It is nothing short of a disgrace, and I hope that the whole House will show its contempt for the amendment when it is put to the vote later.

8.13 pm

Lady Hermon (North Down): I apologise to hon. Members for not being here at the very beginning of the debate for the Secretary of State's opening words; it overlapped with a commitment that I had to a Committee, and I came here as quickly as possible afterwards.

Let me make it clear from the beginning—I am sure that the Minister will be relieved to know this—that the Ulster Unionist party broadly welcomes the efforts made in the Bill to make the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland more effective, transparent and accountable. As the Minister will no doubt know, there is great frustration about the inefficiencies of the present system, and we hope that the modernisation proposed in the Bill will address such problems.

We are also particularly pleased by the Government's commitment to devolve both policing and justice matters to the Northern Ireland Assembly after the next scheduled Assembly elections in May 2003. That reflects the Government's confidence both in the continued stability of the Assembly and in the calibre of its Members, both of which I welcome.

We are therefore pleased at the prospect of the new Department of Justice being established under a Minister of Justice with responsibility for the Court Service, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the probation service and the new juvenile justice agency.

Before examining the Bill in more detail, I should like to endorse the sentiments in paragraph 12.2 of the review group's report and pay tribute not only to those who have served in the Northern Ireland Prison Service but to those who have served in the wider criminal justice review system and have given such dedicated service over 30 years, despite threats and attacks by paramilitaries.

There are many positive elements in the Bill. First and foremost, given our party's commitment to human rights, equality and freedom from all forms of discrimination, including positive discrimination, we are pleased to see that the Government have agreed that those themes should be central to the criminal justice system.

It is also pleasing to see that the opening clause gives a guarantee that

> "Those with responsibility for the administration of justice must uphold the continued independence of the judiciary."

It is that emphasis in clause 1 on the "continued" independence of the judiciary that I particularly welcome, as it rightly recognises their independence to date.

Of the other positive aspects of the Bill, I draw particular attention to the progressive approach to juvenile justice. We should all agree that, where possible, we should endeavour to avoid processing and reprocessing young people within the criminal justice cycle, without providing them with the opportunities to escape from criminal activity.

Attached to the sphere of juvenile justice is the idea of restorative justice, as outlined in the criminal justice review. The genuine concerns of many people in Northern Ireland about how and where restorative justice schemes would operate in practice, and their interaction with the criminal justice system, will be allayed to some extent by the commitment to accredited systems of restorative justice.

That would tie those schemes and initiatives into the mainstream criminal justice and juvenile justice systems. We also welcome giving victims a voice and involving them in that respect. Concerns would be further eased if the Minister could tell us tonight what the Government intend to do to stop unaccredited "community justice" systems operating, and to prevent them from attempting to involve themselves in the punishment of young offenders.

The Minister will know that recent figures for punishment attacks showed an alarming increase last year, compared with 2000. The Government cannot afford to be complacent about the 25 per cent. increase in such attacks, or about the fact that it is loyalist paramilitaries, particular the Ulster Defence Association, who have been responsible for two thirds of the overall total.

We agree that it is accepted practice nowadays for investigatory and prosecution functions to be conducted by separate organisations. On the plane to London today, I was pleased to read in the Minister's article in the *Irish News*—good article, terrible photograph—that the new Director of Public Prosecutions will operate regionally, with offices open throughout Northern Ireland. I hope that the Government, in embarking on such a large expansion, will take on board the logistical and funding lessons to be learned from a similar transition in England and Wales.

The creation of a chief inspectorate of criminal justice for Northern Ireland is particularly welcome. It is essential that the inspector should be able to consider all aspects of the criminal justice system and all organisations that perform functions within it. It is to be regretted, therefore, that the list of organisations in clause 41 is not comprehensive. Even with the creation of the Public Prosecution Service of Northern Ireland, prosecution functions will continue to be carried out by a variety of other bodies, including—this will come as news to some hon. Members—Consignia, the Financial Services Authority and, last but certainly not least, the office of the police ombudsman. Will the Minister undertake to review that point and to consider expanding the list in clause 41 to ensure that the inspectorate has a truly comprehensive remit?

Mr. Browne: That issue has exercised the hon. Lady for some time and she and I have discussed it previously. I can give an assurance that the organisations that will be subject to inspection by the inspectorate will be kept constantly under review. That is why the clause has been drafted as it has. The list reflects the list contained in the review, but we have included a provision to add others to it by order. All organisations that have criminal investigatory powers and powers to prosecute in Northern Ireland are being considered for incorporation in the list. We are also considering whether the courts themselves ought to be included.

Lady Hermon: I thank the Minister for that helpful and useful intervention. As he has responded so positively, I shall try him on another issue.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I did not catch what the Minister said. Did he imply that he would see that the ombudsman's office would be on the list, or did he just say that it could be on the list?

Lady Hermon: The Minister indicated that he would keep the list actively under review and that it would become more comprehensive.

I want to draw the Minister's attention to the dramatic fall in the number of police officers. The figure has fallen below the 7,500 recommended by Patten over 10 years, and has done so in under three years. We should prefer to see police officers out on the streets instead of being tied up in the prosecution of minor offences in magistrates courts. For that reason, we are happy with the separation of investigatory and prosecution functions.

[Lady Hermon]

That said, will the Minister address low morale among police officers in Northern Ireland? Will he, in the context of a criminal justice Bill, consider introducing a fixed and heavy penalty for the murder of police officers, including Gardai officers on secondment to the new policing service in Northern Ireland and those who join it through lateral entry?

I congratulate the review body on not following Patten's recommendation of using discrimination to redress imbalances in the composition of the police service. It is none the less disappointing that female and ethnic minority under-representation in the judiciary seems to have been largely overlooked in the Bill. That is one of many problems with the proposed reform of judicial appointments. The Ulster Unionists strongly support appointments based solely on merit.

There is, however, an impression of politicisation in the new proposals, with the office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister involved in the appointments procedures in many different forms and at all levels. That impression seems to be justified when one considers clause 3(7), under which the new Judicial Appointments Commission will be established. In paragraph 6.87 of the review, its members were at pains to point out the difference between the words "reflective" and "representative":

> "Individual judges and magistrates, in carrying out their functions, do not 'represent' any particular section of society".

Nevertheless, the Bill contains the proposal that a representative commission be appointed. With the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister appointing five lay members, we have an appearance at least and a fear that political appointees might be inclined to make political appointments. I understand that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister might prefer not to have that power, but if my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) would like to intervene, perhaps we could clarify that issue here and now.

Mr. Browne: Let me take advantage of the point that the hon. Lady makes to make a point that I have been meaning to make publicly for some time. Whereas it is appropriate for bodies that operate in a collegiate fashion to be either reflective or representative, individual appointments, such as judges, cannot possibly be seen to be representative; otherwise, it would be impossible for them to reflect society. In the context of what the Government are trying to achieve in Northern Ireland, it is important to say that it may be appropriate for some bodies that operate in a collegiate fashion to be seen to be either reflective or representative, but that that is entirely inappropriate for people such as judges, who are appointed to operate individually.

Lady Hermon: I thank the Minister for that intervention.

I sincerely congratulate the Government—the Minister will be pleased that we have so much on which to congratulate him—on resisting the temptation to enhance in any real sense lay involvement in the judiciary. Experience in England and Wales shows that many lay benches can be costly, inefficient and fail to command the respect of others who work in the criminal justice system, so I appreciate the fact that the Government resisted the temptation to follow suit and repeat the pattern found in Great Britain.

Despite the fact that we welcome so many positive aspects of the Bill, the Minister will not be surprised to learn that there are matters about which we are greatly disappointed. I am disappointed with recommendation 138, in which the Irish language is specifically singled out for consideration for use in courts. Such a recommendation offends other minority groups in Northern Ireland, not least the large Hong Kong Chinese community. I declare an interest in that I am the chairman, on a voluntary basis, of the fundraising committee for the Chinese Welfare Association.

In fairness to our ethnic minority groups, all minority groups should be considered fairly, so perhaps the Minister will kindly give equal attention to the language of other minority groups. Perhaps he will explain at the end of the debate what is meant by the phrase "consideration of the use of the Irish language", as used in that recommendation.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The constituency that I represent, South Belfast, contains a high percentage of people who speak other languages, so I support my hon. Friend on that issue. Surely translators could be present to help those whose main language is Irish, especially as English is spoken even in the Dail.

Lady Hermon: I thank my hon. Friend. I am reminded of the cost, which the Northern Ireland Assembly considered, of providing simultaneous translation into Irish, and such costs should also be borne in mind.

The section of the review entitled "Community Safety" contains rather odd proposals for local community safety partnerships, which will require much greater scrutiny in Committee. The proposals are odd in two respects. The first relates to the lack of detail about the composition of the partnerships. I would have liked more information on who will be encouraged to serve on them. Secondly, I am discouraged by the recommendation's similarity to the proposal in the Patten report for district policing partnership boards, as they were originally described.

Clause 71(4)(d) will give the local community safety partnerships the power to buy in additional resources. I hope that point will be clarified, because I do not want us to resurrect the original power in the Patten report that would have allowed policing to be bought in by the partnerships.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Lady can be reassured that our intention is made clear in the implementation plan. Local rates are and should remain a matter for the devolved institutions to determine.

Lady Hermon: I appreciate the Minister's clarification.

I have supported the Belfast agreement from the beginning and continue to do so. It is the benchmark against which the many changes to be introduced by the Bill must be measured. As hon. Members have said, the agreement was endorsed by a substantial majority in a referendum in Northern Ireland and in a separate referendum in the Republic of Ireland. The Government must not therefore cast aside the wishes of the majority of the people on the island of Ireland and substitute them with their own as they have done in the recent past.

I want the Government to abide by the Belfast agreement for a change and to build on it, so that it works for the benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland and not just a section of the population. Given the express provisions in the agreement, there can be absolutely no justification for clause 66 as drafted. It recommends that the royal coat of arms must not be displayed in any courtroom. The Minister will know that there is an express provision in the Bill not only about Northern Ireland's constitutional position in the agreement unless and until people wish otherwise, but about the use of symbols.

The paragraph dedicated to symbols and emblems states that all the participants—the British Government, the Irish Government, Sinn Fein and the rest—

> "acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division."

I particularly draw attention to the words in the agreement—which the vast majority of the people in the island of Ireland agreed to in two referendums—that say that symbols and emblems are to be used

> "in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division."

It was not part of the agreement—and, therefore, not a wish of the people of the island of Ireland—that symbols should be taken down. On the contrary, they are to be used in the manner to which I have drawn attention. So the hacking out of the royal coat of arms from existing courtrooms and the exterior of courthouses where they are fixtures is wholly unacceptable. We reject outright such a recommendation. Such acts of vandalism inside and outside courthouses would provoke intense division rather than avoid it. It would certainly add to the steady seeping away of Unionist support for the agreement, which I bitterly regret, and the Government must address that problem.

I was encouraged to hear the Secretary of State allude to heritage considerations. I hope that when it comes to listed buildings that have the royal coat of arms embossed in wood or sculpted in, either in the courtroom or on the exterior of the courthouse, a sensible cross-party consensus will emerge that the vandalism of those symbols will not promote mutual respect, but cause division instead.

Provisions in clause 62 also make us concerned about new courthouses. The recommendation suggests that they should be neutral on the outside, the inside and the roof. However, the agreement is not neutral about symbols, and I specifically read out the relevant paragraph. It urges all participants to use symbols in a way that shows mutual respect rather than causing division. So I cannot accept the neutrality of new courthouses and new courtrooms. Neutral is not what we voted for. I voted for mutual respect.

Mr. Trimble: With regard to arguments in favour of neutrality, which appear to have influenced the Northern Ireland Office's review group and consequently the legislation, would it not be appropriate for the Northern Ireland Office to reconsider its position? My hon. Friend argues that the agreement was not about neutrality, but about the appropriate use of symbols. In addition, the neutrality argument was rejected in the High Court of Northern Ireland by Mr. Justice Kerr in his judgment on the flag regulations. He said that those arguments based on the agreement that there should be neutrality in the use of symbols were wrong. So the few arguments that have been put to that effect by various Labour Members have been ruled wrong in the High Court of Northern Ireland.

Lady Hermon: I thank my right hon. Friend for that comment, especially as it means that I can delete a whole paragraph of my speech because he has just covered my remarks.

Instead of having blank walls inside and outside, I passionately hope that in consultation with other parties we can make the agreement work and reach a consensus on mutually agreed symbols for new courtrooms. That is what we and the people of Ireland voted for.

My right hon. Friend urges me not to exclude my comments on flag flying regulations, so I shall draw the attention of the House to a serious omission. The regulations were, as he reminded us, recently tested in the High Court. In the Murphy case, Mr. Justice Kerr had to consider whether they were compatible with the agreement. He concluded that there was no particular case to be made for the flag flying regulations to favour one tradition over another. He decided that the symbolism of the flag merely reflected Northern Ireland's constitutional position as part of the UK. The flag flying regulations reduced the number of days and they treat Northern Ireland on the same basis as the rest of the UK. That is guaranteed in the agreement, and the people of Northern Ireland should be pleased with that. The regulations exclude 12 July, but the situation is the same as in Great Britain, and if we want to be treated as part of the United Kingdom we should have agreed to the regulations on flags. I should like the Minister to address the serious issue of future courthouses because there appears to be a gap in the flags regulations on that matter.

In conclusion, the Bill represents a genuine opportunity for the Government to claw back Unionist confidence lost during the implementation of the Patten reforms. The Government can begin to repair that damage if they start to listen to Unionist concerns with open ears and show themselves to be responsive to those concerns. Mistakes were made in implementing Patten and there was insensitivity in the handling of those reforms. I urge the Government not to repeat those mistakes in reforming the criminal justice system.

8.40 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon). I agreed with much of what she said and particularly with the tone of her contribution, which was constructive, considered and intelligent.

It is a pity that the Opposition's contribution was made in such a different tone. Unfortunately, that reflects what I fear is a shift away from their earlier support for the Good Friday agreement. At one point when I was listening to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) expressing full synthetic outrage, I almost wished that we had the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) back. The Conservative party claims to support the Belfast agreement, but in all its actions, its rhetoric and its language it consistently works to assist the opponents of the agreement both in Northern Ireland and on its own Back Benches.

[Mike Gapes]

The Bill is very welcome. It is a further step towards the full implementation of the Belfast agreement. As hon. Members have said, it has been subject, in different forms including a draft Bill, to wide and on-going consultation. I had the privilege of being a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Northern Ireland Office for two years, from just after the 1997 election until the end of July 1999. I pay tribute to the work done in that period by the Ministers with whom I worked, including the former Secretary of State and Member for Redcar and my right hon. Friends the Members for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) and for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), for whom I worked directly during the negotiations that secured the Good Friday agreement.

Those two weeks in March 1998 were among the most tiring and exhilarating times in my 35 years in active politics. It was not certain that we would get the agreement. On many occasions there were difficult issues to be dealt with. Books have been written about that, and no doubt there will be many more when people write their memoirs. All the parties present, including the two Governments, had to compromise and come together to secure the agreement. Its wording is very clear. It has been quoted already, so I will not quote it at length. Pages 22 and 23 of the Belfast agreement set out the approach to be followed on policing and justice. There is clear recognition that a complete review of the system was needed; the Bill is the product of that review. All the participants agreed that the principal aims of the criminal justice system were to

> "deliver a fair and impartial system of justice to the community;
>
> be responsive to the community's concerns, and encouraging community involvement where appropriate;
>
> have the confidence of all parts of the community; and
>
> deliver justice efficiently and effectively."

My hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) has already talked about the concept of parity of esteem. I agree strongly that we should deal with the realities, but we must also recognise that in Northern Ireland—but not just there, as we have the problem in other parts of the UK, but perhaps in less extreme forms—symbolism is, unfortunately, often far more important than reality. There has been talk in our debate about the role of the Queen. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford kept going on about it. He is an interesting man because he is a pro-European who supported the Maastricht treaty; I have shared platforms with him, when he argued in favour of Europe against Eurosceptic Conservatives and others. When he signed up to the Maastricht treaty, he supported the concept of European Union citizenship.

The people of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and the Irish Republic are all European Union citizens, which did not seem to present a problem to the hon. Gentleman in his previous incarnation. Now, however, he has become obsessed, to the point of going over the top, with the language of the review and the report. I recognise, and recent events in north Belfast bring it home to all of us, the need to be careful and make sure that we do not encourage alienation among the Protestant working class communities of Northern Ireland. There is a danger that irresponsible demagogues and people with a criminal agenda will be able to use symbolic issues to build support, with the consequence that postal workers will be murdered and other criminal terrorist activity will take place.

We all know that that is not representative of the bulk of society or the bulk of people who call themselves loyalists. Nevertheless, there will be a dangerous situation if gangs of misguided young men carry out attacks because they believe that their identity has been destroyed or will be taken away. Those issues are politically important and account must be taken of them. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister and other Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office will take careful note of the words of the hon. Member for North Down and others who are in favour of the agreement and want it to succeed. It is crucial that those of us throughout the United Kingdom who want harmony, parity of esteem, unity and an end to violence, both strengthen the forces on the ground in Northern Ireland that are in favour of that aim and stand up and undermine the demagogues, whether in the House or in Northern Ireland.

I agree very strongly with the remarks made by a number of hon. Members about the importance of the Policing Board having Sinn Fein members. I also believe that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) suggested, Sinn Fein Members should not be elsewhere in the building, but here in the Chamber to tell us why they refuse to support the reformed police organisations in Northern Ireland. The proposals were set out in the Belfast agreement, to which they signed up and on which they campaigned for a yes vote. It would be good if they were present, so that we could subject them to such questioning. Until the bulk of the Catholic community in all areas in Northern Ireland supports, joins and assists the police, they will not be able to do their job with maximum effectiveness.

The Bill is not about those matters—it relates to other issues—but it is crucial that it is understood in the context of the wider policing and justice aspects of the Belfast agreement. It contains important provisions about youth justice—clauses 57 to 61—and it is welcome that information about discharge of prisoners is to be given to victims in a wider sense. Community safety partnerships at a local level are also important. We have had them throughout England and their quality was variable, but I believe that they are very significant.

Those are all welcome steps forward. I believe that, in time, the Bill will make a big contribution in terms of making life better for ordinary people in all parts of Northern Ireland. I hope that, by building on this process, as well as on the other measures implemented in the past couple of years and the new political processes initiated by the very wise activities of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team, support will strengthen during the next year for the pro-agreement, pro-co-operation and pro-consensual approach that is favoured by at least some Ulster Unionist Members and also by my hon. Friend the Member for South Down. I hope that, in time, more aspects of normal life will be devolved to the Assembly and to the people of Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, it is important that those of us who live in the rest of the United Kingdom understand that the reality of Northern Ireland and of the issues that are being discussed is not what will feature in the headlines in tomorrow's papers, as it is not about whether certain people have offices—or about the furniture, plants and number of filing cabinets in those offices—but about what the ordinary people of Northern Ireland will gain in their day-to-day life from measures taken by this House and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

8.53 pm

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): In rising to speak in the debate, I fear that I have to say things that hon. Members may not find palatable. None the less, I feel that they must be said. As the Secretary of State said at the outset, the Bill is being brought forward in the context of the Belfast agreement. The right hon. Gentleman also said that it was the biggest overhaul of criminal justice in 30 years.

It sometimes appears to people in Northern Ireland that there is an underlying premise on which Her Majesty's Government and the political institutions in Northern Ireland tackle all issues, whether criminal justice and the improvements to it that we all want, political institutions such as the devolved Assembly, cultural manifestations or parades.

The premise is that there is an inherent imbalance, almost a genetic imbalance, that must be rectified. There is a false, inaccurate and implausible belief that Northern Ireland's inherent Unionism must be diluted to accommodate or satisfy nationalist opinion. That appears to be the case in the Bill, as it was in the Belfast agreement, and in decisions about cultural manifestations and parades. Every major or significant move, for example on emblems and the royal arms outside courthouses, has to be a signal to the nationalist community of a form of neutrality and openness. It has to be an attempt by the Government to bring the nationalist community from the cold into the warm sunshine of an all-embracing Northern Ireland under the agreement.

Before Christmas, the Secretary of State made a comment that my colleagues and I have been making, not for a few weeks or months, not even since the Belfast agreement, but for decades. The only thing that he got wrong was the tense. Northern Ireland is not in danger of becoming a cold place for Unionists; it is and has been a cold place for Unionists for many years because of the underlying premise on which the Bill is based. There is a false belief that nationalism can be accommodated by the removal of symbols.

Although I bow to the Minister's greater experience of the Scottish legal system, I raised in the ad hoc committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly the question of royal symbols outside Scottish courthouses. Nationalist opinion rises and falls in Scotland, and I asked many witnesses whether there was evidence of an attempt by those who represent the nationalist community there to remove the royal symbols from outside courthouses. Every witness said that there was no such move and that they knew of no demand from nationalists in Scotland to remove the insignia from courthouses. Why should there be such a demand in Northern Ireland? Before the criminal justice review was mooted, did any evidence exist to show that there was such a demand?

I saw a false and inaccurate programme last night on national television about the day known as Bloody Sunday. I watched to see if it would refer to a demand for changes to the criminal justice system. There was no such reference. Why? I defy any hon. Member, past or present, to recollect demands by civil rights demonstrators at the beginning of the civil disturbances in Northern Ireland for changes to the criminal justice system. I do not recall there being any and, until the review, there was no evidence that the removal of the insignia or the royal coat of arms was a demand being voiced by campaigners.

I take issue with some of the points made by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). He referred to the ad hoc committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly, of which I was a member. I attended most of its hearings, put questions to many of the witnesses and spoke at the Northern Ireland Assembly when we were debating these issues. I made the point on every occasion I could that the hard issues that might divide members of the committee, and Members of the Assembly, had not been addressed. We did not grapple with the thorny question of the royal coat of arms outside courthouses. That is why there was a degree of unanimity. I do not mind if people agree to set aside for a time the hard issues that are likely to divide them, to achieve some form of consensus. I do mind, however, if they try to present that course of action as a solution to the many difficult decisions that they face.

Rev. Ian Paisley: As a member of the committee, I must point out that the chairman, Mr. Shipley Dalton, an Official Unionist, stated in the committee's report:

> "It is true to say that there is no complete consensus"

in this report. Hon. Members have tried to paint a picture of almost complete unanimity in the committee. There was no such unanimity, because these issues, which are contentious for Unionists, were not dealt with. They could not be dealt with because there was no coming together of minds.

Mr. Campbell: That is indeed the case, and it was alluded to in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I shall have to ask the hon. Member for South Down to explain that omission from his speech at some point, but I shall now move on.

The Secretary of State's earlier contribution on the Policing Board will cause concern in Northern Ireland. We attempted on several occasions to ascertain from the right hon. Gentleman the precise nature of the Government's position. It appeared that, when he met the Democratic Unionist party, the Ulster Unionist party and, I assume, other parties several months ago, the issue of the deadline for the nominations to the Policing Board was put to him. We were given the clear and precise response that a deadline would be adhered to and that, once it had passed, that would be it for any changes to the board until a subsequent point beyond the next Assembly elections, which are scheduled for 2003.

The Secretary of State appeared today to admit of the possibility that the boat might not have left the harbour, if Sinn Fein-IRA were to suggest, in the immediate future, either privately or publicly, that they had reviewed their position. We were told many months ago that the boat was to set sail, and that if Sinn Fein was not on it, it would be left behind. The implication tonight, however, was that if a change was in the offing from Sinn Fein-IRA, there could perhaps be a review of the legislation by Her Majesty's Government. It would be preferable if we could clarify that point tonight. Has the boat left the harbour? Is there any possibility that if Sinn Fein-IRA were to hint at a change of mind—despite their previously stated position, their adherence to and support

[Mr. Campbell]

for violence, and their continued campaign of punishment beatings in Northern Ireland—their position would be reconsidered via a change in legislation in the House?

Lady Hermon: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify one point? Does he agree that it would be preferable to have Sinn Fein on the Policing Board at the earliest opportunity and thereby encourage young republicans to join the police service? Would not that be a better way forward for all of us in Northern Ireland and a clear indication that the war is indeed over?

Mr. Campbell: If Sinn Fein were committed to the political process and if its members were democrats, I would unreservedly and unequivocally say yes, but the point is that they are not. They would corrupt the system just as they are corrupting the system in Northern Ireland now. That is the point and that is why the hon. Lady has alluded over the past few days and weeks to the undermining of support for the Belfast agreement in the Unionist community. That community sees the corruption of civic and political life by Sinn Fein-IRA supporters across Northern Ireland, so it has no confidence in the agreement that delivered those people to the heart of government via the system that the hon. Lady supported and continues to support.

I must refer to the possible appointments to the Judicial Appointments Commission. The Bill says that there will be

> "a body corporate known as the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission"

consisting of a chairman and

> "twelve other members appointed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly."

My party would have serious reservations about that, not least because, just as the political institutions are causing controversy and attracting a distinct lack of support in the Unionist community, the offices of First and Deputy First Minister, as they claim themselves to be, equally have a reputation problem in the Unionist community in that Unionists have no confidence in them.

I return to the possible introduction of community restorative justice, which has been raised several times. That issue again divided the Northern Ireland Assembly ad hoc committee, as it causes deep concern to many communities in Northern Ireland. For a number of years, a barbaric type of justice has been meted out by those who support Sinn Fein or loyalist paramilitaries and some have banded together in a pseudo-community restorative justice programme. Some people involved in some programmes are causing major concern to those of us with a genuine interest in a restorative justice system that can command support across the communities in Northern Ireland. It is vital that the Northern Ireland community—Protestants and Catholics; Unionists and nationalists—see that a community restorative justice programme can have no semblance of credibility within the terms of the Bill.

Mr. Browne: That is a very bald assertion. The Bill sets out clearly the exact reassurances that the hon. Gentleman seeks on the proposed restorative justice agencies—they must be accredited and they must be prepared to work with the statutory agencies, including the police—so I invite him to explain why they are not good enough. What reassurances on restorative justice, which he says could be good for the people of Northern Ireland, does he think he needs from the Government?

Mr. Campbell: The Minister should not underestimate the capacity of Sinn Fein and the community groups with which it is associated to do whatever it takes to control the justice system in their areas. In the so-called ghetto areas of Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein has proved over and again that it is prepared to use whatever means it has at its disposal to try to control the justice system.

Mr. Browne: The House needs to tease this matter out. The argument that the hon. Gentleman has just articulated is an argument for no restorative justice. Is that what he is arguing? He prefaced his critical remarks on the Bill by saying that, like the Government, he believes that restorative justice has a role to play in Northern Ireland. We should work together to ensure a restorative justice system that does not allow those elements to deny the people of Northern Ireland this opportunity. What is his position? Does he think that no system of restorative justice will ever work in Northern Ireland because of those elements, or can we work together to improve the provisions in the Bill?

Mr. Campbell: Last week, the Minister told me and my colleagues that he wanted our comments on the Bill and suggestions for improvements. We relayed our comments, including our concerns on the community restorative justice aspects of the Bill. I am merely laying down a marker. The ability and capacity for Sinn Fein and the community groups with which it is associated should not be underestimated: they will go to the nth degree to try to ensure that they retain control in Northern Ireland.

I do not think that the status of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland has been referred to in the debate. The ad hoc committee took evidence from the board. The board and the committee agreed that it would be a retrograde step to downgrade the board to the status of a next steps agency. I reiterate that view.

9.12 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I want to speak against several aspects of the Bill, and to make specific criticisms of the proposals for restorative justice for young offenders in part 4. I also want to make some wider points about the nature of the Bill.

The simplest explanation of the aims of restorative justice can be summarised as the three Rs: responsibility, restoration and reintegration. As I understand it, a number of countries around the world already use similar systems for encouraging offenders to confront the consequences of their behaviour, and to make amends via one method or another to those against whom they have transgressed.

In Canada, the emphasis is on reconciliation, with victims given the opportunity to confront their offenders and to suggest ways in which offenders could make amends for what they have done. In New Zealand, they prefer a system of family or community conferencing, which involves people concerned about the victim and/or the offender in decisions about how amends can best be made.

Mr. Browne: Even in his introductory remarks, the hon. Gentleman sounds as though he may know what he is talking about, and may have come across the document that accompanied the review and the many hundreds of research documents that are referred to in the schedule to it. Why did he not tell his hon. Friends on the Front Bench about its existence?

Mr. Francois: If it helps the Minister, I can confirm that my research was not undertaken for me in a great hurry by civil servants at two minutes' notice.

The Australians use a similar system based on the New Zealand model but with a greater role for the police as part of the overall process. Closer to home, we have a slightly different system. In Scotland, offenders can be brought before panels of volunteer members of the public, who can discuss restorative justice options with them and their parents. In England, a non-criminal youth panel sees offenders who have been formally convicted by the youth court, and seeks to draw up a contract involving the offender and those seeking reparation.

The proposed system of restorative justice for young offenders in Northern Ireland is based on an amalgam of those different approaches, with youth conferences and associated youth conference plans. The critical difference is that the systems in other countries were not designed to operate in an environment such as Northern Ireland, where special circumstances clearly apply.

The proposals for Northern Ireland youth conferences allow the participation of a so-called appropriate adult. Under new article 3A, the appropriate adult could be a parent or guardian, a social worker or a legal representative. If no one in those categories was able or willing to serve, he or she could be replaced by

> "any responsible person who has attained the age of 18 and is neither a police officer nor a member of the police support staff."

That definition is so broad that it could relate to just about anyone in practice. While it excludes police officers and members of the police support staff, presumably because the police are meant to be represented at the conference in their own right, it makes no reference to excluding members of paramilitary organisations, whether republican or loyalist. That means that, given the special circumstances in Northern Ireland, the system is open to abuse.

For instance, what is to stop members of paramilitary organisations effectively using their muscle in the local community to insist that only they should be allowed to represent young offenders at youth conferences, as "appropriate adults"? They might then argue for a very light penalty—if any meaningful sanction is to be imposed at all. Youths who had been involved in criminal activity might look to the local paramilitary bosses for protection via the system. Not only does that offer the paramilitaries an avenue to subversion of the justice system; it threatens to turn young offenders towards them if they appear to have been successfully protected.

I accept that the proposed system may be well intentioned, but I believe that it ignores the reality of life in Northern Ireland. All this needs to be thought through again very carefully, even before the system is piloted in the Province.

I am also concerned about the proposed changes to the judicial oath. The current oath states

> "I . . . do swear that I will well and truly serve our sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth the Second in the office of . . . and I will do right to all manner of people after the laws and usages of this realm, without fear or favour, affection or ill will. So help me God."

In stark contrast, the revised oath in clause 20 states simply:

> "I . . . do swear that I will well and faithfully serve in the office of . . . and that I will do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill will, according to the laws and usages of this realm."

The revised oath expunges any references to the Crown other than the word "realm", which it retains almost as an afterthought. That is of concern not just to Unionists in Northern Ireland, but to all constitutional monarchists—or, at least, it should be. I include the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), for whom I also have a high regard.

As our amendment states, we oppose the Bill

> "because it infringes the principle that justice flows from the Crown throughout the realm".

Once we interfere with that principle, there will be implications for other parts of the United Kingdom. We kid ourselves if we pretend otherwise.

I also have worries about the removal of the Crown arms outside courthouses in the Province, for similar reasons. Clause 66 states:

> "The Royal Arms must not be displayed in any courtroom."

It also states that the arms must not be displayed

> "on the exterior of a new courthouse".

"New courthouse" is defined as

> "a courthouse first used after the coming into force of this section."

We will therefore have the anomaly of some courthouses displaying the royal arms and some not, depending not on what they stand for but simply on when they opened.

Mr. Browne: That is true.

Mr. Francois: I agree with the Minister. The explanatory notes that accompany the Bill gloss over that important point.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Fifty per cent. of the courthouses will be new courthouses. They will have no royal arms.

Mr. Francois: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. For the avoidance of doubt, when I said that I agreed with the Minister, I agreed with his admitting the point. I did not agree with what he is trying to do.

If the Bill is passed in its current form, how long will it be before we hear siren voices suggesting that the royal arms may be removed from other courthouses in the United Kingdom in order to comply with the precedent that has been set in Northern Ireland? The explanatory notes that accompany the Bill gloss over that important point in a desultory three lines.

These measures are an affront not just to Unionist opinion but to all loyal subjects in the United Kingdom, including those in England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Tom Harris: The hon. Gentleman has intimated that that practice will be an insult to people in Scotland, England and Wales as well as Northern Ireland, yet it has pertained in Scotland at least for part of its history. Was that also an insult to the people of the other regions of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Francois: I have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I understand that royal arms are currently displayed in courthouses in Scotland and I do not believe that that should change.

[Mr. Francois]

These measures will undoubtedly give succour to republicans, but not just republicans in Northern Ireland. Here we come to the heart of the point that my party is opposing. They will also be welcomed by republicans on the British mainland, including those in the British Labour party, of whom there are many, some covert and some overt. A few have gone from covert to overt in the course of this debate.

The ramifications of some clauses go well beyond Northern Ireland itself. They are the thin end of a wider republican wedge. Chiefly for those reasons, I oppose them.

9.22 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) in welcoming the Bill. I shall not repeat his arguments in regard to parts 1 to 3. Instead, I shall confine my remarks to parts 4 and 5 and endeavour to be relatively brief.

I too was struck by the emphasis that the report of the criminal justice review placed on international human rights standards. Paragraph 10.64 suggests that in drawing up and agreeing the aims and principles of the juvenile justice system, there would be value in drawing in particular upon the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, the international covenant on civil and political rights, UN guidelines for the prevention of juvenile delinquency, the UN standard minimum for the administration of juvenile justice, and UN guidelines for the protection of juveniles deprived of their liberty.

I am pleased that clause 53(3) states that all persons and bodies exercising functions in relation to the youth justice system must have regard to the welfare of children affected by the exercise of their functions, with a view to furthering the personal, social and educational development of the child. Will the Government consider a more detailed statement of aims and principles being drawn up, perhaps in consultation with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission?

Paragraph 10.66 of the report of the criminal justice review suggests:

> "The Government should develop, agree and incorporate a clear statement of the aims of the juvenile justice system in Northern Ireland and a statement of the principles which should guide those who exercise the powers conferred by the legislation with due regard to the international human rights standards".

I support the scheme of reparation orders that is introduced under clause 54. There is a need for a greater role for the principles of restorative justice, with offenders meeting their victims, discovering the consequences of their actions and planning to improve their behaviour. Reform should respond not only to the problems caused by child offenders but to the problems that they face.

The reparation order is useful, in that it can show children the damage, both physical and emotional, that their actions have caused to the victim, and allow them to give something back to the victim and the community and make amends for their actions in a way that a custodial sentence could not achieve.

I am a little curious, however, about the provision in the new article 36B(2)(a) that the clause inserts in the Criminal Justice (Children)(Northern Ireland) Order 1998—that a reparation order must not be made if the court proposes to pass a custodial sentence on the offender. Surely there are circumstances in which a reparation order would be of benefit in addition to a custodial sentence. Are there circumstances in which a custodial sentence could be reduced if such an order was made, or is it the intention that a youth conference should be offered or convened in every case in which a community responsibility order, a custody order or a custodial sentence is imposed? There is a possible element of reparation in community responsibility and community custody orders, but not, as they are written, involving the victim.

I am also concerned about some aspects of the custody care orders mentioned in clause 56. They are specified as being for children under 14 and for offences that do not carry a term of life imprisonment for an adult. A period of six months to two years seems to me a very long time for someone so young. What is the reasoning behind the measure?

Further, in new article 44F, which details breaches of supervision requirements under the custody care orders, paragraph (3) imposes on the child a £200 fine or placement in secure accommodation for a period not to exceed 30 days. If the child has reached the age of 14, the figure rises to £1,000. These seem like quite large sums for young people. There also seems to be no mention of parental or guardian involvement. What role does the Secretary of State envisage for guardians or parents?

I am impressed by the provision for youth conferences and youth conference plans in clause 57, but I should like to see a greater commitment to the child's education expressed in the membership of youth conference panels, and greater clarity about the circumstances in which these will be convened.

Under part 5, the assumption of full responsibility for security by the Court Service and the removal of all symbols in the interior of courtrooms will ensure that the courts are a more welcoming environment for people, regardless of their community or ethnic background, a fact which Liberal Democrats very much welcome. I am also pleased to see in the criminal justice review implementation plan that the Court Service has already been proactive in the provision of information to the public and in providing outreach opportunities to the wider community through court visits and work experience placements, and that work is on-going to simplify the language used in courts.

I agree with the report of the criminal justice review in its adoption of the recommendations in "Speaking up for Justice". Under the current justice system, victims are failed, in that they often feel left out, unimportant and even non-existent. I agree with clause 67, which is designed to inform victims of the progress of their cases and of the release of prisoners back into the community. I am concerned, however, about subsection (4), which allows the Secretary of State to make available "other information" relating to the discharge and temporary release of imprisoned offenders. Will the Secretary of State publish any guidance on what "other information" might be? We have seen a rise in the incidence of vigilantism across the UK in recent years, and I seek reassurance from the Government on how they propose to minimise the risk of that.

I welcome clauses 70 and 71, on a community strategy and a local community safety partnership, but I would like to raise briefly one particular concern about the local community safety partnerships. Clause 71(3) states that membership of the partnerships is to be as specified by order made by the Secretary of State. Why are the guidelines on membership, if not the actual community groups, not written into the Bill? Could the Secretary of State at the very least make the order available in draft form to the House for its consideration?

The Bill is certainly moving in the right direction and should help in making the criminal justice system on the whole more accessible and more understood by the general public, whether or not they are ever involved with its process. Such openness and transparency are very welcome, and I support the Bill in principle.

9.29 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The first thing that I want to talk about is consultation, and the way in which the Bill has been handled. Much has already been said about that in the debate, but I want to make it clear that, in general, the Opposition welcome the Government's approach to framing the legislation—up to a point.

The beginning of the process, which was conducted by the Northern Ireland Office, set a good example for other Departments of how to go forward and seek consensus, and also perhaps, for the benefit of the Government, to identify areas of disagreement and find out whether they had the potential to be resolved.

However, I have to tell the Under-Secretary that the moment the Bill got into his hands, that praiseworthy approach appeared to fall apart, because of the timetable. He did extend the timetable for consultation on the draft Bill over Christmas, but not to the satisfaction of the Northern Ireland Assembly, to which I shall return in a moment—and now we face the programme motion before the House, which we shall not be able to debate.

The combination of those two elements has entirely negated the beneficial effects of what the Government did before they published the Bill in November. I congratulate the Minister on having united all shades of opinion in the Assembly—because, as he will be aware, it is united in its condemnation of the Government's handling of the Bill and their inability to give the Assembly, or anybody else, sufficient time to consult on the details of the Bill, as opposed to the details of the published review.

The Assembly's conclusion is worth reading into the record. It states that Members noted that the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultations states that

> "'sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest.'"

It provides that 12 weeks should be the standard minimum for consultation and that consultation should never have to be shortened below an acceptable minimum for reasons of departmental convenience, for example because a department has fallen behind its own implementation schedule.

It is much to be regretted that the Government have not been able to meet that standard for the discussion of the Bill before this stage. It is wholly unacceptable that they have provided for only 12 sittings on the Bill in Committee, because it contains a vast amount of detail that deserves proper consideration by the people who will have to examine it.

In my 15-minute response to the debate, I should not be having to try to make up for what is lacking elsewhere because the Government have ensured that many of the hours that would be necessary in Committee will not be available. I do not believe that it will be possible to give the Bill proper consideration in Committee under the timetable that the Government have drawn up, so I urge them to withdraw it.

Now I must move on and deal with the contributions to the debate. I heard the Secretary of State say that the composition of the review group was established under the agreement. However, as I think my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) made clear in his opening remarks, the review group was a creature of the Northern Ireland Office; its composition was not part of the Belfast agreement.

The Secretary of State also said that there would continue to be consultation over the months ahead—but consultation in this place will end on 14 February, less than one month ahead, when the Committee stage will finish if the House passes the programme motion.

Concerns have been expressed in the debate about community safety, not least in the contribution by the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton), who seemed to welcome clauses 70 and 71 before the penny dropped with her that there was nothing in them. They are Henry VIII clauses, which give the Secretary of State the power to do anything he likes.

Detail is woefully missing from clauses 70 and 71. That is not acceptable to Parliament; nor is giving the Secretary of State that much power when, because of the Government's behaviour to date, there is significant suspicion about exactly how they will use those powers if Parliament bestows them.

The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), whose long-standing interest and expertise in Northern Ireland politics is on the record, began his speech with a complaint about the youth element of part 4 of the Bill. He complained that the Bill mentioned a first duty to protect the public by preventing offending rather than by rehabilitation. By implication, the hon. Member for Cheadle agreed with him.

I wholly disagree and shall support the Government in Committee in sustaining the position as it stands. Like the hon. Gentleman, I believe in the merits of rehabilitation. It is implicit, however, that if we succeed in rehabilitating youth offenders through the youth justice system in the Bill—we have no problem in principle with much of it, but considerable reservations about points of detail—we will achieve the first aim of the Bill as well as achieving what the hon. Gentleman wants in terms of protecting the interests of the child by preventing the child from continuing as an offender.

I agree with the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) about consultation, and I sincerely hope that he will join us in the Division Lobby when we oppose the programme motion. His party has traditionally done that, but tonight's motion is unacceptable not just in principle, but in practice. Good work can be done on the Bill in Committee as part of the Government's consultation process.

I enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's maladroit equation of the hon. Member for Hull, North with Cromwell, to which the hon. Gentleman quite properly took exception.

Mr. McNamara: For the record, Cromwell exported 2,000 McNamaras as slaves to Jamaica. It is arguable that

[Mr. McNamara]

he exported the wrong ones, but to call me Cromwell, or to suggest in any way that that man was a great parliamentarian, is to rubbish history.

Mr. Blunt: That is why I made my point that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire had been somewhat maladroit in making such a remark. I shall go no further into that point because I should have no time to discuss the rest of the Bill if I did.

It was a bit rich of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire to say that the Conservative view of the merits of devolution appeared confused. Let us consider the messages put out by his party at present. A bipartisan arrangement between Government and Opposition continues to exist over the Belfast agreement. Our concern is about cases in which the agreement is not implemented, as the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) made clear during the debate. Yet today, the leader of the Liberal Democrats has announced that the bipartisan arrangement that has prevailed for some time between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats is over.

The party of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire also sent out a confused message in its votes on access to facilities of the House: 14 of its Members voted for, 14 voted against and 28 abstained. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should put his own house in order before seeking to criticise the Conservatives for confusion of messages.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) was quite right about the consistency of the approach taken by the Social Democratic and Labour party over the years. He said that it sought to achieve neutrality in the criminal justice system. That goes to the heart of the difference between the hon. Gentleman and the official Opposition. We do not believe that there should be neutrality in how the criminal justice system is represented in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and the criminal justice system must flow from the Crown. Symbols should recognise that reality, and I shall return to symbols later. However, I appreciated the tone in which he suggested that we should withdraw our amendment, even though I fear that that request will not meet with success.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) made it clear in speaking immediately after the hon. Member for South Down that our opposition to that detail of the Bill is no cheap publicity stunt and that it arises from fundamental principles. He drew proper attention to the fact that the review group's conclusion on the issue was illogical, and I want to return to that in a few moments.

The contribution of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) was that of a self-confessed republican. That became clear during this debate.

Mr. Tom Harris: The hon. Gentleman should acknowledge the difference between a republican in Ireland and a republican in Britain—the latter simply believes that the hereditary principle is not the most appropriate way to select the Head of State.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman is right to make that distinction. Of course, I am not suggesting that he is associated with the violence that has been the distinction between the people who describe themselves as nationalists and republicans in Northern Ireland. Part of the problem in dealing with Northern Ireland issues is that one ends up talking in code and words such as "community" become enormously loaded.

That is also part of the problem with the Bill, especially with regard to community safety partnerships. What is the word "community" supposed to mean in that context? The Secretary of State has introduced the Bill, but clauses 70 and 71 deal with community safety partnerships in absolutely no detail, so the House is entitled to be extremely suspicious about what will flow from that, which is why the Secretary of State should not have such powers.

I compliment the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) on the charming tone with which she delivered her speech; it completely deceived the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) by wholly disguising the steel in her remarks and the resolution with which she put them to the House. She referred to the role of the chief inspector, and we agree that it would be appropriate to include the ombudsman in the list of institutions to be subject to inspection by the chief inspector. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us that satisfaction, if not in replying to the debate, certainly in Committee—if the House is minded to debate the Bill in Committee.

The hon. Lady also talked about the Irish language. Of course, an absurd position has now arisen in the new courts in Laganside. To accommodate verbal instructions to members of the public, they can ask for those instructions to be put on a board in three languages—English, Irish and Cantonese—because more people speak Cantonese on the island of Ireland than speak Irish. That is the rather bizarre result of attempting to accommodate everyone.

I agree with some of the analysis of by the hon. Member for Ilford, South, especially when he said that the problem was with Unionists and loyalists and that people could abuse the debate about symbols. That has to be viewed in the context of the fact that there is now a cold house for Unionists in Northern Ireland. Almost every informed commentator now agrees that the issue that requires the greatest management is not reassuring the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, but what has happened to the Unionist community as a direct result of the way in which the Government have conducted themselves, going above and beyond the Belfast agreement.

The issue of coats of arms in courthouses and the oaths taken by members of the judiciary goes right to the heart of that symbology. The hon. Lady quoted the agreement. I shall not repeat that quote now, but it made it clear that the measures are not part of the Belfast agreement. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart complained that there had been too much focus on the issue, so why is it in the Bill? Why is such a measure being introduced when it will cause such offence to the people who want the Union to be sustained?

The provisions for the oath and the coat of arms will be foolish in practice because of the message that they send to the Unionists. They are unacceptable in principle to those of us who regard Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and want it to remain so. That is why we shall press our reasoned amendment to the vote.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): I fear that 15 minutes is not long enough to deal with all the points that have been raised in the debate. I am grateful to most Members for their contributions to what has, in the main, been a constructive debate on an important Bill. I say "most", because I was disappointed by the contribution of an hour and 15 minutes by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies). He devoted about an hour and 10 minutes of that to form, not to substance. I suspect that the bluster and alleged passion of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen was a cover for their failure to prepare properly for the debate so that they could address the provisions of this complicated and difficult, but important Bill.

Before the debate, the Bill had benefited from the significant consultation that has contributed to its final form. The issue of consultation has occupied far too much time in the debate, but it is instructive that not one party other than the Opposition referred to the amount of consultation and co-operation that it has received from me, my officials in the Northern Ireland Office or my predecessors since the review proposals were published.

I had an extensive meeting with the chair of the ad hoc committee of the Assembly. His work has been mentioned and he clearly understood the circumstances and the background that led to the Bill having to be published when it was. It is a pity that the understanding that was apparent in that meeting was not reflected in the report that was subsequently published.

I must deal with another point that is not of substance but has been raised at length by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford. He referred to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland left the Chamber a short time after he had made his speech. My clear recollection—I have checked this with the official record—is that my right hon. Friend referred in his speech to the fact that he would have to leave, so it is a great pity and a great discourtesy to him that those who were present in the Chamber and who sought thereafter to malign him by making constant references to his absence did not seek to raise that issue when he was here to defend himself.

As a matter of fact, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a significant programme of extensive meetings and many people in the Chamber will know the hours that he works for Northern Ireland, both in Belfast and in London. He would not have absented himself from the Chamber but for the fact that he had to go to Belfast this evening. He set out this evening, so it is a pity that those who sought to criticise him in his absence did not have the courage to raise the matter when he was here.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Secretary of State said in his speech that he would have to leave early but not for a moment did I imagine that that meant that he would not stay even to hear the remarks of the Opposition spokesman. I thought that he would leave at some point in the evening. As he left, he sent me a note as I was speaking. Clearly, I was not able to read that note.

On the most important point, the Secretary of State should so arrange his priorities that Parliament comes first whatever may need to be done in London, Belfast or elsewhere. The fact that he has not done so clearly shows what is wrong with the Government as a whole.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue specifically. If he checks the official record tomorrow, he will see that, when he was present in the Chamber, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that, because of today's statements, he had to do the hon. Gentleman—my right hon. Friend was referring to and looking directly at him—the discourtesy of leaving soon afterwards. If the hon. Gentleman has the courage to malign my right hon. Friend in that way, he should have done him the courtesy of doing it when he was here.

The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who is not in the Chamber, mentioned respect for Law Officers. We need to clarify that. He asked whether the Attorney-General for Northern Ireland is to be a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The answer to that is no, he cannot be a Member of it, and I refer hon. Members to clause 24(7). The review envisaged that the Attorney-General would be an independent and impartial figure. That recommendation was accepted and has been included in legislation.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford said that we were making a new provision in which the Advocate-General would hold the position of Attorney-General for England and Wales. I refer hon. Members to the specific provision in clause 28. Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the local Attorney-General cannot legally carry out the functions in relation to excepted matters, as the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) suggested. That is why there must be a division between the two responsibilities.

Opposition Members said that there was no need to legislate this Session. The Government's position on that is clear. It is necessary to pave the way to make devolution possible if there is to be any prospect of the legislative framew[illegible]or criminal justice in Northern Ireland being ready for the target that the Secretary of State mentioned today and which has been made clear in public in Northern Ireland for some time. The timetable to reach that objective is tight. Many of the provisions have to be implemented before devolution, such as the creation of a new prosecution service similar to that in England and Wales.

I shall comment fleetingly on the allegation that no report was made available to hon. Members on the New Zealand experience during either the review process or the consultation period. Apart from the research document that was handed to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford during a meeting with officials in the Northern Ireland Office on that matter, the document "Restorative Justice Options for Northern Ireland: A Comparative Review" is a companion of the review document itself. Far from there being no academic consideration or review of the provisions in New Zealand, there are no less than eight references to it in the companion document, which I commend to him. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says, "About New Zealand, not about Northern Ireland." There could hardly be a report on the ability of restorative justice to have an impact on the young people of Northern Ireland when it has not been implemented. Indeed, that is what the Bill is about.

[Mr. Browne]

The hon. Gentleman's argument was that there was no published research on the way in which restorative justice operates in New Zealand. There is, however, a significant amount of research on that. Indeed, a plethora of it—nine pages, I think—is in the back of the companion document. It covers research throughout the world on restorative justice and its operation in many different jurisdictions. I hope that between now and the next time—*[Interruption.]* I will give way in a moment; I do not need the hon. Gentleman to instruct me on when to give way, especially as he only reluctantly gave way to me.

I hope that before we engage in debate in Committee, the Opposition spokesman will have an opportunity to read up on much of the interesting documentation that is available.

Mr. Trimble: Although one may argue what documentation was available and what studies are in it, surely the point is that the experience in New Zealand, whatever it might be, is not relevant to the situation in Northern Ireland. The essential point about the situation in Northern Ireland is the existence of paramilitary gangs that seek to dominate certain neighbourhoods which means that the introduction of any community-based scheme carries with it enormous dangers. That has no parallel in New Zealand or elsewhere.

Mr. Browne: The right hon. Gentleman makes a telling and important point. It was not made earlier, and I was trying to respond to the debate, but I shall respond to his point. The Government's position, which I understand to be shared by all the parties in Northern Ireland, is that the inability of the police and/or the judicial system to affect the behaviour of young people in some parts of Northern Ireland does not mean that those young people should be denied the opportunity to take advantage of restorative justice if it can be made to work. I understand that to be the approach that has consistently been taken by all parties in Northern Ireland. Indeed, there is an argument that young people in Northern Ireland are more deserving of extra opportunities than those who live in societies with less trouble and conflict.

The Bill's purpose is to create a framework in which restorative justice can be delivered without denying that there are serious challenges in doing so. The structure that has been created is designed to address those challenges. The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) says that we have to ensure that nobody with a paramilitary background should be included. That might mean denying some young people access to their parents in a youth conference. If we are to deflect young people from taking the path that their parents have taken or prevent them from being dragged down that path by the parents of other children and other malign influences in the community, we must address these issues. We will do so not by saying that it is difficult but by engaging in constructive debate. We must try to address the difficulties and create an environment in which we can deliver the benefits of restorative justice to the people of Northern Ireland.

We do not view the reform of the justice system as an issue that should divide the parties in this Chamber or in the community in Northern Ireland. It appears that the official Opposition are hell-bent on dividing the House for the sake of two recommendations out of 294. In the absence of any serious work by them on these issues, they have elevated those two recommendations into issues of principle on which they will oppose the whole Bill while constantly telling us, without giving any detail, that they accept many of the recommendations in the review and in the Bill.

The vast bulk of material covered by the review and the Bill concerns the practical workings of justice. Getting it right is in everyone's interests. The tone of the debate has, in large measure, matched that of the recent consultation exercise. There have been issues of division—symbols are the most obvious and predictable—but I am pleased that the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) was able to say that the Secretary of State's opening remarks were, to some degree, reassuring to her. We hope that we will be able to build on that in consultation with other parties in Northern Ireland.

The fact that symbols are the most obvious and predictable issue on which there has been division should not hide the fact that on enormous parts of the Bill there is cross-community agreement in Northern Ireland. During consultation, we were struck by the real interest in and enthusiasm for the reform of criminal justice and by the steps that are necessary to bring the system closer to the people of Northern Ireland. We have taken note of that.

In announcing the draft legislation and implementation plan, the Government set out their target for possible devolution of criminal justice functions after the Assembly elections in 2003. As the Secretary of State said in his opening speech, this is a challenging timetable. However, I sense in the House and more widely the commitment and good will that will make that possible. In many ways, today's debate reflected debate that we have had about the review's recommendations. The most encouraging feature is the support for the vast bulk of the Bill's key provisions.

These reforms cannot happen overnight; it will be several years before they take full effect, but I am confident that once they have been fully implemented Northern Ireland will have a criminal justice system that can be measured against the best in the world.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 133, Noes 324.

Division No. 137] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*

Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*

Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. John Randall.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob

Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*

Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*

Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad

Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siön
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

JUSTICE (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

(2) All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(3) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 14th February 2002.

(4) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(5) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(7) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—[*Jim Fitzpatrick.*]

The House divided: Ayes 316, Noes 136.

Division No. 138] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben

Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkins[illegible], Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan

Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick

Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

JUSTICE (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL

[*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown by virtue of the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided.—[*Mr. Woolas.*]

Question agreed to.

EMPLOYMENT BILL (PROGRAMME) (No.2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

That the Order of 27th November 2001 (Employment Bill (Programme)) be amended by the substitution in paragraph 3 (time for conclusion of proceedings in Standing Committee) of the words 'at 11.25 a.m. on 24th January' for the words 'on 22nd January'.—[*Mr. Woolas.*]

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Ordered,

IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

That the Immigration and Asylum Appeals (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 4014), a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th December 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

That the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 4043), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st December 2001, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—[*Mr. Woolas.*]

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

SIXTH ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PROGRAMME

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 5771/01, a Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the European Community: 'Europe 2010: Our future, Our choice', and a Proposal for a draft Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the Community Environmental Action Programme 2001–2010; considers that co-ordinated action at a Community level is the most effective way of addressing the main environmental objectives of the programme; welcomes the strategic approach; agrees with the objectives, particularly the identification of the four priority areas; endorses the emphasis on climate change as an outstanding challenge of the next 10 years and beyond; supports the Government's efforts to ensure that policy is developed on the basis of full analysis of the issues with consideration of the full range of instruments; endorses the Government's position that the programme should be ambitious yet achievable, and that where analysis has not yet been completed detailed targets should be set out in thematic strategies to be developed later; and supports the Government's aim that the programme should give a clear steer on improved and consistent implementation and enforcement.—[*Mr. Woolas.*]

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 30th January, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents), the Speaker shall—

(i) put the Question on any Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Blunkett relating to the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) no later than Seven o'clock; and

(ii) put the Question on any Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Byers relating to Local Government Finance (England) 2002–03 no later than Ten o'clock.—[*Mr. Woolas.*]

Ragwort

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Woolas.*]

10.32 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): We discover many things when researching for debates that we hope to instigate, and I came across a couple of surprising facts when researching for this debate. I was surprised to find, for instance, that the word "quidditch" in the Harry Potter book—which I had assumed to be made up—clearly derives from the name of a place in Devon called Quoditch, where ragwort grows. I mention that because it allows me to give a plug. J. K. Rowling wrote a lot about places in Devon in her books, having studied at Exeter university. She referred to the Chudleigh Cannons, the premier quidditch team. Chudleigh is a town in my constituency, and we are proud to have the country's premier quidditch team.

Our last debate on ragwort took place on 25 July 2000. It was initiated by the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson), who pointed out that the debate was taking place on St James's day, and that St James's wort was another name for ragwort. It has other names—staggerwort and, less pleasing, stinking willie and mare's fart.

This debate takes place somewhat earlier than the last, which began at 3.21 am. The Minister will get home to his night-time cocoa, put on his jim-jams and get to bed a little earlier than he did on that occasion. Before he does, however, let me tell him a story. It concerns Georgina Norton, a nine-year-old girl who, like many nine-year-old girls, was fairly horse mad. She was lucky enough to own a pony called Topic. One day her mother went to turn Topic loose, but he appeared to have had a good night out: he was unco-ordinated, perhaps even appearing slightly drunk. They sent for the vet, blood tests were carried out, and it emerged that Topic had acute liver damage caused by ragwort. Topic had to be put down. Georgina said:

> "Topic was my best friend, and I spent ages talking to him. When he died, it was the most awful time of my life and I still miss him."

Topic was poisoned by ragwort.

Ragwort is generally considered a biennial weed but in fact it is a facultative perennial. It grows to about 1 m in height. As most people will be aware, it is a yellow-flowered weed. As I am sure the Minister is aware, it will grow almost anywhere: on verges, embankments and waste land. It is highly toxic, particularly to horses. I understand that 2 lb of fresh ragwort is enough to kill a horse. It is also toxic to young stock, cattle, pigs and sheep. Of course, we do not tend to see the effects of ragwort on those animals because they are slaughtered early, whereas horses live to a ripe old age, so the effects of ragwort on them can be seen all too often.

The symptoms are weight loss, poor coat, impaired vision, staggering and a changed gait. The horse will tend to circle, suffer blindness, and collide into other obstacles. It may be unable to swallow. Ultimately, the condition will lead to collapse and death.

Ragwort weed is remarkable in other ways. It has unique wildlife which most people recognise: the cinnabar moth caterpillar with its rugby-top-like banding of black and gold and the cinnabar moth itself, with its dramatic

[Richard Younger-Ross]

red and black. Both are poisonous because they feed off the plant. That pretty plant and its insects are all deadly. That is due to the pyrrolizidine alkaloids.

It is a difficult weed to remove. Usually in the United Kingdom, one would spot-spray the young rosettes in April to May. One can dig it up, but that is harder and obviously difficult when there is a large number of weeds.

The biological experiments elsewhere were well covered in the previous debate, so I will not go into those. It is a pernicious weed. It is hard to remove and it is becoming more common. The question is: what should be done?

In 1959, Parliament thought that it had the answer. It passed the Weeds Act 1959. It named ragwort and four other weeds: spear thistle, creeping or field thistle, curled dock and the broad-leaved dock. However, common ragwort is the most pernicious and dangerous of those and causes the most problems.

I quote from the Act:

> "Where the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food . . . is satisfied that there are injurious weeds to which this Act applies growing upon any land"

I emphasise "any land"—

> "he may serve upon the occupier of the land a notice in writing requiring him, within the time specified in the notice, to take such action as may be necessary to prevent the weeds from spreading."

So why is ragwort invading virtually every pasture and meadow still?

The previous debate took place a year after Topic died. The Government have good intentions. I note a lot of what the Minister said in that debate. Baroness Hayman has been an active supporter of the "root out ragwort week", but there are questions from that debate. I am pleased to see that the Minister present is the Minister who attended it, so he knows the topic well. He said:

> "we are determined to root out injurious weeds wherever they may be found."

He went on to say that the 1959 Act applies to Great Britain and empowers Agriculture Ministers to take action against occupiers of any land to prevent the spread of the five species of weed. He explained the scope of the Act and said that it

> "empowers, but does not require".

I take the point.

The Minister also said:

> "Commercial equine activities are a business and one which we embrace as a legitimate form of agricultural diversification, so it is not unreasonable for us to treat them as an agricultural business."

What measures has he taken? Why were other parts of the horse industry—livery—ruled out? Was there one rule for one and one rule for the other? The horse industry is worth well over £2.5 billion.

We now have the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which is broader and more all-embracing than MAFF, and is meant to cover all the countryside. Should not DEFRA now say that it will look after the horse industry and take care of pernicious weeds?

Has the Minister resolved the problem that he referred to when he said:

> "we ensure that all complaints from farmers who have diversified into equine enterprises and to whom ragwort poses a threat are fully investigated"?

How many cases have been investigated?

The Minister said:

> "I urge those owners to follow the advice to ensure that any bought-in hay is warranted as free of ragwort before it is purchased".

That is vital, but has the hon. Gentleman considered the plight of organic hay growers who cannot use spray? Imagine the difficulties of trying to remove the weed by hand from hundreds or thousands of acres. Surely it would be better if we could take more action to prevent the spread of the weed.

The Minister said:

> "It is in only a few cases that we may be forced to use the powers that we have under the Act."—[*Official Report*, 25 July 2000; Vol. 354, c. 1089-92.]

In a later written answer, he said:

> "During 1998, staff at MAFF Regional Service Centres, acting on the Minister's behalf, served one notice under section 1 of the Weeds Act 1959; one notice was served in 1999; and one has been served so far this year; default powers were exercised last year in respect of the 1998 notice."—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2000; Vol. 355, c. 379W.]

Why so few? That seems remarkably few, when the weed is so common.

My securing this debate has raised a few eyebrows, as people have said to me, "Isn't ragwort a pretty weed that grows in the hedgerows?" It may be pretty, but it is dangerous. People do not realise that, apart from the risk to horses and livestock, there is a risk to human health. About 18 months ago, it was reported that a Tasmanian man who had been weeding ragwort by hand for about two weeks was taken seriously ill, and I am told that there is at least one other case of serious poisoning.

Derek Knottenbelt, senior lecturer in veterinary science at the university of Liverpool, went out and removed ragwort by hand on the campus, then took a blood test two days later. He says that his liver enzymes were clearly elevated. I accept that that was not a scientific test, and there may have been other reasons for that, but it is indicative of the fact that ragwort has an effect on humans.

That man went on to report that he had seen ragwort in a cornfield being harvested with the corn. May I remind the Minister that in 1995 the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food carried out research that showed that where bees had been in a field containing a lot of ragwort, the honey would be polluted with the alkaloids? I hope that the Minister will sleep well after this debate, but perhaps he should be careful about the bread and honey that he may eat in the morning, because it, too, may contain those alkaloids. I do not say that there is an immediate risk and we should all stop eating honey and bread, because that would be nonsense; I am simply pointing out that there is a growing risk, and the more the plant invades, the greater the risk will be.

Derek Knottenbelt has said:

> "It's a real killer and has got to be got rid of fast: every plant should be pulled out roots, boots and all".

That is what I am asking the Minister to ensure happens.

I started by talking about Georgina and her horse, and Derek Knottenbelt advises that up to 500 horses a year may die of ragwort poisoning. I do not know—and I am sure that the Minister does not know either, because when I asked the Department how many horses were affected by ragwort it could not give me an answer. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will be able to enlighten us further in his response tonight. However, documents from the British Horse Society report tragic cases of horses dying from ingesting the weed.

Many people who are concerned about ragwort have written to me. I cannot quote all of them, but I shall give the last word to the National Farmers Union, because it clearly states what we all hope will happen:

> "The NFU urges DEFRA to be more positive in its use of the Weeds Act so that effective action can be taken early, and over a number of seasons to control ragwort before it becomes an agricultural nuisance. This means the Highways Agency, highways authorities and Railtrack being particularly vigilant in relation to land in their responsibility. It means that each responsible public authority should have a specified contact point for weed problems that farmers can contact. Finally it means that authorities need to take early and regular action to control 'weed hotspots' so that the young plants are removed or killed before they become a problem."

I hope that the Minister will heed those words, and that we shall hear a positive response this evening.

10.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) on securing this debate about ragwort, which is indeed a serious issue, and one which the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs takes seriously. He is right to say that at least we are having this debate at a more reasonable time than our previous debate on ragwort, which did indeed take place at 3 o'clock in the morning. My hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey)—the latter is here again this evening—sat through that debate too.

We put great emphasis on animal welfare in DEFRA. We are aware of the fatal consequences that may arise for animals as a result of eating ragwort, and we take seriously the powers available to the Secretary of State under the Weeds Act 1959.

I would like to put on record my regret at hearing about the case of Topic, who was owned by the Norton family, and I appreciate the distress that the loss of their horse will have caused them. That is one of the reasons why ragwort needs to be taken seriously by all concerned. We will continue to treat each case on its merits and investigate complaints about ragwort where it threatens farmland, farming activities and diversified equine enterprises on farmland.

I must be absolutely honest with the hon. Gentleman: my Department does not have the resources to investigate every complaint about ragwort on every piece of land. The 1959 Act was designed to protect agricultural premises. We have extended its application to embrace diversified equine enterprises on farmland, and that is the distinction between those enterprises and the others that the hon. Gentleman asked about. We are trying to be flexible about the application of the Act in line with the way in which the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was set up, to take a more integrated approach towards countryside activities and businesses. The vast majority of complaints are resolved satisfactorily through co-operation and persuasion, without the formal powers of the 1959 Act being invoked.

The hon. Gentleman asked what we have done since last year. We have taken a range of actions to deal with ragwort. I do not underestimate the difficulties or the scale of the problem because of the spread of the weed and the wide range of land on which it grows. In consultation with the Rural Development Service and the Rural Payments Agency, we have examined ways to improve the discharge of our responsibilities under the 1959 Act and to ensure an efficient and consistent approach.

We recognise, as the hon. Gentleman said, that ragwort has environmental benefits. It supports a range of biodiversity, and that is important for the countryside in the right place—away from livestock and horses.

I listened with care to the hon. Gentleman's points about human health. DEFRA and, I think, the Food Standards Agency have no evidence to suggest that there are dangers to human health either from direct exposure to ragwort or from consumption of meat or other products, including honey, from animals that have eaten ragwort.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions last year produced a code of practice for verge maintenance which, following representations, specifically included control of ragwort. Railtrack has been made aware of the importance of the need to control ragwort. Last year, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—which has since become DEFRA—commissioned Agricultural Development Advisory Service research projects on ragwort and its control, with particular reference to horses. It also provided a schedule of control measures, which DEFRA has already made publicly available and will put on its website.

DEFRA has also produced a useful colour leaflet on the identification of ragwort and other injurious weeds. That is useful for those who are not familiar with ragwort and who may not be aware of the serious consequences that it can have for livestock. Information on that can also be found on the DEFRA website, and we are revising our leaflet on the 1959 Act.

It is important to stress that responsibility for ragwort control lies on landowners, including in the provision of such things as hay. People making hay must take into account the fact that ragwort can be dangerous, and it is their responsibility to ensure that it is not in the hay. It is also important for owners to check as far as possible that hay is not contaminated. We recognise that the Government have some responsibility, but landowners and horse owners have responsibilities too.

Richard Younger-Ross: Does the Minister agree that when silage and hay are brought in, it is difficult to pull out all the weeds, even though the hay is sifted? Where the weed becomes more endemic—almost epidemic—that will become a greater problem. It is difficult for organic farmers to eradicate ragwort, and greater prevention to stop it spreading would be greatly appreciated. I understand what the Minister has said about some of the measures taken, but I hope that more pressure can be brought on such organisations as Railtrack, particularly when it comes to clearing verges that pass through agricultural land.

Mr. Morley: Yes, those are reasonable points, and I also accept that, of course, it is very difficult for horse owners to check through deliveries of hay to ensure that it has not been contaminated with ragwort, but it is important that those who are cropping hay or silage ensure that it is not contaminated in that way. I accept that there are challenges—for example, for organic farms—but as I

[Mr. Morley]

shall mention in moment, there are ways to deal with ragwort. We are trying to spread that information around by supporting the work of organisations—the British Horse Society, the Country Landowners Association and the National Equine Welfare Council—that have been active in promoting the awareness of ragwort contamination.

I was pleased to give the opening speech at the National Equine Welfare Council seminar on ragwort in September last year. That useful forum brought together not only equine interests but countryside and environmental organisations, and a range of information was available on the various techniques to control ragwort in various ways and situations. It is important that such organisations spread that information around so that people are aware of best practice, and we are playing our part in DEFRA to make that information available.

I accept that it is very difficult to deal with ragwort, and the Department finds doing so costly and time consuming. In the past year, the Department has been seriously distracted with the foot and mouth epidemic, which, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, has made it very difficult for us to give our full attention to such problems, but I assure him that we will continue to support bodies such as the National Equine Welfare Council, which does an excellent job in relation to this issue. Where appropriate, we will pursue complaints about ragwort, within our farmland and agricultural enterprise priorities, which can include equine activities. I also assure him that we shall continue, through our various agencies and Departments, to try to promote good practice in controlling the weed and, wherever possible, to try to disseminate that information.

Richard Younger-Ross: I appreciate the Minister's comments. This question was asked in the previous debate on ragwort, but is DEFRA considering any research programme on ragwort? Two years ago, the answer was negative, but having moved on two years, I hope that DEFRA has considered funding some research, especially into the equine side of the issue. Will he consider funding research into the possible risks to humans? It is a worldwide problem, so other people may be working on it elsewhere—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. An intervention should be just that, and the Minister has very little time left to reply.

Mr. Morley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am not aware of any current research into the effects on human health, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will check with my Department and tell him in writing what we know about the situation. I repeat that the Department has commissioned an ADAS research project on ragwort and its control, with particular reference to horses. We are funding research into the most efficient ways to control the weed, and I very much hope that that helps the livestock sector.

Although I would not want to mislead the hon. Gentleman about the difficulty, costs and resource implications to DEFRA in relation to ragwort control, I want to assure him that we take it seriously, that we will continue to work with interested organisations on research and development, and that we will do what we can to play an appropriate role, alongside the responsibility of landowners and livestock owners, to minimise the risk to livestock that the weed presents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 22 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

MR SPEAKER'S ABSENCE

The House being met, the Clerk at the Table informed the House of the absence of MR. SPEAKER *from this day's sitting, pursuant to leave given [18 January].*

Whereupon, SIR ALAN HASELHURST, THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS, *proceeded to the Table, and after Prayers, took the Chair as* DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Accident and Emergency

1. **Mr. Robert N. Wareing** (Liverpool, West Derby): What plans he has to reopen accident and emergency units that were closed during the last decade. [26359]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the Minister, may I say that I shall be looking for short questions and concise answers.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Decisions about the configuration of A and E departments, including their closing or merging or the opening of new facilities, are a matter for local determination, taking into account local needs and clinical advice about safety and quality. The Government remain fully committed to modernising and improving A and E services throughout the NHS, which is why we have made the biggest investment in them since the NHS was established in 1948.

Mr. Wareing: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. One of the A and E units closed during the last decade was that at Broadgreen hospital in Liverpool, and I believe that that closure has contributed to the increasing strains on the Royal Liverpool and Fazakerley hospitals. It is necessary to review the situation in Liverpool, so I hope that my right hon. Friend will visit the city and reach the same conclusion as me: that Broadgreen A and E unit and its associated services should reopen.

Mr. Hutton: I listened closely to my hon. Friend's comments, and obviously we shall consider them carefully. I have been to Liverpool recently and I saw the A and E services at the Royal Liverpool hospital and the new walk-in centre at the Old Swan site, close to the old Broadgreen A and E site. Significant extra investment has gone into A and E services in his city, and all three hospitals providing A and E services in Liverpool are operating within their capacity limits. I am aware of his concerns and we are looking carefully at the situation.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): Will the Secretary of State advise on how the A and E department at the tiny Hexham general hospital, which is only a few miles from his home, has been maintained?

Mr. Hutton: Let me make one thing absolutely clear: I live 110 miles from Hexham, so the hon. Gentleman should check his facts before making allegations of that kind in this House. The circumstances of Kidderminster and Hexham are different. At Kidderminster, we decided no longer to provide blue light services because of the advice from local clinicians about the safety of those services. Such concerns were not expressed about services at Hexham.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Leigh lost its A and E department in the mid-1990s and people there are under no illusions about who is to blame for that. Although I accept that we cannot reopen an A and E department in Leigh, will the Minister give full consideration to the case for a new diagnostic and treatment centre at the Leigh infirmary site, using the spare capacity? It is well located, and separating acute services from elective admissions in the Wigan and Leigh trust makes good sense.

Mr. Hutton: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. The new diagnostic and treatment centres can make a positive contribution to elective and emergency services right across the NHS. We are considering a number of proposals to establish the new centres and we shall look carefully at his suggestion. An announcement will be made in the near future.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Yesterday, after four and a half years of Labour Government, the East Surrey hospital A and E department had to close to 999 calls because there were 40 patients on trolleys; Crawley hospital had to do the same. That has appalling consequences for people coming in for elective surgery and appalling consequences for my constituent Philip Sprake, who could not be found a place in that hospital and had to be sent to Bromley, which is an hour away, and for his family. The trust is bankrupt, so the issue is certainly about money and resources. When will money and resources get to the trust? After four and a half years of Labour government, what is happening there is an absolute disgrace.

Mr. Hutton: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that very much more money and resources are reaching trusts in Surrey than was ever the case under the previous Administration. *[Interruption.]* It is no good him shaking his head, because he knows that that is precisely the case. I accept that the situation at that A and E is serious and we are looking closely into the exact circumstances.

but his solution—more money—is one that we have already embraced. I am afraid that it is a lesson that his party has not yet learned.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the excellent work of Government inspectors? They visited my local accident and emergency department in north Staffordshire recently and made 71 recommendations based on best practice. Does not that contrast with the days of the internal market when every hospital was in competition and best practice was not shared?

Mr. Hutton: I agree. Such lessons were drawn out in Professor Sir Ian Kennedy's report. We have made a significant advance not only by establishing new national standards, including a new emergency care strategy, but by spreading best practice throughout the service.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Further to the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) asked, I have the facts about East Surrey primary care group. It states that the accident and emergency departments in both Redhill and Crawley will be closed to all admissions from 4.45 pm until the review at lunchtime on 22 January. What would happen in the case of a major road accident or an accident at Gatwick?

Mr. Hutton: I do not know the details, but there are well-established contingency plans to deal with large-scale emergencies. The plans remain in place.

HIV

3. **Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): What steps he will be taking to monitor HIV prevention work after April. [26362]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): The Department plans to monitor local HIV prevention through the AIDS (Control) Act 1987 and through the NHS performance assessment framework. That will include monitoring expenditure for groups most at risk of HIV, and developing performance indicators to assess progress towards meeting the prevention target in the sexual health and HIV strategy.

Mr. Gerrard: My hon. Friend knows that some anxiety has been expressed about transferring commissioning to primary care trusts. I appreciate her comments about the Government's continuing to monitor. Will she assure us that that will continue beyond the next financial year into the following year, when primary care trusts become wholly responsible? If it is found that spending is not maintained, especially on vulnerable groups, will the Government be prepared to intervene?

Yvette Cooper: I can assure my hon. Friend that we envisage long-term arrangements for performance management on sexual health and HIV. It is right to bring that into the mainstream of the NHS, but we are not considering only transitional arrangements. We must continue to monitor progress to ensure that we achieve the challenging targets.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Can it really be true that nurses who are HIV-positive are being recruited? Do the Government believe that that poses no health hazard?

Yvette Cooper: No, it is not true.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Does the Minister know about doctors' grave anxieties, especially in London, that female asylum seekers who come to this country from areas of high HIV infection are ignorant of the dangers of HIV and will not be tested? That means that those who are infected do not receive proper health care as early as possible and it places additional strains on the provision of health care by the NHS.

Yvette Cooper: It is clearly important that people with HIV/AIDS receive treatment. We are keen to increase testing and to ensure that we reduce the amount of undiagnosed HIV. The hon. Gentleman is right that that affects asylum seekers and others who have travelled abroad. We are reviewing the procedures for providing health care and testing for asylum seekers to ensure that we deal properly with any problems that arise.

Service Outsourcing

4. **Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): How many health authorities purchased services outwith their region in the last 12 months. [26363]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): All 95 health authorities will have commissioned some services for their populations outside their region in the past 12 months, mainly for specialised services that are provided in relatively few hospitals in different parts of the United Kingdom.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the difficulty in assessing what is happening and I welcome the fact that some people have recently been treated in France. Is it possible that, instead of caring for patients, health authorities that could not deal with waiting lists have refused to purchase elsewhere in order to protect jobs in their areas?

Mr. Milburn: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we want to move from the traditional position whereby hospitals choose patients to one whereby patients have a greater say about their hospital treatment. The scheme to treat some patients in France is only a pilot scheme. The hon. Gentleman would rightly be the first to express anxiety if quality of care lapsed or if we did not get value for money. It is important to test schemes and get them right. Although they will be an important option in providing more choice for patients, I suspect that many patients will choose not to choose.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): My right hon. Friend mentions value for money in the context of purchasing from the private sector and providers abroad. What steps are being taken to ensure that the NHS gets value for money from such purchases?

Mr. Milburn: As I have said to my hon. Friend on more than one occasion, both in the Chamber and before the Select Committee, there is no blank cheque. It is important that we can guarantee the right things to patients and to taxpayers: first, the highest possible standards of care and, secondly, good value for money. When there is spare capacity in the private sector, we should use it for the benefit of NHS patients, provided that the private sector passes those two important tests. Furthermore, as my hon. Friend is well aware, capacity in the mainstream national health service continues to be built, involving more beds, more hospitals, and more doctors and nurses. I hope that my hon. Friend will do what I do, which is to contrast the growth in the national health service now with the reductions that took place under the Conservatives.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Is the Secretary of State not aware that patients cannot choose to use facilities in their own region, let alone in others, unless their health authority has contracted to purchase care at those facilities? Patients have to follow the money, but surely money should follow patients. If the Secretary of State has done a U-turn on this issue, is he aware that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents? We shall not believe that he has repented, however, until he withdraws the circular that forbids patients to choose care at a facility with which their local authority does not have a contract.

Mr. Milburn: When the right hon. Gentleman was in government, he was never one to practise humility, as I remember. So far as the issue of money following patients is concerned, it is true that that is what the internal market, which he and his right hon. and hon. Friends devised, was supposed to achieve. But it never did. The money did not follow the patient; the patient ended up following the money, because the Conservatives had the absurd idea that the only way to raise standards in NHS hospitals was to foment competition among them. That was a failure then and, if we did it now, it would be a failure now.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Secretary of State look carefully at the number of health authorities that actually pay for what they have purchased, rather than at those that purchase outside their area? In my area, two hospital trusts—the Queen's medical centre and Nottingham city hospital—regularly have to carry bills of about £1 million each for extra-contractual referrals from other areas. Those bills do not get paid. It is one thing to ask hospitals to meet their own targets; it is another thing to ask them to meet other people's targets using their own financial allocations.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. Incidentally, he has two very good hospitals in his city, as he well knows. The system of extra-contractual referrals has gone. It was part and parcel of the internal market, which has now been replaced by a new system. He is quite right, however, to say that there is a faultline in the new system. When a hospital takes patients from outside its area, we do not recompense it immediately. Indeed, because of late payment, it has taken some hospitals up to two years to pay the hospitals that have taken their patients. We must change that, so that hospitals that treat more patients more quickly get more money more quickly.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The tests for use of the private sector surely include value for money and accountability. Would it not deliver better value for money to free up the beds currently blocked in the health authorities where the Secretary of State is paying private companies over the odds to treat patients abroad, before trying the latter option? How can he demonstrate accountability when health authorities will not release to the House the value of the contracts to treat patients abroad, saying only that it is less than the very high cost that they are paying—over the odds—for private care in this country? How can that value for money be demonstrated in an accountable way?

Mr. Milburn: It is a nice, simple world that the Liberal Democrats live in, where there is always a simple solution to every problem. There is not a simple solution to the problems in the national health service. We have to grow the capacity in the NHS, use it where we can elsewhere, and put the reforms in place. It is not simply a question of using spare capacity in the private sector, or of freeing up capacity in the NHS. The hon. Gentleman is quite right; we are trying to get the number of delayed discharge patients down by investing more in social services, and by providing intermediate care, rehabilitation and other forms of care. We are doing all those things, not just one of them.

The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that the so-called secret contract between the primary care group and the hospitals in France is being evaluated. The primary care group will have to account for how it spends its share of the public money that it receives.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am sure that we were all pleased for the nine NHS escapees who hobbled off for treatment at the private clinic in Lille last week. They will have been waved off enviously by the 1 million-plus patients who remain on waiting lists at home, not least the 42,000 and rising who have been waiting for more than a year. Will the Secretary of State now have another go at telling us exactly how much the treatment in Lille costs, including the associated travel costs, compared with the treatment available at private and not-for-profit centres here? Given the press reports about looking at using hospitals in Turkey, Tunisia and Malta, will he tell us just how far afield he is prepared to send our constituents before he gets to grips with the worsening crisis in treatment at home and puts an end to this national humiliation?

Mr. Milburn: I do not think that it is a national humiliation to get more NHS patients treated more quickly. I know that the Conservatives never managed to achieve that, but that is what is happening. I have a little tip for the hon. Gentleman: he should not believe everything that he reads in the newspapers. It will make him a very unhappy person—I candidly tell him that, on occasions, it makes me very unhappy.

There are no deals with other countries. We have one deal in a pilot scheme between one primary care group and one hospital in France. As for escapees from the national health service, there is one policy that the Conservatives would carry out: they would make every NHS patient an escapee, because they want to abandon the national health service.

Derriford Hospital

5. **Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): What assessment he has made of the capacity of Derriford Hospital, Plymouth, to meet the acute health needs of its community. [26364]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): In February last year, we approved plans for a £101 million major redevelopment in Plymouth, which will significantly increase the capacity of the hospital.

Mr. Streeter: The Minister refers to a new hospital that will come on stream in six or seven years, but what about levels of care for my constituents in the meantime? Given that the Government's own commission reported at the end of last year that it has been discovered that activity levels at Derriford hospital in Plymouth are three times higher than the national average, but that resources for the hospital are less than twice as high as the national average, is not the problem of the long-term funding structure the real reason why it often performs at 102 per cent. of capacity, why doctors and nurses are so hard pressed, and why so many operations are cancelled? After five years of a Labour Government, how much longer must my constituents wait for proper acute hospital health care?

Ms Blears: It is true that there are problems of capacity in this country, and it is no wonder, because under the previous Government 60,000 beds were cut. Between 1980 and 1997, the NHS lost 60,000 beds. That is why there is a problem with capacity. At long last, under this Government, we now have a scheme to rebuild Derriford hospital.

What has already happened at Derriford? *[Interruption.]* Let Opposition Members listen to what has already happened at Derriford: £6 million for a new cardiac unit; £3.5 million for a new cancer centre; £1.5 million for a new breast care unit; £820,000 for additional critical care beds; £765,000 for A and E modernisation; a new 10-bed observation ward planned in accident and emergency; four new wards for cardiac patients; and three wards to be released. That is just in Derriford. The rest of the country is also benefiting from the Labour Government, whereas people had to wait for years and years under the Tories.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Does my hon. Friend agree that primary care trusts have an increasingly important role to play in easing not just winter pressures but all the seasonal pressures that affect hospitals these days? Does she further agree that private insurance has absolutely no role to play in solving those problems and, indeed, would make matters worse for many of my constituents?

Ms Blears *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Minister that this question is about one particular hospital. I hope that she will not stray outside that.

Ms Blears: Much as I am tempted to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Getting hospitals to work well is not just the responsibility of the acute trusts; it also depends on primary care trusts, on social services working together and on the whole health community coming together to achieve that. I am aware that senior managers are working in each other's organisations. Anne James, chief executive of Plymouth City primary care trust, has recently spent some time working in accident and emergency. What better way for professionals to experience the problems that they all face across the piece? I am delighted that, in this area, people are looking to modernisation and reform as well as investment.

Sexual Health

6. **Sandra Gidley** (Romsey): If he will make a statement on the sexual health strategy. [26365]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): Consultation on the sexual health and HIV strategy ended on 21 December. An action plan is being developed. In addition, we have started to prepare for implementation by asking health authorities to undertake a baseline review, and by seeking expressions of interest in chlamydia screening.

Sandra Gidley: Is not the truth that the long-awaited strategy is little more than an HIV/AIDS strategy with a teenage pregnancy policy added on? Worthy as those matters are, should not the strategy include issues such as sexual dysfunction and endometriosis, which have a huge impact on people's lives? Most damaging, there is little emphasis in the strategy on barrier methods of contraception. I am glad that chlamydia screening has been mentioned because chlamydia rates have doubled in the past five years, along with those for other sexually transmitted diseases. But is it not too little, too late? Is not the Government's record the sexual equivalent of fiddling while Rome burns?

Yvette Cooper: I completely disagree. It is the first time that this country has ever had a comprehensive sexual health strategy. It covers issues around all kinds of sexually transmitted infections, contraception and abortion. It sets clear targets, including on preventing new transmissions of gonorrhoea. It has been widely welcomed across the country for focusing not simply on prevention but on integrating prevention and HIV/AIDS and sexual health services.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating young people in my constituency who have been involved in producing the local sexual health strategy? Does she agree that involving young people in producing such strategies is the best way to ensure that they are relevant to their needs and deal with issues around sexual health and reducing teenage pregnancy?

Yvette Cooper: I welcome the work to which my hon. Friend refers. It is true that a lot of the work on prevention is effective only when the groups at whom the work is aimed are involved in its development. With teenage pregnancies and preventing teenage pregnancies, it is particularly important to get teenagers involved. We are aware of the broad health impact of teenage pregnancies not simply on teenagers but on their children. That is why it is so important to keep on bringing the rates down.

Caesarean Section Births

7. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the change in the proportion of babies born by Caesarean section in the last five years. [26366]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): The proportion of babies born by Caesarean section has risen gradually over the past five years. To help set standards on the use of Caesarean sections, the Department commissioned the national Caesarean section audit. The findings will form the basis of clinical guidelines to be issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the development of the national service framework for children.

Dr. Cable: Does the Minister share the assessment of the Royal College of Midwives that the number of operations at present—approximately double the level considered safe by the World Health Organisation—is unnecessary, unwanted, a major drain on NHS funding and a risk to mothers? If she does share that assessment, why are the Government not moving more urgently to reverse the trend?

Jacqui Smith: I think that I explained that the Government are moving urgently. There is no clinical consensus about the right level of Caesarean sections. Through NICE, we will be able to develop guidelines that mean that instead of focusing on overall levels we are able to ensure that the advice and the service that any individual woman receives, whether a Caesarean section or other forms of delivery, is appropriate. It is right that, building on the work that the Department has already done in gaining information, we now develop guidelines to ensure that the processes are appropriate for each woman. Alongside that, I am sure that the Royal College of Midwives recognises and appreciates the extra investment that the Government are putting into maternity services and into increasing the number of midwives available to support women.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): The Minister has spoken of the advice that parents should be given. The pregnancy book given out to parents-to-be says that the Caesarean operation is "safe", rather than pointing out that it is still a major operation and spelling out the risks, as the risks associated with other forms of childbirth would be spelled out. Will the Minister ensure that the guidance is looked at again, so that parents-to-be can be told about the risks associated with what is, as I have said, still a major operation?

Jacqui Smith: As I told the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), I think the information that individual women receive is crucial. Some of it will be given during discussions that they have with their obstetricians, and some will be published. One of the important jobs for the maternity component of the national service framework for children will be ensuring that the information we provide for women is available to them, so that they and their clinicians can make the best choices in each case.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Would not one way of reducing demand for Caesarean operations be to increase the supply of acupuncturists? At Derriford hospital in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), only 7.5 per cent. of babies are delivered by Caesarean.

The working group on herbal medicines established by the Minister's Department, under Professor Pittilo—*[Laughter]*—not my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo). The working group will be looking at the regulation of acupuncture. Does that change in Government strategy represent original thinking?

Jacqui Smith: We wondered who would get the alternative medicine question today—but the hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the good work that is going on at Derriford hospital. When I visited a Walsall hospital maternity unit, I saw interesting work going on there as well. Midwives are being trained to use complementary therapies; indeed, more midwives are being trained throughout the country to use such therapies, and use them when appropriate.

The remit of the working group under Professor Michael Pittilo—this is not, as some thought, a new job for one of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues—will be to present proposals to make self-regulation statutory for practitioners of herbal medicine, and proposals to revise provisions in the Medicines Act 1986 relating to the administering of such medicine. The group's recommendations will form a basis for wider public consultation before proposals are finalised and put to Parliament. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will follow developments with the assiduity with which he follows all such matters.

Nurses

8. **Mr. John Smith** (Vale of Glamorgan): What steps he is taking to improve the recruitment of nurses to the NHS. [26367]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Provisional figures show that 10,000 more nurses were working in the NHS in 2001 than in 2000. That is a consequence of better pay, improved child care and more flexible working.

Mr. Smith: I welcome the good news about nurse recruitment, and congratulate my right hon. Friend and his team on their good work. Does he, however, recognise the vital part played by the Royal College of Nursing in both recruiting and retaining nurses, given its principal role of representing nurses' interests? Does he agree that the college should adopt the same high standards in protecting its own employees as apply to its members in the NHS? It should not be in the business of diddling former employees such as my constituent Mrs. Marilyn Reed out of their pension entitlements.

Mr. Milburn: The news about recruitment is indeed very good. I well remember that when we announced the NHS plan in the House, the Opposition said we would never hit the target of an extra 20,000 nurses by 2004. Now, at the beginning of 2002, there are already 16,000 more. We are not just on target; we are well ahead of target. The RCN has played an important part in that, as have Unison and the other trade unions representing nurses at all levels in the NHS. We work closely together precisely to try to get the policies right, and not just bring nurses into the NHS but ensure that they stay.

As far as internal issues as concerned, I think that they are a matter for the RCN.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): There are 750 nursing vacancies in Wales. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that nurse training places are allocated to Wales to meet that need?

Mr. Milburn: It is one of the joys of my life that I am not responsible for all things Welsh—not that all things Welsh, as personified by hon. Members of all parties, are not absolutely admirable. There is very good news about nurse training places. I note that the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service reports that the number of people applying for nursing degrees has risen by 18 per cent. in one year. The news is better with regard to applications for nurse diploma courses: they are up by 83 per cent.

Radiographers

9. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): What action he is taking to increase the supply of radiographers. [26368]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Measures are being taken to improve the recruitment and retention of radiographers. They include improvements in pay and cost-of-living allowances, increased provision of child care and of other means of supporting flexible employment, and increases in the availability of training courses. We are also working closely with the Society and College of Radiographers, running recruitment and return-to-practice campaigns. There are now over 700 more radiographers working in the NHS today than in 1997, an increase of 6 per cent.

Mrs. Campbell: I welcome the improvement in radiographer services at Addenbrooke's hospital. The provision of brand new linear accelerators has been very welcome, as they are much more efficient. They take longer to set up, however, which has increased the need for radiographers at the hospital. Will my hon. Friend consider using trained staff to administer radiotherapy? Such staff, being less than fully qualified, would work under the supervision of fully trained radiographers.

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's words of support, and the answer to her question is yes. Addenbrooke's is one of the 13 pilot sites that are currently helping shape new roles for what we call assistant practitioners in radiography. They can make a powerful and important contribution to dealing with some of the problems that my hon. Friend has identified, and to improving the service available to NHS patients.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there are variations in the recruitment of radiographers and nurses both within and between regions? That has a lot to do with the uncertainty about the continued existence of certain hospitals. On two occasions, the right hon. Gentleman was unable to see a delegation from Lichfield and Burntwood to discuss the future of hospitals in the area, where there is real uncertainty about the future of day surgery. We met the Under-Secretary of State in the other place, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, in November. He promised to respond rapidly, but we still have not received a reply. When will we get a reply? When will we be able to recruit the nurses and radiographers that we need? This matter goes back to November.

Mr. Hutton: The fact that I was unable to meet the delegation was not for want of trying, nor because I had no desire to meet the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman knows why I was not able to attend those meetings. On one occasion I had to travel to Ottawa to attend an international forum dealing with issues connected with bioterrorism. I hope that hon. Members would regard that as a pretty good reason. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman soon—

Michael Fabricant: Soon?

Mr. Hutton: Today. The hon. Gentleman will get the letter later this afternoon. However, he may be interested to know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is to hold a meeting on expanding access to day surgery tomorrow. I shall keep the hon. Gentleman informed of progress.

Lymington Community Hospital

10. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): If he will make a statement on the future of the Lymington community hospital. [26369]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): New Forest primary care trust, which manages Lymington hospital, is developing proposals for a new hospital and plans to submit its outline business case to the NHS regional office next month.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the Minister for that reply, although it is slightly uninformative. The existing health authority is to be wound up at the end of March, and replaced by a new strategic health authority. Is the hon. Lady aware of the New Forest primary care trust's concern that there is a risk that the funding allocated for the new hospital under the existing health authority might not be carried forward as a commitment by the new health authority? The trust is also worried that what might be termed planning blight will add to the hold-ups that have bedevilled the project for so many years. Can the Minister give a reassurance that the New Forest will not lose out in funding and suffer further delays as a result of the changeover to the new health authority?

Ms Blears: I am aware that it has taken time for the project to reach fruition, but I am delighted at another example of delivery. I am aware also of how much the hon. Gentleman's constituents will value that facility. I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman that the matter has been brought to my attention and that I will follow it through. The plans are well advanced for 113 beds, two theatres, an endoscopy suite, outpatient services, X-ray facilities, dental services, pharmacy and pathology. It will be a wonderful enhancement to the hon. Gentleman's community and I hope that this Government will be able to deliver it.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): What will be the implications for Lymington hospital and other building projects of the south-east region being overspent by £60 million, which will have to be paid for out of next year's allocation?

Ms Blears: No, it will not. Hon. Members have become a little excited at the prospect of the south-east's financial position. The deficit that the south-east region is facing is about 1 per cent. of its budget and one eighth of 1 per cent. of the overall NHS budget. Such matters arise from time to time; they will be resolved. The majority of the deficit—some £51 million—is the result of increases in prescribing. Many drugs are being prescribed to prevent ill health in the first place.

Warrington, North (Appointees)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Question 11, please.

11. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What progress has been made in appointing more people from the Warrington, North constituency to serve on health authorities and trusts. [26370]

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is there a Minister willing to answer Question 11?

Ms Blears: Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The National Health Service Appointments Commission aims at ensuring that board membership reflects the geographical areas served by the bodies concerned. The criteria issued by the commission state that it is essential that candidates must live in the area served by the health authority or NHS trust—or in the case of a patient care trust, be registered as a patient of a general practitioner within the PCT area.

Helen Jones: My hon. Friend is possibly looking for the word "none" in her answer. The health service cannot meet the needs of those whom it is meant to serve unless people in the most health-deprived areas are represented in decision making. It is nonsense for the commission to argue that it cannot find suitable candidates to serve on NHS bodies from a constituency of more than 72,000 voters. My constituency and others like it have been badly let down. Most of the commission's recent appointments were from the wealthier areas of Warrington, South. It is a case of good chaps appointing other good chaps, and the golf club rules. What will the Minister do to redress inequality?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend raises an important point. If the health service is to be redesigned around patient needs, it is crucial that a proper cross-section of the public serve on boards. The new Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will be charged with finding people who want to serve on health bodies, patients forums and panels—and in the governance of future health service bodies—to make sure that people from a much wider range of social backgrounds become involved. I am concerned about that matter and mean to make progress. Considerable progress has been made in recent years in appointing not just women but people with disabilities and from a range of ethnic backgrounds, but there is much more to be done.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Is the pattern of appointments to health bodies that serve Warrington, North the same nationally? The commission has appointed five times more Labour supporters than Conservatives or Liberal Democrats to NHS bodies—140 Labour, 30 Conservative and 31 Liberal Democrats. Those are the Minister's own figures, given in a parliamentary answer dated 8 January. What will the Minister do about the culture of Labour cronyism?

Ms Blears: The commission does indeed appoint people on merit—people who properly represent their communities. The Commissioner for Public Appointments has just reviewed the appointments to primary care trusts, and she said that there was

> "no significant difference between the political activity of applicants and the political activity of the appointees".

She concluded that there was

> "no evidence of any political bias in the appointments process".

I am afraid, therefore, that Conservative Members will really have to do better and ensure that the appointments that are made on merit perhaps include some people with the ability to represent their communities.

Norfolk and Norwich Hospital (Access Road)

12. **Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): What discussions he has had with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Highways Agency concerning the provision of an access road for the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital; and if he will make a statement. [26371]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): My noble Friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath has raised the issue of access to the new Norfolk and Norwich university hospital with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The Highways Agency has confirmed that the direct access road from the A47 to the new hospital cannot be approved, on grounds of safety.

The national health service has so far spent more than £4 million on improving road access to the new hospital site, and an additional £1 million has been earmarked for further improvements. Norfolk county council is now urgently considering other options for improving access.

Mr. Bacon: Does the Minister agree, while recognising that he is in no sense to blame, that it is unacceptable to spend £229 million of public money building a major new hospital and then not ensure that high-quality road access is provided as an integral part of the development? Will he use his good offices to apply every possible pressure to those responsible, to ensure that a speedy solution is found to that very important problem?

Mr. Hutton: Yes, I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance and we are working very hard to ensure that there is a sensible outcome. There is widespread consensus that improved and better access to the hospital site is needed. A taskforce of the four local authorities concerned has been set up. I understand that its first meeting is next week and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, if he is able to attend, would be welcome. If he cannot come, I will ensure that he is kept properly informed of progress.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): When looking at the road links, will the Minister also look at the A and E department of that hospital, which depends crucially on those road links? Did he see an article in the local newspaper the other day, headed, "Delays at A & E"? It said:

> "Patients were left waiting in a queue of ambulances outside a busy Norfolk casualty department because of a 'bottleneck' in dealing with patients, it emerged yesterday.".

Is it not a sad reflection on the Government that they cannot even build a brand new hospital and deliver for that hospital a proper, functioning, A and E department?

Mr. Hutton: That is a very disappointing response from the hon. Gentleman. We do not want to stray too far into this territory, but his party had 18 years in which to build a new hospital for Norwich and it never quite managed to do it. We have built a new hospital. Yes, issues still need to be addressed, but my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have yet to hear one word of welcome for the new hospital from the hon. Gentleman.

Disabled People (Croydon)

13. **Geraint Davies** (Croydon, Central): What plans his Department has to support the provision of sustainable jobs for those with mental and physical disabilities in Croydon. [26372]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): Participation in employment is an important factor in promoting well-being and social inclusion. The Department of Health contributes to work in this area through a range of initiatives such as the welfare-to-work joint investment plans for disabled people, and the prominence given to employment issues in the national service framework for mental health and the learning disability White Paper, "Valuing People".

Geraint Davies: My hon. Friend will be aware of the very valuable work done by Crosfield Industries, which employs more than 100 people with disabilities, turns over more than £3 million of commercial revenue—

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Calm down. *[Laughter.]*

Geraint Davies: Thank you very much. It turns over more than £3 million of commercial revenue from windows, assembly and electrical work. It is supported by Government and council subsidy. Will my hon. Friend give her backing to continued Government support for providing sustainable jobs for people with disabilities—jobs which support them by caring for their physical and emotional needs and giving them a stake in the economy and society?

Jacqui Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Unlike Opposition Members, who have reacted to it with such hilarity, I think that providing work opportunities and the support necessary for disabled people is a pretty important and serious issue. I certainly would commend the work that Crosfield and Crosslink do with disabled people. That is part of the Government's workstep programme, which helps and supports 22,000 people throughout the country, enabling them to get or keep a job, and I understand that at least 90 people in my hon. Friend's constituency are supported in that way. I hope that he continues his support for that important work in his constituency; the Government certainly will.

Residential Care

14. **Mr. Nick Gibb** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): How many beds for elderly people have been lost in residential homes between May 1997 and the latest available date. [26373]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): The Department's figures show that there were 261,600 residential care home places for older people in March 1997. That figure had fallen by 1,500, to 260,100, in March 2001.

Mr. Gibb: It is strange that the hon. Lady cites those figures, because experts appointed by her Department—Laing and Buisson—show 49,000 fewer beds in residential care homes since 1997, as a consequence of which almost 6,500 beds are now being blocked in NHS hospitals. Is not that an absurd misallocation of scarce NHS resources?

Jacqui Smith: There are pressures on the care home sector. That, of course, is part of the reason why the Government are investing £300 million this year and next year, partly to help to stabilise the care home sector; but I really do not think that a discussion about this important issue is helped by Opposition Members' consistent misuse of figures. Laing and Buisson has no axe to grind, and the Laing and Buisson figures actually showed a net loss of 19,000 beds since 1996—a period in which there has also been a considerable increase in the number of older people receiving intensive care packages at home. In other words, we are doing what older people want us to do—helping them to be independent.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): My hon. Friend is right to concentrate on intensive home care packages. Is she aware of the report in this month's *British Medical Journal* that suggests that, if the NHS could reduce the acute bed/day average down to levels such as those in the Kaiser organisation in California, we could save up to 17 per cent. of the NHS budget? Does not that send the message that it is important to have such acute home care packages and that we should concentrate on reform, rather than just pouring money into the health service?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why the investment that has already gone into intermediate care and the £300 million that the Government are providing over this year and next year is buying not only more care home places, but more intermediate care to keep people out of hospital and help them move more quickly from acute beds to independence. It is also buying more intensive home care, so more people are receiving nursing and other support to stay at home. This is a time of transition in the care that we provide to our older people, and a mature debate recognises that and the extra support that the Government are providing to help to promote independence and to maintain capacity in the care home sector; it does not focus on misusing statistics to the benefit of no one.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Although I appreciate the content of the Minister's replies to the questions that she has been asked on this subject, does she not agree that there is a problem with residential care for the elderly and that a number of elderly people require residential care? Although home care packages can play a very important part, there is a problem because of the increased costs that residential care proprietors have to incur. Will she not accept that there is a problem with the costs incurred in certain areas of the country, not least in my own, where a residential care home provided by an independent body—County Lifestyle Services—has closed in Cheshire? Will she not take account of the fact that some people require care homes for their retirement?

Jacqui Smith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Some people need care homes, and the fees and commissioning arrangements at local authority and local health service level are important for the publicly funded residents in those homes. That is why my predecessor set up a strategic commissioning group, to bring together representatives of local authorities and of independent health care and residential home providers to develop an agreement which the Government published at the same time as we invested £300 million in the system. The group also addressed the need for better commissioning and explicitly said that, when local authorities make decisions about fees, they should bear in mind the costs faced by care homes and the quality that we want for residential care provision.

Decisions about fees are rightly made at local authority level. However, with the guidance and extra investment that the Government are putting into social services, it is possible to remodel our services and to maintain the necessary high-quality capacity in residential care to give a real choice to our older people.

NHS Dentistry

15. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the availability of NHS dentistry. [26374]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): The Government are committed to ensuring that everyone who needs it can have access to NHS dental treatment. To support that, NHS Direct is now advising people on how to find dentists willing to provide NHS treatment in their local area.

Mr. Chapman: Does my hon. Friend agree that everyone has the right to be on the list of an NHS dentist? Does she also agree that the best way to improve dental health, not least in poorer areas, is to increase further the number of available dentists? What specific plans does she have to retain or to recruit more dentists who are willing to provide a high-quality NHS service, rather than do as they currently do—which is to spend an ever increasing amount of time on private practice?

Yvette Cooper: I assure my hon. Friend that we are committed to increasing access to NHS dentistry. The number of dentists working in the NHS is increasing, and primary dental services have been established in his area. Through the use of dental access centres as well, we are increasing access to NHS dentistry for people in low-income areas. My hon. Friend is right to suggest that inequality issues also need to be addressed.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Despite the assurances that we have been given over the years, is it not true that there are still huge gaps in NHS dentistry provision, not least in my county of Somerset where people still come to me because they cannot get an NHS dentist? Do we not best serve the interests of acute and long-term care by concentrating on primary care and making sure that we have the practitioners available in dentistry, optometry and general practice to provide universal and comprehensive primary care for our constituents?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that catching dental problems at an early stage is far better than palliative work later, and that the position varies across the country. We need to improve access at an early stage. However, we would be in a considerably better position now if hundreds of dentists had not left the NHS in the early 1990s, when the Conservative Government changed their contracts. We are putting in place incentive payments and improving things so as to bring dentists back into the NHS—but we would not be in this situation if previous decisions had not been taken.

Hospitals (Leeds)

16. **Mr. Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds, North-East): If he will make a statement on the reconfiguration of hospital services in Leeds. [26375]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The creation of the single Leeds teaching hospitals NHS trust in 1998 provided an opportunity to improve service configuration across the city. Two major capital schemes are in PFI procurement: a major new wing at St James's university hospital to house mainly cancer services, and the redevelopment of Wharfedale general hospital at Otley.

Mr. Hamilton: Does my hon. Friend agree that the already excellent oncology services based on the St. James's university hospital site are in urgent need of upgrading, and that it is important that the PFI scheme that is currently on the books be moved on quickly, so that the services provided to the citizens of Leeds and outlying areas can be extended to the whole of west Yorkshire and beyond?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The new wing proposed at St. James's is a £160 million PFI scheme. I understand that building is to start in mid-2003 and that it will open at the end of 2006. It is crucial that swift and effective progress be made with the scheme, which is in line with our national priorities to modernise cancer services and to make sure that people, wherever they live, have access to the highest-quality services for such an important aspect of care.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Although the Minister is right to focus the Government's attention on that form of specialisation, does she share my concern that even if the patients are not travelling, the specialists are, as they move between three different hospitals—Harrogate, Leeds and York? Does she not see enormous difficulties in that?

Ms Blears: It is always a case of achieving a balance between the need to provide centres of excellence and local access to facilities, and either patients or consultants have to travel. It is for the local health community to design the optimal service for local people. It is right, however, that specialists and consultants should travel to see patients if that is the appropriate way to organise the system. That problem is yet more evidence of the need to reform the way in which services work. We need to put patients at the centre and design the service around their needs rather than around those of the professionals or of the system itself, as happened all too often in the past. This illustrates the need for investment and reform.

Point of Order

3.30 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that there are strict rules regarding the use of the Lobby when the House is sitting and governing who may or may not come into it and what they may do when they are there. Are you aware that at least one Lobby pass issued by the BBC has not been issued to a journalist and has been used at least once—I understand from others that it has been used many more times—not to gain information on Lobby terms from Members of Parliament but to influence them to vote in a way that favours the BBC's corporate interests? Is that not a gross abuse of the Lobby pass? Will the House of Commons investigate the circumstances surrounding that and issue clear guidelines defining when a journalist is indeed a journalist?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that that matter is being investigated by the Serjeant at Arms.

Endangered Species (Illegal Trade)

3.32 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to increase penalties for offences under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976.

Just in case unkind Members have it at the back of their minds that the Bill is about hereditary peers or Conservative Members of Parliament, let me make it clear that it is nothing of the kind.

In common with other hon. Members, I am an animal lover. Indeed, when I return to my home the only thing that I can guarantee is that all my animals will be pleased to see me, pleased to be taken for a walk and pleased to be fed. The only sight more inspiring than my good wife bringing me a cup of tea in bed, which may or may not be laced with arsenic, is seeing wild animals in their natural habitat, and unless the House, the mother of Parliaments, takes endangered species seriously, we will no longer be able to enjoy seeing them in that habitat.

I wonder how many hon. Members realise that it is possible to be arrested for poaching a pheasant in the United Kingdom, but not for selling a tiger, and that it is possible to be arrested for poaching deer or even salmon, but not for trading in ivory or rhino horn, which are derivatives of some of the most endangered species on the planet. Under current UK legislation, trading in endangered species is not an arrestable offence, and that is what the Bill attempts to amend.

Globally, the illegal wildlife trade is estimated to be worth more than £5 billion a year, second only to illegal trafficking in drugs. It is estimated that in excess of 520 million animals and plants are traded each year, and about a quarter of the wildlife trade is thought to comprise illegal items.

The United Kingdom, to our shame, is a major consumer of endangered species. For example, in a police operation involving a series of raids across the United Kingdom on premises selling traditional east Asian medicine, more than 20,000 medicinal products containing derivatives of rare and endangered species were seized. A survey by the wildlife trade monitoring programme, TRAFFIC, of Chinese medicine shops in the UK in 2000 found that 64 per cent. sold products that contained protected animal and plant species, including leopard, bear, musk deer and costas root.

The impact of that trade on endangered species is huge. For example, the decline in the black rhino population is an appalling case study in the demise of an endangered species. In the early 1970s, the population was in excess of 65,000, but it has now fallen to just 2,500. The decline is partly due to poaching to fulfil the demand for rhino horn, primarily for traditional east Asian medicine. In 1998, a man was found to be in possession of 127 rhino horns, worth £2.8 million. Although he was found guilty of conspiracy to sell the rhino horns, they were returned to him on appeal. In 1998, the Metropolitan police raided a shop in Islington which was selling stuffed tiger cubs less than one week old; they were stuffed and mounted on a branch, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and I saw them earlier today.

In April 2000, UK police seized more than 130 shahtoosh shawls, which are made from the wool of a rare and endangered species of Tibetan antelope—the

[Mr. David Amess]

biggest ever seizure of such items in the world. That haul alone is thought to be worth more than £350,000; the shawls are estimated to represent just 2 per cent. of the world population of the species. The growing demand for shahtoosh has left a trail of blood from the Tibetan plateaux to the celebrities who unfortunately choose to wear them. Up to five Tibetan antelope are killed to make just one of those wretched shawls.

In another case reported last week in the *Daily Mail*—I know that many hon. Members have talked about this—rare birds of prey were wedged into six-inch diameter plastic tubes in a bid to import them illegally from Asia. Twenty-three birds, all with their feet bound and with no access to food and water, had endured a 14-hour trip when they were discovered in two suitcases by customs officers.

The trade in exotic pets, especially reptiles and amphibians, is flourishing. Every year, millions of wild animals are trapped for use in the exotic pet trade; most die before reaching the pet shops. The World Wild Fund for Nature—to which, along with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, I am indebted—believes that that behaviour threatens the survival of many endangered species and damages their fragile ecosystems and habitats. Killing those animals denies local communities in their native countries the right to a sustainable livelihood. The aim of the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild flora and fauna is to restore the balance between humans and nature to ensure that people's use of wildlife is managed carefully so that it does not threaten either wildlife or the people who rely on it. The trade in endangered species seriously jeopardises that balance.

Bringing those animals into the UK puts the public at risk. RSPCA inspectors helped police to uncover a collection of eight deadly snakes in a raid on a Sheffield flat last February. Unbelievably, a four-foot alligator currently in the Heathrow animal reception centre was abandoned in a telephone box, only to be found by a member of the general public. As the Minister knows, it is also possible that many of these animals could bring in diseases infectious to humans, crops or farm animals. A variety of birds and reptiles can spread very dangerous diseases.

Yet the penalties for these crimes do not reflect their gravity. The company selling the shahtoosh worth more than £350,000 was fined only £1,500. The tiger cub trader was sentenced to only three months for selling a species that numbers only 5,000 in the wild. The maximum sentence for buying or selling an endangered species in this country is only two years—and the maximum sentence has never been awarded. Most criminals who are prosecuted for their crimes receive a fine that the World Wide Fund for Nature believes to be no deterrent whatever. Since these crimes are not arrestable offences, the police, who are responsible for enforcing international legislation protecting endangered species, cannot arrest these criminals. Bizarrely, they can only invite them down to the police station for questioning. Furthermore, as the offences are not arrestable, the police do not even record the statistics on these shocking crimes.

In conclusion, I believe that the House can address this anomaly by increasing from two to five years the maximum sentences for offences concerning illegal trade in endangered species. That would make the offences arrestable. An arrestable offence carries with it not only powers of arrest, but other powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which would provide the police with powers of entry without a warrant, powers of search and seizure and the ability to charge and bail people to court with conditions where appropriate. All hon. Members enjoy watching films about dinosaurs, but it would be a disgrace if the House were to do absolutely nothing and add to the number of dinosaurs. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Amess, Norman Baker, Mr. Ian Cawsey, Mrs. Helen Clark, Jane Griffiths, Mr. Mike Hancock, John Mann, Linda Perham, Mr. John Randall, Angela Watkinson, Miss Ann Widdecombe and Mr. Bill Wiggin.

ENDANGERED SPECIES (ILLEGAL TRADE)

Mr. David Amess accordingly presented a Bill to increase penalties for offences under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 April, and to be printed [Bill 84].

Opposition Day

[8TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Public Services

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): We now move to the main business. I should announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.43 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I beg to move,

> That this House regrets the confusion over Government policy on the public services, which has contributed to a lack of morale and direction for those working within them and dependent upon them; urges Ministers to explain why they believe that greater private sector involvement and leadership will be good for the NHS but in their view was bad for Railtrack; requests the Secretary of State for Health to clarify whether it is his aim that there should be 'one monopoly provider' of health care or whether he believes that the NHS should 'no longer be a monopoly provider of care'; condemns the appointment of the unelected Lord Birt to preside over transport strategy; agrees with the Minister for Europe that Britain now has the worst rail network in Europe; deplores the fact that Labour Ministers failed to give priority to transport in their first term; further condemns the multiple failures of the Government's Education and Skills policy, including the collapse of the ILA scheme, the closure of Education Action Zones, and the reversal of the policy of exclusions, as well as the high numbers of teachers leaving the profession, the confusion over exam grades and the failure to consult over the future of student funding; calls for an end to the flow of paperwork and circulars from Whitehall which burden and undermine the professionalism of teachers; and, while paying tribute to the immense skill and dedication of many public servants, shares the public's disappointment that the standards of many public services are well below those prevailing in the rest of Europe.

So, new Labour moves closer to its sixth year in office, but what has it meant for Britain's public services, for those who work in them and for those who use them? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I want this debate to be conducted in an orderly manner and I certainly want to be able to hear hon. Members' contributions.

Dr. Fox: How well has Labour matched its delivery to the enormous expectations that it raised before it was elected? Those are the questions that are central to our debate. The British public want to know what has happened to all the extra taxes that they paid for all the extra spending. Why is it that they have noticed no difference? We also want to examine whether there is any intellectual coherence in the Government's approach to policy making, or whether the constant proxy war of interference by Nos. 10 and 11 is making it impossible for Cabinet Ministers to exert any continuity whatever.

It all began with such promise: education, education, education; tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime; 24 hours to save the NHS. But now teachers are increasingly demoralised and violent crime is rising. What of 24 hours to save the NHS? By summer 2000 that had become a 10-year vision in the NHS plan, and by autumn 2001 the Chancellor's Wanless report talked about a 20-year plan. Ministers feed us figures, send out glossy brochures and spend millions advertising their wonderful achievements, but for the users of the services things are completely different.

Phil Hope (Corby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: Not before I have said anything.

It is anyone's guess whether one waits longer these days on a railway platform or on a hospital trolley. Street crime, particularly in the capital, is rocketing. Post Office workers are threatening to strike; train drivers are striking; the morale of doctors and nurses is at rock bottom. Exam papers have unanswerable questions. Health authorities are dangerously overspent and hospitals lack the ability to undertake basic infection controls, so we intend to send more patients abroad—that is if they can get as far as the coast on our ever-ailing railways. All this occurs under the leadership of a Prime Minister who seems constantly to be appearing in yet another part of the world where diplomacy fuses with fashion, and to be increasingly disinterested in domestic affairs or completely out of touch with the reality faced by the public.

Phil Hope: Apart from the fact that an opinion poll gives the Prime Minister the highest approval rating since we got elected and the Leader of the Opposition a rating of only 13 per cent., the Opposition motion refers to

> "the closure of Education Action Zones"

which will come as a bit of a surprise to my constituency, where the education action zone has just been extended. That is worth £2 million to Corby schools, Corby teachers and Corby pupils. The Opposition opposed education action zones, but they lament their closure and they are telling us lies because Corby's zone is being extended for two years.

Dr. Fox: I can only suggest that the hon. Gentleman would be better off sticking to the questions given to him by the Whips, as he normally does, because the Government are abolishing the zones that he seeks to praise. Perhaps he should get his facts right before he intervenes.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): The hon. Gentleman said that he wanted to examine the intellectual coherence of the Government's arguments, but he both expressed the wish to have the Government interfering less and referred to the problems arising from exam questions. Is he seriously saying that Ministers should be sitting down and writing exam questions?

Dr. Fox: The hon. Lady should not bother to intervene at all.

We are suggesting that the Government's whole approach smacks of utter incompetence in education, transport, health, law and order and most of the other public services.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Dr. Fox: I shall give way a little later to the hon. Gentlemen, if I can remember exactly who they are.

The problems faced by our public services lie in the very ethos of new Labour. Like the Clinton Administration, its project is about coming to government

[Dr. Fox]

and staying in government, not about what one does in government. Consequently we get endless reports and reviews. It is little wonder that a senior United States official is quoted this week as saying that Tony Blair seems more concerned about finessing a problem than dealing with it. How very perceptive.

Moreover, while the presidential style undermines Secretaries of State, No. 10 increasingly interferes in what Secretaries of State are able to do. We have just had the Treasury's Wanless report on the funding of the NHS. That was about cutting those options available to the Secretary of State for Health which the Chancellor did not like. Of course, as No. 11 had a report on health, No. 10 has now commissioned a report on health as well—the Adair Turner report on the structure of the NHS for the latest master plan—but no terms of reference have been published, and there are no plans to publish the report itself. Neither we nor, presumably, the Department of Health will be given the information on which the Prime Minister's interference in the Secretary of State's health policy is to be based. Lord Birt has been commissioned by No. 10 to review transport policy, and of course as the Prime Minister is having a report, No. 11 has to have one too, and we now know that someone will review transport policy for the Treasury. What is going on?

We have all been entertained when the Chancellor's men, as they like to describe themselves, call the Secretary of State useless in lobby briefings and the Commons watering holes echo with the briefings and counter-briefings of senior Ministers against their colleagues, but that culture, especially the seemingly endless tussle between No. 10 and the Treasury and between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, is debilitating for the Government and has profound consequences for public policy.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): First, does the hon. Gentleman not realise that education action zones were time limited in any event, so they will reach the end of their lives? Secondly, he talks about transport and the railways in particular, but can he explain why the Tory Government included a clause in the northern area franchise, which went to Northern Spirit, saying that the company had to reduce manning by 40 per cent? It sacked a lot of workers and drivers in particular. Now we have shortages. The privatisation was botched.

Dr. Fox: First, more passengers have used the railways since privatisation, and passengers are what count on the railways. Secondly, hardly any Government policy has not been time limited and immediately overridden by a review—only a few weeks later in some examples—because the policies are so ill thought out. I shall take an intervention from the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell)—they are getting easier.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Dream on. The hon. Gentleman referred to the role of policy advisers. One of the most senior under the last Conservative Government was Alfred Sherman, who wrote in *The Guardian* last week that any improvements to the rail service should be paid for solely by the rail commuter. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Dr. Fox: Well, that is an intellectual step up. As someone once said, "Advisers advise; Ministers decide." I am sure that there is another one somewhere.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington) *rose—*

Dr. Fox: Yes, I shall take that one.

Mr. Plaskitt: The hon. Gentleman started his peroration by talking of no delivery across a range of services. May I tell him that 32 per cent. of Warwickshire primary school children were in classes of more than 30 in 1997 while today there are none in such classes? Does he call that no delivery?

Dr. Fox: No Government can get everything wrong. Even this Government, by the law of averages, are bound to score the odd success, but up and down the country and right through the public services, which are far from being a great success with either service users or service providers, the Government are presiding over greater demoralisation than ever before among service providers and a greater lack of satisfaction than ever before among service users.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I must get on, especially as those who are intervening cannot understand the difference between perorations and little perforations.

Nowhere is the failure seen more clearly than in health. The recent scandal, which is all it can be called, of the fiddled waiting list figures, which was exposed by the National Audit Office, is one of the most appalling stains on the Government's record. We, and in fairness other parties in the House, warned that their obsession with waiting list figures would result in clinical distortions. When asked whether clinical distortions occur, Nigel Crisp, the NHS chief executive, said:

> "No doubt there are specific incidents where that has happened, and I have no doubt that people can see an incentive in doing that".

What an appalling admission. The Prime Minister tried to understate the issue by telling the House that

> "it is important to put this matter in perspective. Over a period of four to five years, 6,000 people were misallocated on the lists."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 281.]

Only 6,000. They are not mere statistics; they are real people, sick people.

Only last week, a GP friend told me that he had just returned from holiday only to find that his daughter had been taken off a waiting list because, while they were away, the health authority sent a letter saying, "If you don't write back within seven days, your name will be taken off the list." Now she has to go back to the end of the queue. What sort of system is that?

In another hospital, the maxillofacial surgeons were forced to add patients to the waiting list and give a date of 23 December for treatment, knowing that no patient would volunteer to go in for facial surgery so close to

Christmas. Those patients were therefore temporarily taken off the waiting list. That is the extent of the scandal in the NHS.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I am sure that my hon. Friend will share the anxiety that I experienced after receiving a letter from a GP in my constituency. A consultant surgeon at the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital wrote to him to say that the hospital no longer took any notice of GP referrals when patients had deteriorated while on the waiting list. The consultant stated:

> "However, if even a single patient waits longer than 15 months there are enormous financial implications for the trust."

The GP writes that he cannot interpret that in any other way than patients being treated by political diktat rather than GP referral.

Dr. Fox: When I trained as a doctor, patients were treated on the basis of clinical need. That appears to have been abandoned under the current Government. My hon. Friend might be interested to know that the list of what the Government euphemistically describe as the "inappropriately suspended" consists of 75,000 patients. That means that 75,000 people in our country who need care are being denied it to make the Government's figures look better. That is a cause for national shame.

The National Audit Office recommended that the Department of Health examined other trusts. It stated:

> "For example, they could investigate in more detail those trusts where more than 10 per cent. of patients are suspended and which have more than 2 per cent. of patients waiting more than twelve months for treatment. There are some thirteen trusts which currently meet both criteria."

Have the Government commenced such an investigation? No. They do not want to know the embarrassing result. If the Secretary of State is genuinely anxious about the needs of patients who have been taken off the list for statistical reasons, I challenge him to announce immediately that such an investigation will be undertaken.

More than 1 million people are on the in-patient waiting list. There are 2,000 more people waiting more than 12 months for their operations than in March 1997. There are 400,000 more people on the list for the waiting list. The Audit Commission stated that, in 1996, 73 per cent. of hospital patients were seen by a doctor in an hour. That figure has fallen to 53 per cent. The proportion of patients admitted to hospital in four hours was 90 per cent.; the figure has subsequently fallen to 76 per cent.

Phil Hope: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: No, once was enough.

The Audit Commission was damning about the effects of Government policy on accident and emergency provision. Since 1998, a year after Labour came to office, it concluded that matters were not only getting worse but were doing so at an accelerating rate. The Secretary of State described that as "pretty disappointing". He was not half as disappointed as the 88-year-old man in Bristol who waited 22 hours on a trolley this week, or the patients who had the wheels taken off their trolleys so that they counted as beds, or those who circled hospitals in ambulances so that they did not start the accident and emergency clock ticking. That is more than disappointing; it is a disgrace.

What will happen to the community health councils, which provided the data on what was happening in accident and emergency? The Secretary of State dealt with them in his best Queen of Hearts manner—"Off with their heads." They are to be replaced by a more complicated, less understandable, more expensive and unwelcome system. The judgment has been that although some CHCs work well, all should be abolished because some are not working. I should love that to apply to the Cabinet.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): The hon. Gentleman knows that the National Audit Office report stated that up to 6,000 so-called fiddles may have occurred out of a total of 5 million patients. That is 0.1 per cent., and it applied to only nine out of 300 trusts. All the chief executives and chairs of those trusts have gone. Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that the Government are committed to stamping out all such fiddles? He completely misrepresented the statistics.

Dr. Fox: Ah, well then, it is only 6,000 fiddles and nine trusts, is it? If the Government were as committed to stamping out this pernicious practice as the hon. Gentleman suggests, they would hold a full public inquiry into what these figures mean, rather than failing to ask the questions to which they do not want to know the answers.

On top of this scandal, we still have mixed-sex wards; thousands of patients are still contracting hospital-acquired infections and dying unnecessarily; and we still have the scandal of dirty wards in the NHS.

Ms Drown *rose—*

Dr. Fox: The hon. Lady is very persistent. I shall give way.

Ms Drown: I want to point out that the same pressures to fiddle waiting lists existed under the Conservative Government. I was working in the health service at that time, and people came to me with the same suggestions. I hope that Ministers in that Government would have frowned on the practice and taken action. The hon. Gentleman needs to remember the background to these circumstances. The Labour Government have reduced waiting lists by more than 100,000. That is a fact, and it contrasts strongly with what happened under the Conservative Government, when waiting lists rose by 400,000.

Dr. Fox: No, the hon. Lady fails to get the point. This Government have not reduced waiting lists; they have reduced the numbers on the lists. Those are two very different things. Sick patients are still waiting for treatment. What lies behind the Government's approach to this question is not just their obsession with numbers. For this Government, there is no such thing as truth and untruth; there is only convenience and inconvenience.

Despite all these horrible statistics, one phrase echoes more than any other round Richmond House and the Treasury: "Where has our money gone?" Why are we all still getting letters saying that our constituents are waiting longer to see their GPs, waiting longer in casualty, and waiting longer for surgery? More people are coming to our constituency surgeries with these problems. If all this extra money is being spent, why are patients in the NHS not seeing any benefit?

[Dr. Fox]

I shall give the House a simple example, involving last year's settlement for the NHS. The Government spent an extra £3.8 billion on the NHS last year; no one disputes that figure. However, when we take away the money that was inevitably spent on pay review bodies, pay costs, pensions, the debt overhangs and the Government's ring-fenced projects, the total amount available to expand core services was a maximum of about £560 million. That calculation assumes that the Government's national service frameworks came in at the bottom level of expectations.

That explains the picture presented by the experts at the King's Fund—these are not our numbers, but those produced by the King's Fund—who highlight how the Government's extra funding has had little impact on activity levels. The King's Fund has stated:

> "The implication is that any reduction in the waiting list in the last three years has been achieved not through treating extra patients, but through fewer people being placed on to the waiting list each year. The figures show that there has been a fall in the rate of increase in NHS activity, despite a large increase in funding for the NHS. The most recent quarterly evidence suggests a decline in NHS elective activity."

In other words, more money is going in, but less is coming out. Why? This is primarily due to the combined genius of the Health Secretary and his Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), who have managed to lose—from the peak in 1996—49,000 care home beds, resulting in huge bed blocking right across the NHS. More than 6,000 NHS patients are stuck inappropriately in hospital at any one time—38 per cent. of them for more than a month, according to the Department's figures. There is a waiting list to get into hospital, and a waiting list to get back out. When they came to office, the Government claimed that the system had too little capacity; they have effectively managed to cut that capacity further. What a triumph!

That triumph is matched only by the ability of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to survive in office.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I shall not give way. I am perfectly capable of mocking the afflicted myself. That right hon. Gentleman should have resigned over his failure to sack Jo Moore. That whole wretched episode brought shame on the Government, and the Government's failure to act brought shame on this country. The right hon. Gentleman should have resigned over his calamitous handling of Railtrack. The Government's original estimate that Railtrack would be in administration for between three and six months has proved to be hopelessly optimistic. The latest estimates suggest that it could be as long as August 2003 before Railtrack's replacement is up and running. A report in *The Times*, which went unchallenged, estimated that the administration of Railtrack is costing the taxpayer more than £1 million a day. Of that, fees for advisers connected with Railtrack are estimated at £500,000 a day.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich) *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I should like to know whether the hon. Gentleman thinks that that represents value for taxpayers' money.

Mr. Henderson: May I give the hon. Gentleman some information that I received from the Library? I asked how many White Papers the previous Government introduced to Parliament from 1979 to 1997, and was informed that they introduced four. Thus in 18 years they introduced only four White Papers, two of which were for rail privatisation—we all know what happened there—and another was for bus deregulation, and we know what happened there, too. What was the hon. Gentleman's transport plan in those 18 years?

Dr. Fox: The concept that after 18 years in government we issued only four White Papers is absolutely astonishing. Clearly, numeracy is not a quality required for Government Back Benchers.

It is a sad truth that Labour Members will have to recognise that, in the big boy's class, when one has been in government for two terms, one must answer for what one has done and for what one has promised and failed to provide. There is no point in the Labour party, in its second term in government, going on about what the previous Conservative Government might have done two Parliaments ago. The Labour party is on trial today, and will be in future, for its failure to provide the people of this country with what it promised them at two general elections.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: I think that I have given way perfectly sufficiently up until now. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I am not giving way at the moment.

Not only has the Secretary of State's incompetence cost the taxpayer huge amounts of money, but performance on the rail network continues to deteriorate. Since Railtrack was placed in administration, performance has plummeted. Delays and cancellations caused by track and signal failures have risen by 45 per cent. since early October when Labour pulled the plug on Railtrack. The Government's 10-year plan for the railways is in tatters: £34 billion for the railways was meant to come from private sector funding by 2010, but having seen what the Government have just done to Railtrack, the private sector is unlikely to want to do business with a Government who have just confiscated a private company from its legal owners.

The strategic rail plan was a complete flop.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): My hon. Friend is making a magnificent and spirited attack on this lamentable Government and their performance on public services. Is he aware that they spent most of their first term trying to set up a Strategic Rail Authority—a new instrument of torture to destroy private interest in the railways—and are now spending their second term trying completely to reorganise it under a new chairman, because they accept that all that it did in the first term was a disaster?

Dr. Fox: It is certainly very interesting, in the light of what my right hon. Friend has just said, to look at the different ways in which the Secretary of State for Health and the Transport Secretary are dealing with the results of their own incompetence. Both have reached the dizzy heights that they now occupy in the Cabinet on the third-way tide, yet the Transport Secretary now says that the third way was flaky and is busy reinventing himself as a born-again nationaliser.

Meanwhile, the Secretary of State for Health tells us that he is the arch Blairite moderniser—in the words of the Transport Secretary, the chief flake now in the Cabinet—and he moves ever closer to a full-scale working amalgamation with the private sector, including using private sector management.

I did not come to praise the Secretary of State for Health, and I shall leave burying him to his hon. Friends on the Back Benches, but he is the one who is heading in the right direction. He will need to be genuinely courageous in the face of not only Back-Bench but trade union hostility if he is to move in the right direction as he indicated last week. He will find that he will get a lot of support from many Labour commentators, who know that the policy of utilising the private sector more fully in our public services is the right one.

As for the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, it is clear that she has been left a series of time bombs by the now Home Secretary. Teacher shortages, the chaos in student support and, the collapse of education action zones which the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) did not know about, and individual learning accounts are all examples of the Home Secretary's legacy. The policy is littered with inconsistency.

Before 1997, Labour attacked Conservative education reforms as bureaucratic. Teachers now think that they did not know what bureaucracy was under the previous Government. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills said:

> "I say to the House and to head teachers that sending teachers less paper will neither raise standards nor satisfy them of our ability to give them the support that they need to do the job."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 661.]

Who is she talking to?

The Government tell us that they want new powers to crack down on disruptive and violent pupils, but they ordered that exclusions from school should be cut by a third by 2002 for purely political reasons, which robbed heads and governors of their independence in excluding disruptive pupils. There is intellectual incoherence, inconsistency and incompetence, all underpinned by the Government's dishonest claims to want to depoliticise the delivery of public services.

The Government announced the setting up of the NHS Appointments Commission. The results of that fair, impartial, objective commission were given in a parliamentary answer: of those appointed, 30 were Conservatives, 32 were Liberal Democrats, nine were independents and 140 were Labour—how independent, objective and fair! Long live cronyism, the hallmark of Blairite new Labour!

Not only do we have a Government of intellectual incoherence, inconsistency and incompetence where the Prime Minister becomes ever more detached; we have a Prime Minister who appears to grow ever more contemptuous of his party, which seems to exist only to glorify the cult of his personality, spawning a ministerial culture of blame, spin and reannouncement. This Government blame the professionals, their predecessors in government, the third way—anyone but themselves. If that fails, they set new targets, shift deadlines and commission new reports.

Our transport system is in a mess. Violent crime is rising. The NHS is an international embarrassment. The Government do not know the problems and they certainly do not know the solutions. It is new Labour, new year, new panic, new policies—but never fear:—there will come a good day to bury them all.

4.13 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> 'welcomes the Government's commitment to investment and reform in the public services and notes the contrast with 18 years of Conservative government, typified by under-investment and botched privatisations; recognises the progress being made on raising school standards, improving safety on the railways, cutting waiting times for NHS treatment and reducing levels of crime; wishes to see the ethos of public service strengthened in the country and recognises the importance of high quality public services to the creation of a fairer society; acknowledges the important role of public servants in achieving a fairer society and the contribution made to staff morale of growing staff numbers and rising staff pay; welcomes sustained investment in health, education, police, transport and local government and other areas of public service; believes that the Prime Minister's Principles of Public Service Reform are important to maximise the benefit gained from higher levels of public service investment; further believes that where public services do well they should benefit from greater decentralisation of power and resources, lighter inspection and greater local control; further believes that where public services fail to reach acceptable standards the Government has a responsibility to provide additional support and intervention whether that provider is in the public sector or, as with Railtrack, in the private sector; and contrasts this approach with that of the Opposition which tolerates failure in the railways, has no coherent plans to raise school standards, supports charging for NHS patients and wishes to cap government spending at 35 per cent. of GDP resulting in cuts to public services of at least £50 billion.'.

What a load of claptrap we heard from the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). He does what he always does: he reminded the House that he once trained as a doctor. In that case, he should know a case of selective amnesia when he sees it. He talks about the state of the trains and conveniently forgets that his party presided over the botched privatisation of Railtrack and the rundown of the railways. It is no good him talking about nurse shortages, doctor shortages or bed shortages. It was his party and his Government who created those shortages.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: I will in a moment.

Labour Members are proud of our record on public services and on the NHS.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: I will in a moment.

The Conservatives' problem is that they are ashamed of voting against the NHS in the first place, and of running it down over 18 years when they had the chance to build it. We know what the tactic of the hon. Member for Woodspring is: it is to try to air-brush his party out of history. Not even Joseph Stalin tried that.

The hon. Gentleman should ask for a bit of help from some of his hon. Friends. Take the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who is sitting next to him. I wish someone would! According to his CV, the hon. Gentleman is an expert on Mesopotamian

[Mr. Milburn]

archaeology. That means that he has spent a lot of time working with ancient relics from a bygone age, which is probably why he has a job on the Conservative Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman should get together with his friends. They can then unearth the true story of what the Conservatives did to the public services—run them down, cut them back, sell them off.

Mr. Blunt: In 1996, a new accident and emergency department opened at East Surrey hospital. Is the Secretary of State proud of his record, given that yesterday that department shut because it was so full of patients on trolleys that it could admit no more patients? It was not open for 999 calls.

Mr. Milburn: Of course there are problems in the national health service: there are bound to be problems. There are problems in Surrey—which, incidentally, is why we have just increased the amount of money going into the Surrey health authority area. There have been years during which the NHS has not had the necessary investment, and has not had the necessary capacity. *[Interruption.]* Before Opposition Members get too excited, they should remember that when their party was in office the number of nurses and GPs in training remained the same. Now the number is rising.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Perhaps that explains why, when I wrote to the Department about a constituent who had been waiting for 10 months for an investigatory operation relating to her bowel cancer, she was sent a letter telling her how wonderful the cut in waiting lists was. She has now been forced to pay for the operation. What a disgrace! Could the Department not have managed a better reply?

Mr. Milburn: It is true that too many patients are waiting too long for treatment. How will we put that right? I will tell the House how we will put it right: we will put it right by investing more, and introducing reforms. The issue for the hon. Member for Woodspring and his party is this. Are they going to back the investment, and are they going to back the reforms? I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will do what his hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring has failed to do on successive occasions, and say that the Conservative party would match our spending on the national health service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that it is never a good idea to tout for business in that way? I might conclude that he had finished his speech.

Chris Grayling: I want to take the Secretary of State back to his comments about the railways. Can he explain, given what he said about rail privatisation, why the Strategic Rail Authority set up by his Government said in its report

"The private sector was playing a full part in financing the industry and delivering improvements"?

Mr. Milburn: What the hon. Gentleman fails to recognise is that Railtrack was a botched privatisation. The hon. Gentleman should have a word with the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), the chairman of the Conservative party. He did a sterling job when he was Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. He reminded the House, and indeed the country, that because of the Conservative party's policy not only was the privatisation botched, but the party managed to sell off a state-run national asset and lose £6 billion in the process.

If the hon. Gentleman is proud of that record, he must be the only person in the country who is. The truth is this. The Tories doubled crime; we have cut it. They increased infant class sizes; we have reduced them. They increased hospital waiting lists by 400,000; we have reduced them by 120,000.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can tell us this. If the Railtrack privatisation was so botched, why are his Government proposing to leave Railtrack in the private sector and not to change the structure?

Mr. Milburn: Our policy is extremely straightforward. According to the Tories' policy, what came first were the interests of shareholders. In our policy, the interests of the travelling public come first.

Mr. Redwood: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: In a moment. On second thoughts, the right hon. Gentleman may intervene now.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. Will he confirm that it takes three years to train a nurse, and that this Government have been in power for five? Why are we still short of nurses?

Mr. Milburn: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman is on this planet today but, if he was present for health questions earlier, he will have heard that there are 10,000 more nurses in the NHS this year than last year. Since this Government came to office, moreover, there are 27,000 more nurses in the NHS. The right hon. Gentleman should apply some compare-and-contrast strategies. When he was a member of the Conservative Government, the number of nurse training places was cut, as was the number of nurses.

The Leader of the Opposition says that the Opposition's policy is based on principle. It is certainly based on Tory principles. It starts by talking down the public services. It continues with cutting back resources for the public services. It is completed by selling off the public services. The Tories' policy is the same as it used to be: talk it down, cut it back, sell it off. For 18 years, they had the chance to put in place the necessary investment and reforms, and they failed to do so.

Talking of failure, I turn now to the Liberal Democrats. No doubt the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) will be on his feet shortly, complaining that we did not invest enough, soon enough.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Milburn: That is the hon. Gentleman's story, but his problem is that he has the same answer for every question. He really is the man from Del Monte, who only ever wants to say yes. He says yes so often and so indiscriminately that I am surprised that it is not he who is getting engaged to the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

If the Tories had their way, they would deny the public services the investment that they need, but the Liberal Democrats would deny the country the economic stability that it needs.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The Secretary of State is boasting about investment, but does the Government's 10-year plan for the railways mean that they intend to spend more in real terms on the railways each year than did the Conservative Government, or less? It is a straightforward question: more or less?

Mr. Milburn: Over the 10-year period, we are planning to spend more. In the previous Parliament, we spent double what the previous Conservative Government spent in their final Parliament. In this Parliament, we will spend more again. The investment is going in, and needs to be matched by the reforms that we have initiated.

The problem for the Liberal Democrats is that they are all for the investment, but against the reforms. The problem for the Conservatives is that they are all for reform and the abandonment of the public services, but they are not in favour of investing in them.

Dr. Fox: The worst thing about the confusion from which the Secretary of State suffers is his lack of insight. Treasury figures show that managed expenditure on transport as a percentage of gross domestic product totalled 1 per cent. between 1997 and 2001, compared with 1.7 per cent. under the previous Conservative Administration.

Mr. Milburn: Yes, but the hon. Gentleman's fixation with the private sector makes it surprising that he has failed to count both public and private investment. He should recognise the total level of investment going into the railways, and what that total will be. Investment is going in and we shall also harness the skills, expertise and resources of the private sector.

With regard to health, Britain is the only country in Europe where public services receive a bigger share of national wealth. We lag behind other European countries on health spending but the NHS is the fastest-growing health service of any major country in Europe. The hon. Gentleman said that the grass is always greener on the other side and that we should abandon our form of NHS funding and change to the French or German system. The hon. Gentleman should realise from his travels that France and Germany do not have a superior system but a superior level of funding. We are putting that right.

As I said earlier today, I do not regard people receiving treatment abroad as a national humiliation or disgrace but as a way of getting more NHS patients treated more quickly. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was all in favour of choice, as I am. I want patients to have more choice from the NHS. The only difference between patients travelling abroad for treatment and the hon. Gentleman travelling abroad to look at other forms of providing treatment is that at least NHS patients are well when they return.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): The Secretary of State says that British hospitals are the finest in Europe. Is he aware that there have been no new patient admissions to the Victoria Memorial hospital in Glasgow because of acquired hospital infection? Last week, an Indian journalist who investigated the situation in Scottish hospitals concluded that hospitals in India were perhaps better than those in Scotland. What does the right hon. Gentleman say to that?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman does his constituents and the country no favours by falling for the trap set for him by the *Daily Mail* and others. He should go to Afghanistan or India to see what a third-world health care system really looks like. The British health service is being built up with more doctors, nurses and beds.

There are problems with hospital acquired infection and I know that the Minister for Health and Community Care in Scotland takes them extremely seriously. The hon. Gentleman should not pretend that hospital acquired infection is solely a problem for this country's health service. It is associated with the greater range of prescribed antibiotics and other treatments and has occurred throughout the developed world. We have a good plan for dealing with it.

Mr. Ivan Henderson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that last weekend, the first emergency operating theatre ever opened at Colchester General hospital, which is used by my constituents? Is he further aware of the major upgrading of the trauma theatre and that an MRI scanner is being delivered this weekend? Did my right hon. Friend know of the comment by Essex Rivers Healthcare trust in a press statement that it wanted to build an emergency theatre for many years but was hampered by lack of funds? Does my right hon. Friend believe the people working at the front line, who can see this Government deliver, or Conservative Members, who are always running the health service down?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend tells an important story. Investment is being made and reforms are biting. Nobody pretends that everything is fixed but nor should anyone pretend that everything is broken. We know that there is a long way to go. The NHS will require sustained investment over a period of years. Only a fool or a Liberal Democrat believes that a few years of extra investment will put right decades of underinvestment.

My hon. Friend may have seen the report published by the NHS Modernisation Board a week or so ago. Not even the hon. Member for Woodspring can claim that that board is stacked with cronies from the Labour party. Its members are from the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the royal medical colleges, Unison and patients' organisations. The board told the truth about the NHS today. It has profound problems but progress is coming through. In the past year alone, there has been a net increase of 10,000 nurses and the number of hospital beds rose for the first time in 30 years. More than nine out of 10 cancer patients are now seen within two weeks, when they used to wait months. In just one year, there have been almost 5,000 more heart operations and there are 17 per cent. more heart doctors. We do not claim that every problem is solved, but nor should anyone claim that progress is not under way.

Mrs. Browning: The right hon. Gentleman may recall my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mrs. Browning]

Woodspring about the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital. Will he please explain, because the doctors in my constituency would be interested in his answer, why a consultant orthopaedic surgeon feels obliged to write to a GP:

> "We are presently only operating on long waiters, much against our better judgement"?

It is not that the surgeons are unsympathetic to long waiters, but clearly, in terms of clinical priority, the Secretary of State's judgment is now deemed to be more important than that of consultant surgeons or GPs.

Mr. Milburn: If the hon. Lady thinks that clinical need is as important as I do—

Mrs. Browning: Not me—the doctors.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Lady raised the point, not the doctor. If the hon. Lady thinks that clinical need is as important as I do, why, when she was in government, did she not urge the then Health Secretary to do what this Health Secretary has done: put more money into shortening waiting times and improving cancer services and heart services?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: Oh, there is a posse of them. They are all the same, really; I will take that one.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. The Secretary of State is planning a £150 million reorganisation in my constituency area. Is he aware that 15,000 people have marched against that proposal, because it will involve taking away our A and E, threaten the cancer centre currently located in Canterbury and, in the view of no fewer than 12 consultants who turned out at a few hours' notice, ruin the standard of health care in our area?

Mr. Illsley: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Milburn: It is very tempting, but let me just deal with the point that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) raises, because it is very important. I know that there is concern in his constituency and that he joined many of his constituents in a sit-down protest the other day. Some of my hon. Friends would say that that was the best place for him, but that would be extremely uncharitable.

I know that there is concern in the east Kent area about the situation. The hon. Gentleman has raised those concerns with me more than once. I will of course look at the issues, but he should not pretend that these issues have been brought about as a consequence of some sort of financial decision-making structure; they have not. As the hon. Gentleman knows, they have been brought about and led by clinical decision making. Sometimes that raises profoundly difficult issues in terms of access to local services. It raised difficult issues for the previous Government. It raises difficult issues for the present Government but we should not try to duck them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: Now, who else? That one there.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I was interested in the right hon. Gentleman's statement on investment in the railways. Can he commit the Government today to the £500 million that will be necessary to electrify properly the line from Hastings to London to enable the new rolling stock that has already been ordered by Connex to run? Without that commitment, the new rolling stock, which is detailed in the strategic rail plan of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, is completely worthless.

Mr. Milburn: I have got the point. That is an issue for the Transport Secretary. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] We actually have a very good Transport Secretary. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes, we have a very good Transport Secretary and I know that he will more than happily reply to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: Who is next? That one.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): May I bring the Secretary of State back to the health service? Will he explain why a written answer that I received from his Department confirms that more than 35 trusts, including my local trust, have more than 10 per cent. of their patients suspended from the waiting list for an in-patient operation? Will he answer the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) made and accept the National Audit Office's recommendation for an inquiry into those trusts where there is huge suspicion of waiting list fiddles?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is slightly behind the times. We have actually gone further than the National Audit Office suggested. We have said that in future the Audit Commission, the other Government watchdog on public spending, will be able to spot-check waiting lists, not just in his trust but in any trust that it chooses in the country. But let the hon. Gentleman not fall for the fallacy being peddled by the hon. Member for Woodspring, that the reduction in waiting lists comes about as a result of fiddling figures. It does not. It comes about as a result of treating patients. Half a million more patients are being treated every year in the NHS.

In health, the extra doctors, nurses and beds are providing shorter waiting times for patients. In education, the extra teachers and smaller classes are improving standards for pupils. In our cities and on our streets, the record increase in police numbers is helping to reduce crime. In transport, despite the obvious problems on the railways, more people are travelling by train, as well as by bus, than ever before. We do not say for a moment that our public services are as good as we want them to be, but the difference between us and the Conservatives is simple enough: we want our public services to succeed; they do not believe that they can ever succeed. We are putting in the resources; if they had the chance, they would take out the resources.

Mr. Soley: My right hon. Friend is being very generous in taking interventions, but an increasing number of Labour Members are getting very angry about the interventions on investment made by Conservative Members, given that not only was there a history of intervention, but the shadow Secretary of State for Health refused to answer the question about more investment on the "Today" programme. He refused to take an intervention from me that he knew would be on the same point, and until Conservative Members—whether Front Benchers or Back Benchers—are prepared to say, first, that they will not make the cuts that they made previously and, secondly, that they will match or increase our funding, no one, but no one, should take them seriously.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The hon. Member for Woodspring has had two chances today. He had a chance on the BBC's "Today" programme this morning to say that he would match Labour's spending on health. My hon. Friends gave him a chance to do that in Health questions, and I am happy to give way now to give the hon. Gentleman a third chance, if he wants one, to say that he will match Labour's spending on health.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois). Can he make that pledge?

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Secretary of State mentions cancer patients, and I wish to ask him a specific question on that point. Will he please explain to the House why his Department has recently announced plans to run down the highly successful cancer service at Southend hospital? What have the people of Southend and the surrounding constituencies, including mine, done to deserve this Government reducing the level of cancer care available to them?

Mr. Milburn: I am sorry to say that I am not familiar with the individual—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asks a question; I will give him an answer, and if he would care to listen, he might learn something. I am not familiar with the individual case that he raises. I will look into it, but it is simply wrong to say that, somehow or other, we not building up cancer services. We are building up cancer services—more money is going in than ever before. Indeed, one of the big differences between this Government and the previous Government is that we are ear-marking money specifically for cancer services. One of the eternal shames for the Conservative party when in government is that it did not put a penny piece aside for specialist investment in cancer services, and the legacy is with us today.

Instead of learning from their history, the Conservatives are still living in it. For them, public is bad, private is good. The biggest problem in the public services for them is not lack of investment by the state; it is the size of the state. Only the Tory party could think that the best way to get more out of the public services is to put less in. The Tories, frankly—

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: No, I shall not give way.

Adam Price *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: Oh, I will give way—why not?

Adam Price: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am as surprised as he is to hear about the Tories new-found enthusiasm for public services, but surely 18 years of Tory neglect is not a justification for five years of Labour complacency. Was not the Deputy Prime Minister right last week to refer to the cruel shambles of the state of public services in our poorest communities? They have the worst schools, the worst housing and the longest waiting lists. For 18 years, Labour canvassers used to tell us, "It'll be all right when we get a Labour Government." Well, we are still waiting, aren't we?

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): The right hon. Gentleman does not do Wales.

Mr. Milburn: I do not do Wales, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says. However, I occasionally like to do people from Wales. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) has fallen into the trap that the hon. Member for Woodspring set for him. Unless we solve every problem, no problem is solved. Is that what the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr is suggesting? Unemployment is lower, living standards are higher, the working families tax credit is in place, child poverty is being tackled, the minimum wage is in place and there is more investment in the public services. No, not every problem has been solved—amazingly enough—after four and a half years, but progress is being made. If we went back to the years of cutback and closure, not only would we have less investment in our public services but we would not have the reforms either.

Mr. Illsley: I wish to drag my right hon. Friend back to a point that was made earlier about clinical priorities. It was suggested that the ability of GPs to refer people to hospital was being hampered. Does my right hon. Friend recall the situation that existed in Sheffield under the last Conservative Government? Sheffield hospitals refused to accept patients from non-fundholding GPs, because the money did not come with the patient. That was the result of the underfunding of hospitals in the Sheffield area.

Mr. Milburn: I remember that very well. The tragedy is that that was not an accident but a deliberate act of policy. The policy then was to foment competition among hospitals, to split the NHS up and to fragment it. The result was clear for all to see. We did not even have competition and we certainly did not have higher standards in my hon. Friend's constituency or in mine. We have all learned the lessons from that, haven't we?

The truth is that the Conservatives are still living in the past. The shadow Chancellor, the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Home Secretary are all in search of a new holy grail. They have lost two elections, but they have found a new cause: reducing public spending to below 35 per cent. of GDP. Let me be clear about it. Reducing public spending to that level would require at least £50 billion of public spending cuts. That is the equivalent of the total NHS annual budget for the whole country. The Conservatives have the temerity to complain about our targets to improve public services, but their target would destroy public services.

We stand for public services, because we stand for a fairer society. For Labour Members, public services are social justice made real. Without better schools, too many

[Mr. Milburn]

children miss out on the best start in life; unless we tackle crime, the poorest communities always pay the price; and without a better NHS, too many patients face the dilemma of having to pay for treatment or wait for treatment.

The hon. Member for Woodspring says that we should be clear where we stand. We stand where we have always stood—for an NHS that is paid for by all, that is available to all and that provides patients with care that is free and funded from general taxation and based on the scale of their needs and not on the size of their wallets. The former Prime Minister Lady Thatcher once famously said that she wanted the hospital of her choosing, on the day of her choosing and at the time of her choosing. That is what we want too; we want it on the NHS. That is why we are putting in the investment and the reforms: to get waiting times down and to allow patients to choose when they are treated on the NHS and where they are treated on the NHS, rather than forcing them out of the NHS.

To Labour Members, improving public services has never been just about investment or just about reform. It is about both. So whether it is in health or in education, there will be tough national standards within which schools and hospitals will have greater freedom to deliver. Where services are doing well, there will be less intervention; where they are not, there will be more. In health, education and transport, we will use the private sector where it can help the public sector.

If there are consistent failures in management—whether it be a failure in public sector management or in private sector management—our response will be the same. We will change the management. That is what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has rightly done with Railtrack and what my right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills have done with failing schools. It is what I will do if necessary with the small minority of failing hospitals. Whether it is patients, pupils or passengers, we will not tolerate second-rate services for some when the best should be available for all.

This debate has exposed the Conservatives' cosmetic concerns for public services. It has demonstrated the determination of Labour Members to make the investment and reforms necessary to improve those public services. Public services and the people who work in them—the teachers, the doctors, the nurses, the police officers and the people who drive the trains—make a valued and valuable contribution to the fairer society that we seek to build. They are essential to the quality of life in communities and constituencies in all parts of our country. Yes, there is plenty more to do and there are improvements to be made, but improvements cannot come by cutting back the investment or by scaling back the reforms.

It is the Labour party that believes in an NHS that is free at the point of need; it is the Conservative party that does not want choices for patients—it wants charges for patients. It is the Labour party that believes in putting more money into the NHS; it is the Conservative party that would take that money out of the NHS. Just as it was the Labour party that created the health service and the Conservative party that opposed it, so it will be the Labour party that reforms the NHS against a Conservative party that seeks to reject it. We know that the choice before the country is the choice before the House; it is between Labour Members who would reform the public services and Conservative Members who would wreck the public services.

4.46 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The noise, shouting and macho posturing in the Chamber can mean one of two things: either the Conservative and Labour parties are far apart on an issue or they are close together on it. I suspect that when it comes to dealing with the public services, it is the latter, and they are both wrong. They wish to disguise their unwillingness to tackle the issues, to disguise their unwillingness to own up to the cost of funding decent public services, and to disguise their uncritical love affair with the private sector.

Only a fraud or a Labour Minister would claim to be able to save the NHS without significant sustained early extra investment. Only a fraud or a Labour Minister would claim that a headlong rush towards the private sector in many of our public services will not lead to problems of both accountability and value for money.

Mrs. Browning: On the subject of the love of the private sector, why did the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) enclose a brochure on the Nuffield clinic in Plymouth in literature that he circulated to his constituency last year?

Dr. Harris: I know little about the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). I suspect, however, that I now know more about the weakness of the Conservative unit on the Liberal Democrats, and I hope that I sample more of that weakness during my contribution.

In the 1997 Labour manifesto the Prime Minister wrote:

> "we have made it our guiding rule not to promise what we cannot deliver; and to deliver what we promise."

That will be hard for people who use the public services to take. *[Interruption.]* If the Secretary of State listens, he will recognise that without putting in the funding early, patients, pupils and others will be let down. In the four years following that commitment, the funding provided by the Government for many public services barely exceeded—if at all—the funding provided by the Conservative party when it was in office. Yet expectations were hugely raised, and it is the failure to deliver on those expectations that has made so many people feel let down.

Dr. Fox: In order to buy the hon. Gentleman some time so that the massed ranks of the Liberal Democrats can come to support him, in terms of early investment, how much was 1p in income tax worth in 1997?

Dr. Harris: If the hon. Gentleman waits, he will hear me happily defend our tax proposals in the 1997 and 2001 elections. It is indeed those proposals and our menu with prices that set us apart from the two conservative parties that are opposing each other in the debate.

One might ask why it matters that expectations were raised when the delivery—if it arrives at all—will be so delayed. It matters because the patients who voted for the Labour party in 1997, believing that it would save the NHS in two weeks, 12 hours, 24 hours or whatever the jargon was, had only one chance of treatment.

They cannot wait four, five, six, seven or eight years for the Labour party to deliver their health care. Children entering school have only one chance of education and cannot wait eight years for the Labour party to deliver its education promises.

The Government wasted three years by sticking to Conservative spending plans. They said two things—that they would save the NHS and that no one would ever pay more tax under a Labour Government—in 1997. They therefore made two incompatible pledges. We know that they met their pledge to the better-off, but they let down pupils, patients and passengers to meet it, which they should never have done.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): The hon. Gentleman will not know this, but Inverclyde council has submitted a bid for £100 million of public-private funding to make much-needed improvements to schools throughout Inverclyde. The local Liberal Democrats, who are in opposition on the council, opposed that bid, although Mr. Ross Finnie, a Liberal Democrat Member of the Scottish Executive supports it. What is the policy of Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament? Do they support that extra funding for schools or do they oppose it?

Dr. Harris: We are happy to say where we stand on the private finance initiative; we do not oppose it in principle, but it must pass tests—*[Interruption.]* That is what I mean about the uncritical attitude of Labour Members; if the word "private" is mentioned, they are told via their bleepers that they have to back it. Tests have to be met. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) would do better on scrutiny if he asked the people proposing that scheme whether it delivers value for money; whether there is adequate accountability; whether there is adequate risk transfer if it involves private finance; whether there is sufficient flexibility; and whether it will deliver those in the long term. I fear that he does not bother to ask those questions because he has been told from on high that he must support such initiatives. Liberal Democrat Members will always give practical scrutiny to such proposals—*[Interruption.]* I believe that I have answered that point.

The first three years of the Labour Administration were wasted by sticking to Tory spending plans while our public services went down the pan.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Harris: No, I want to move on.

Those three years were not entirely wasted by them because they were three years of spin; multiple reannouncements of funding and triple counting were used as a disguise for underinvestment. The final year of the Administration's first term, when they recognised that they had not delivered on their pledges, was a year of controlled panic; as they approached the election, there were longer waiting times for patients, poorer education and even more under-representation of poorer students in higher education. We are in the first year of the Government's second term, and it looks like there will be four years of uncontrolled panic, as they settle for reannouncements, interference, reviews and micro-management of the NHS as a substitute for early investment.

Mr. Salter *rose—*

Dr. Harris: I can see that the hon. Gentleman, who is clutching a briefing, is desperate to intervene.

Mr. Salter: It is a newspaper. I should have thought that even people in Oxford, West and Abingdon read *The Guardian* from time to time.

The hon. Gentleman's criticism of the Labour Government for sticking to Conservative spending limits might be valid if—

Dr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Salter: Wait for it; settle down.

The hon. Gentleman's criticisms might be legitimate if we did not read in *The Guardian* today that the Liberal Democrat strategy for targeting areas such as Guildford and elsewhere in Surrey involves the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) holding out the prospect of tax cuts. How does that sit fair and square with the tax and spend ideology that the Liberals are now embracing? The one thing that we can guarantee with Liberals is that they will never ever be consistent on any single point of principle.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman has made a fundamental mistake; he has read *The Guardian*, not the Liberal Democrat manifesto. Until he reads our policies, he cannot readily criticise them. What separates us from the Labour party is the fact that when we make commitments, we explain how they are funded and go into the election saying how they are funded.

Mr. Rammell: In terms of clarity about how the Liberal Democrats fund their policies, does the hon. Gentleman agree with the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), who said:

> "I think when we debate public services, when we look at the health service, we need to throw into the equation . . . you won't like this, we need to look at the issues of insurance, we need to look at the issues of charging"?

Dr. Harris: Before we reject those propositions—I hope and believe that the Conservatives will not do so—we will give the reasons why they are rejected.

Mr. Rammell *rose—*

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman has become excited now that I have answered his question. We approach all these issues—especially important ones such as how we fund the health service—on the basis of pragmatic tests of equity, value for money, accountability, access and so on. As I shall demonstrate—I shall deal with his point—I believe that, while the Conservative policy of charging for the health service is at least a policy—

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): There isn't one.

Dr. Harris: They are thinking about it. It is at least a policy, but it fails many of the tests that I have mentioned.

[Dr. Harris]

[Interruption.] I urge the hon. Gentleman to control himself, as I will scrutinise the policy that he is considering and offer some advice to him.

The threat to the NHS comes not from the Conservative party, which people will never believe to be a friend of the NHS, but from the Government. Most murders happen in the family, and it is the Labour party, which is still believed by many people to have the best interests of the NHS at heart, that may well be sounding the death knell for the future of the health service. Through its failure to deliver, and especially its spin and multiple reannouncements about funding, it is leading many people to believe that a properly funded NHS has been tried and has failed.

The Liberal Democrats argue that the concept of a properly funded health service that is paid for by taxation and is free at the point of delivery is currently failing only because it has never been tried. The health service has not been properly funded. Every time Labour Back Benchers, speaking out of loyalty, or Ministers, sticking to their press briefing, reannounce the funds and give an inflated impression of the money that is available to the health service, they drive a nail into the future of the NHS and its survival as a publicly funded service. Even in *The Guardian*, there will be people who believe the Government's figures and think that the NHS has been properly funded. That is the real danger. Pretending that the funding has gone in allows people to say "It's just a bottomless pit. The Government have put in a significant amount of extra funding and we are spending as much as other European countries, but we are still failing." It is not the health service that is failing, but the Government: they are failing to be honest about how much is going into the health service.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I speak not from a Back-Bench briefing, but out of personal curiosity. The hon. Gentleman rightly said that the Tories were considering the introduction of charging in the NHS. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm or deny that the Liberal Democrats are considering charging as one of the options for the NHS? Yes or no?

Dr. Harris: No. I do not know what part of the word "No" the hon. Gentleman does not understand. I can tell him that we will go into the next election with a commitment to fund the NHS in a fair way that leads to equitable provision of services. Charging is at least a policy, which is more than Ministers have, but it fails in terms of equity. It may provide extra funding in the short term, but it fails to pass the test of giving a long-term future for universal funding and ensuring equity of provision. Charging the sick and elderly to see a doctor is the sort of policy that the Conservatives may consider. I hope that they will reject it, although in a way, I hope that they will not do so. If the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer—or even both—suggest that Labour Members consider the option, they may do so. However, the Liberal Democrats have reached that point. We have looked at those options and rejected them on the grounds that I have set out. I am sorry if that is a disappointment to the hon. Gentleman.

The question is this: if the NHS is underfunded, what is the appropriate way of funding it? It would be appropriate for an accountable, honest Government to say before an election how much taxes will have to rise, rather than to claim beforehand that they will not increase taxes and then come scuttling to the Chamber afterwards to admit that taxes may go up. An accountable, honest Government owe it to patients, pupils and passengers not to rule out the fairest way of raising those resources. That is what this Government did in an attempt to bribe voters with their own money by ruling out a rise in the fairest tax, which is a direct, open tax—income tax. Instead, they chose to raise revenue through stealth taxes, indirect taxes and unfair taxes.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way as he stumbles his way through his fascinating speech. Can he please tell the House whether the NHS is underfunded by 10, 15, 20 or 25 per cent.? He clearly feels that it is a big number, so can he tell us how big it is?

Dr. Harris: Unlike the Conservative party and the Labour party, at election time we provide a costed manifesto, a menu with prices. For example, at the last election we pledged that we would raise the basic rate of income tax by 1 per cent., 1p, to raise additional resources—£3.1 billion, to answer the question that was asked earlier—for education. That does not mean that the money already included in Labour's spending plans would be burned by the Liberal Democrats in government.

Whatever the Labour party says it wants to spend on education, we would have spent £3.1 billion more, saying to the electorate that we thought it was necessary and that raising income tax was the fairest way to fund it. That would have meant smaller average class sizes, a fairer way to fund student finances and more provision for nursery education. *[Interruption.]* That may not, as Labour Members say, be enough, but it is £3.1 billion more than they offered at the last election.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The hon. Gentleman has slithered away from the issue of funding for the health service and taken the lifeline that was thrown to him by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). He argues that Liberal Democrat policy is to view funding for the NHS in the long term, and that their manifestos are always costed on that basis. As the Liberal Democrats know from one election to another that they will never be in government, presumably they have already costed those manifestos. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would therefore be good enough to tell us how much they would spend on the NHS to ensure long-term funding at a level that they feel is necessary—

Dr. Harris *rose—*

Glenda Jackson: I am sorry, but I have not quite finished. Will the hon. Gentleman also tell us where the money will come from?

Dr. Harris: The hon. Lady bases her question on a fallacy. *[Interruption.]* I shall deal with both of her points. She claims that the Liberal Democrats will not be in government. Well, that was said in Scotland, and in Scotland we are in government and, with our partners in the Executive, we are funding our commitment to a fairer system of student finance and our proposals for free personal care. I suspect that if the hon. Lady allowed herself to say so, she would agree with those policies. It is wrong to argue that we make claims that we never have to fulfil in government.

The Liberal Democrats are also the only opposition party to deliver an alternative Budget every time the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivers a Budget, so the hon. Lady will not be disappointed. I hope that when the Chancellor reveals his Budget proposals for funding the health service at the Dispatch Box, she will rise in her seat to thank us for publishing our specific alternative plans the day before. I look forward to that moment.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Harris: No, I want to press on with my speech. *[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that I have been generous. He will have a chance to speak in the debate, and the less time he spends trying to intervene, the more time will remain for the debate.

The Government, in their panic, have introduced distortions to the health service, and they have done the same in education. The rigidity of maximum infant class sizes has led to disappointment for individual children but no more gains than would have been made by putting resources, which we would have increased, into lowering average class sizes. The Government professed that they wanted more students from poorer backgrounds to go into higher education and then introduced a policy, which they denied during the 1997 election, to make poor students poorer in the hope that it would encourage more of them to enter higher education. We see from the National Audit Office and the Government's own research that that failed and failed miserably. It led to inequity and it goes against what many people felt the Labour party stood for.

On the health service, as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, he and I and our predecessors pointed out the distortion of waiting lists. They can be cut by simply no longer offering operations, so when uncomplicated varicose vein operations were stripped out of the health service, it reduced the number of people on waiting lists at a stroke. The Conservative party must remember that it introduced the waiting list commitment, which the Labour party foolishly adopted. For the first couple of years, the Conservatives tried to hold Labour to a flawed commitment.

The Government have done better with waiting times, but their fixation with maximums creates distortions in clinical priorities. Managers know that they will be marked—performance appraised—on the number of patients who have waited more than 15 months by the end of next March, regardless of how many intensive care unit beds they have to close to fund the maximum waiting time target and no matter how many patients who urgently need surgery have to be put off so that someone who would otherwise wait 16 months is treated in 15 to satisfy a political priority. The Government do not care, but patients will die as a result of those distortions of clinical priorities and their distortion of practice in A and E departments will have a similar effect.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who has done sterling work. His constituents recognise that he has been active in this area, perhaps more in opposition than in government, but Kent and Canterbury hospital in his constituency is so short of beds and so terrified of being accused of having long waiters that it has created a ward in a corridor by sticking to the wall a sign signifying "Bed station".

People no longer talk about the old lady who has waited a long time in the corridor for treatment—there were five when I visited the hospital—because they now refer to the lady in corridor bed A or corridor bed B. That "Milburn memorial ward" is testament to the Government's failure to invest in dealing with delayed discharges. More than 1,000 operations could be done in East Kent, West Sussex and the Isle of Wight if they tackled that problem. If some of the money being paid out for patients from those areas, over the odds in secret contracts with private hospitals in another country, went on tackling bed blocking, they would get through many operations that they feel they need to get through.

On the two-week wait for patients with suspected cancer, the shorter the wait the better, even though evidence-based studies show that it does not reduce mortality from cancer; but if the funding to implement that policy is taken from treatment budgets, people will wait longer for radiotherapy. Furthermore, as the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) pointed out, people with confirmed cancer will wait longer for further investigation. Patients will die as a result of such a distortion of clinical priorities.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): In answering my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), the hon. Gentleman drew attention to the fact that the Liberal Democrats are in government in the United Kingdom. They help to govern 15 per cent. of the population and they share responsibility for many of the matters to which he is referring. Why is he not claiming credit, if credit be due, for improved performance on the very waiting list issues that might arise in the areas of the United Kingdom in which the Liberals share power?

Dr. Harris: Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman is concerned with the organisation's name. I am concerned with how long people wait for delivery of service. Why is performance not better, and perhaps worse, where the Liberals are in government?

Dr. Harris: If the hon. Gentleman cannot get his words right, his point has little substance. We believe in devolution and therefore Liberal Democrats in Wales speak for themselves. At the Welsh Assembly, where they share power, they speak for the Administration. Good luck to them.

The Secretary of State claims that the Liberal Democrats are not in favour of reform. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have proposals to reform the response to clinical negligence and move to no-fault compensation. We want to reform the way in which social services are funded and to allow more extensive and rapid multi-skilling for nurses. We want to strip out political targets for the NHS and provide proper, local democratic accountability and reform inspections of quality in the NHS. Those are radical reforms.

[Dr. Harris]

I confess that we do not support pointless reform of the structure of the health service. That constitutes activity as a replacement for action. Patients and workers in the health service need another structural reform like a hole in the head.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman has presented a long list of radical reforms that the Liberal Democrats would carry out in the unlikely event of their getting anywhere near governing this country. He has told us that the health service needs radical reform and that it is underfunded. He also said that class sizes are too large and that the Liberal Democrats would alter the way in which students are financed. He said that such financing can be provided only through a rise in income tax. By how much will income tax need to rise to pay for all that, come the next general election?

Dr. Harris: At the next election, we will tell the hon. Gentleman and the country by how much income tax needs to rise to pay for our commitment to public services. At the last election, we were clear. We wanted £3.1 billion more for education, and in addition we had a proposal, which may appal the conservative Members on the Labour Benches, to tax people who earn more than £100,000 at 50p in the pound.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): For the NHS?

Dr. Harris: Yes. The hon. Gentleman will be disappointed by that reply. The money that the provision would have raised had two purposes. It would have given pensioners, especially older pensioners, a decent increase in their state pension. Not long ago, the hon. Gentleman defended an increase of only 75p. Our proposal would also have provided additional funding for training NHS staff. We had a costed manifesto; the Conservatives did not even have a sensible manifesto.

However, we will support the motion. Although we have tabled an amendment to it, we will support it because it condemns a Government record that desperately needs condemning and because it says so little about Conservative policy. The less Conservatives say about their intentions, the less credibility they have. That matches the Government's lack of credibility, with their disgraceful record on our public services.

5.12 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): I have a slight cold, so I apologise if hon. Members cannot hear me very well. I want to pick up the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on his comment that the Liberals would support the Conservatives tonight. In an article in *The Guardian* yesterday, the leader of the Liberal party—

Dr. Evan Harris: Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Cunningham: Liberal Democrats, if the hon. Gentleman is so touchy about words. The article appeared to signal a change in stance. It suggested that the Liberal Democrats would not co-operate with the Labour party because the Labour party might not support proportional representation. That applied especially to the Prime Minister. What a price they charge for support! The article also suggested that further changes might occur. Perhaps the Liberal Democrat spokesman can explain some of his leader's comments in *The Guardian*. The article stated:

> "In a surprising announcement, Mr. Kennedy says the Liberal Democrats would not necessarily stick by their pledge to raise income tax to fund public services".

I remind the Liberal Democrats that many people, especially in the trade union movement, are under the impression that the Liberal Democrats would support proper funding for public services and, if necessary, tax increases.

The article continues by quoting the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy):

> "'We might well go into the next general election saying that we favour lower taxes,' he says, though he insisted that he had no 'crystal ball' on what might happen in three and a half years time."

If ever there was a change in policy, that is it.

Phil Hope: Let me point out to my hon. Friend another aspect of Liberal confusion.

Dr. Harris: Liberal Democrats.

Phil Hope: Liberal Democrat confusion. They are touchy about what we call them. A "Liberal Future" pamphlet called "Pro Bono Publico—must the state always provide?", published only last year, stated:

> "Some already question the idea that the NHS can provide everything free at the point of delivery. Is it time to start making a charge for some . . . NHS procedures?"

That is Liberal policy.

Mr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend makes a good point. That provides a further clue. If the Liberals are thinking about going down the road of tax cuts, they might want to balance them by introducing charges. That is the clue that we are getting from them, signalling a change in policy.

There is another problem, though, if we listen to the Liberal Democrats'—I had better be careful how I refer to them—spokesman. The hon. Gentleman described a number of conditions under which the Liberal Democrats would accept the private finance initiative, but many people outside the House—particularly those working in local government and the health service—think that the Liberals are against the PFI. They are not. If we listen to what their spokesman said, they will accept it, given certain qualifications.

Since the 1997 general election, the Liberals have made much of the link between pensions and earnings; before the election, they pledged not to do anything about that, but after it, that changed. They keep moving the goalposts. At that election, the Liberal Democrats proposed to put 1p on income tax to fund education. We have put £40 billion into education and the health service in the intervening years. That is three or four times what the Liberals were proposing.

I want to touch on one or two issues that seem to have been forgotten, relating to what we are doing for the national health service, that are important to the public. By 2005, we shall have 10,000 more doctors and 20,000 more nurses. We shall also have 100 new hospital developments by 2010—even the Liberals would accept that we have to programme not only our developments but our expenditure. In addition, 3,000 general practitioners' premises will have been modernised by 2004. Those are some of the positive provisions that the Government are implementing. In terms of capital investment, we have said that we will invest £7 billion. That is a considerable figure by any stretch of the imagination. If we add to that the investment from the private sector, it is a considerable investment in anybody's terms.

The Tories mentioned bed blocking. Bed blocking is not new; it existed under Tory Governments. The reason for it is simple: there has always been a shortage of social workers. We have debated that issue over the years, and one of the problems that we inherited in the national health service is that often when elderly patients are ready to be discharged, they do not have a social worker to ascertain their needs. We have been addressing that issue; the Tories certainly did not do so.

Tim Loughton: Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the shortfall between the amount spent on social services by local councils and the amount that the Government are paying is now estimated at £1 billion? That means that, in parts of the country, there are vacancy rates of at least 30 per cent. for social workers. The situation is far worse than it ever was under the last Conservative Government, which is part of the reason why the problem of bed blocking is now worse than ever, and getting worse.

Mr. Cunningham: I reject what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I shall give him an example from Coventry in relation to investment in public services, including social workers. Coventry lost something like £600 million under the last Tory Government. If we multiply that figure up and down the country, we shall soon find that we have invested considerably more—although, I accept, not necessarily enough.

On transport, it was the Tories who privatised Railtrack. I remember the debates on that measure in the House. The Tories, not this Government, are responsible for the state that Railtrack found itself in a couple of months ago, when we had to take action. Under the Tories, one of the big problems was that the railways were heavily subsidised. At the same time as subsidising the railways, the Tories took money from bus services. In debates such as this, hon. Members do not always focus on the vital service that buses provide in this country. People wonder why many people will not use public transport. The reason is that, under the Tories, there was not only a lack of road investment but a lack of subsidies. I remember the Tories' attempts to privatise the buses.

The question of student grants has been mentioned. I remember the Tories losing their nerve: it was they who abolished student grants and set up the Dearing inquiry. They set up Dearing because they knew that they were approaching a general election, and we all know what happened after that. We should have had a consensus from the Tories after Dearing, but we did not get one and, as usual, they reneged on what they had pledged to do.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said earlier that he did not want to talk about what Tory Governments had done in the past. That is the usual argument that we get from the Tories. They want to go back to Pol Pot's year zero as though there had never been a Tory Government, only a Labour one. The Tories would cut some £50 billion from the public services and, as far as I can ascertain from the debate, although they say that they would do something totally different, they would return to the policies that they pursued for 18 years and which they have tonight tried to deny they ever pursued.

My hon. Friends will remember negative equity, the 3.5 million unemployed, record interest rates, and the decimation of Britain's manufacturing base, particularly in the 1980s. But the Tories do not want to talk about any of that. Anybody who lived in Coventry at that time will remember the decimation of the car factories. Coventry used to be famous for its car factories. As I said earlier, not only was there a lack of investment in the NHS, but my hon. Friends will remember when the Tories cut the number of beds, cut the recruitment of nurses and training, and closed hospitals. Indeed, if I remember correctly, we even had crumbling hospitals and they failed to deliver on their PFI proposals.

We had school closures. The motion before the House speaks of teacher morale. Nobody created lower morale among teachers than the Tories. I remember one Tory Secretary of State being heckled off the stage at a teachers' conference. The Tories are responsible for the low pay in education, whereas we are trying to put it right. On pensioner poverty, I remember sitting on the Opposition Benches when, Friday morning after Friday morning, one of my late colleagues presented a Bill for winter chill payments. Who talked it out? It was the Tories. At the 1992 election, they said that they would not increase VAT on fuel, but they did.

In conclusion, I do not think that the Tories can attack the Labour party. We have demonstrated that we are taking the country forward and that the country does not want to go back to the bad old days of Thatcherism and Tory Government.

5.23 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): The hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) has sat down after making a speech that was entirely concerned with an extraordinary, rather rapid attack on the history of the Conservative Government. He said that a Conservative Government abolished student maintenance grants. I am afraid that either his memory has gone or his sense of history is failing, because they were abolished by the incoming Labour Government.

The hon. Gentleman's approach, which is a pale echo of that adopted by the Secretary of State for Health, shows that Labour Members are simply not addressing the serious subject before us: the future of the public services. In my opinion, it is the only serious subject that is currently engaging the attention of most of the general public.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way once I have made a little progress—not straight away.

We are in a curious political situation, largely because we have just had a general election and the Government have a huge majority, settling the government of this country for the next few years. A lot of the general public

[Mr. Clarke]

have switched off from the party political debate altogether: almost half of them refused to take part in the general election. The one thing that is bringing people back to politics—they will be brought back on other things—is concern about the state of our public services. I do not think that I overstate the case when I say that there is widespread public anger about that. It is easy to detect a national sense of shame about the standards that are being achieved in some of our public services when one reflects that the United Kingdom is one of the wealthier countries in the world.

A source of much of the public's disillusion with politics, politicians and party politics is that they despair of the ability of the political process to produce the improvement in services that they wish. Giving a litany that could have been prepared for the 1997 election—which I shall not debate, although much of it was totally false—or indulging in the cavalier exchange of slogans about the past, which was all the Secretary of State for Health was able to produce, does not remotely respond to that.

Phil Hope: The right hon. and learned Gentleman comes to the House to lecture us about public services when has form in spades, which is a bit rich. I remind him that, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, the hospital-building programme came to a grinding halt, and as Secretary of State for Health he abolished free eye tests, so we will take no lessons from him. Does he support his party's view that it will not invest more in health services and will instead charge patients for services? What is his opinion on that?

Mr. Clarke: I had two spells at Health and one at the Treasury. We hugely expanded the amount of money going into the NHS. We combined it with much radical reform, most of which is now grudgingly accepted by the Government.

I have already said that the one thing that I shall not be drawn into is a ludicrous debate in which the Labour party tries to demonise the Conservative party's past. That is a grotesque caricature of our attempts to improve public services. Labour opposed every step we took, most of which it is now adopting.

Mr. John Smith: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will give way and then proceed with my speech. I have one clear memory of the hon. Gentleman. He won a by-election in Vale of Glamorgan by conspiring with the local branch of the British Medical Association to say that my health reforms would involve paying to see a general practitioner. That was grossly untrue. We now have a pale echo of that, whereby the Labour party is trying to put it to my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State that he is contemplating charging and cuts in expenditure. I am aware of no such policy. I do not believe that any Conservative has ever put that forward as our policy on public services, and I do not think they ever will.

Mr. Smith: My thanks are on record to the right hon. and learned Gentleman personally for letting me win that by-election in 1989, because it was a by-election fought on his reforms of the health service. But that is not my point. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that this debate is about the future of public services. Neither the motion nor the opening speech by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) made one reference to the future or to what his party would do instead.

Mr. Clarke: I have already said that I want to move on to the future, yet I am faced with arguments from the past. I should have been interested if the hon. Gentleman had admitted after all these years that the proposition upon which he was first elected—that my reforms involved charging to visit a general practitioner—was false. It was not at any time contemplated. The hon. Gentleman's claim was a parody of what we were proposing, and fortunately the electors of Vale of Glamorgan were eventually able to realise their error and remove him.

Mr. Smith: I am still the Member.

Mr. Clarke: Does the hon. Gentleman still represent the same seat? Good grief. I do not know how he has the nerve to face those who first elected him, but I hope that they have seen through the absurd proposition on the basis of which he was first returned.

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): While the right hon. and learned Gentleman is still dealing with the past and before he moves on to the future, can he tell us by how much the national debt rose under the Major premiership, for a considerable period of which he was Chancellor?

Mr. Clarke: Under the Major premiership, national borrowing continued to fall. During my chancellorship, the public sector borrowing requirement fell regularly. It dropped steadily. We were well on course to balancing the budget.

The Minister has adopted the absurd habit of a Labour Government four or five years into office who continually present slogans and caricatures relating to the position that they inherited. He should come and listen to some of the exchanges between my successor as Chancellor and me. We sometimes have difficulty in disagreeing, because we have considerable regard for each other, but the point is that the present Chancellor on occasion concedes that he inherited an extremely good record from the last Government. It should be no part of a debate about the future of public services to keep repeating the bizarre claim that public finances were not improving, and improving rapidly, when Labour took over. We were then well on course for a balanced budget and healthy public finances.

Mr. Spellar: Is it not a fact that the national debt rose from £175 billion to £350 billion—which is doubling in anyone's money—during the Major premiership, for a considerable part of which the right hon. and learned Gentleman was Chancellor? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that those figures are correct?

Mr. Clarke: The Major Government, and I as Chancellor, tackled public finances in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party. We brought the public sector borrowing requirement under control, and at no stage did the national debt become out of control and unsustainable. When presenting unattractive Budgets, Labour becomes obsessed with taking credit for repayment of the national debt. As I have pointed out in the past, the present Chancellor managed that largely by accident rather than by design, having got his forecasts wrong.

The fact that, in a debate on the future of public services, the Labour party is interested only in the history of the national debt represents a strange transformation; but I will discuss the national debt on a more suitable occasion, as I have already made my case.

I believe that the crisis in the public services is, in most instances, considerably worse than it was when Labour took over in 1997. There were problems then, but they have undoubtedly worsened—certainly in the national health service, and certainly on the railways. Members who shake their heads or, even worse, try to respond by means of what I have already described as a cavalier excursion into the party politics of the 1990s seriously misunderstand the public if they do not realise that that is the feeling out there. If most of my constituents had been able to hear the speech of the Secretary of State for Health today on such an important subject, they would be deeply worried about the outlook for the country. It is time that we saw something more positive emerge from the debate.

In their rare moments of candour, the Labour Government actually seem to admit that they failed to deliver in their first term. Their excuse is that they need another term in which to try to deliver. That admission, when it comes—and not a whisper of it has come today—does a little credit to the Labour Ministers who have been responsible for public services. It amounts to an admission of what I believe to be the case: that the Government were elected as a party with many promises, but no policies of any substance to deal with the public services about which they had been so vociferous when they were attacking us.

The failure to deliver was not the responsibility of the civil service, which Labour's spin doctors usually blame when they are pressed. It was the bright young men who were brought into the Downing street policy unit who failed to deliver. A series of White Papers, initiatives and reviews have been produced, against a backdrop of declining standards in our key public services. That ought to be acknowledged, but it is plainly not being acknowledged.

I agreed with one observation made by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) in his extraordinary and, in my view, entirely inadequate speech. He suggested that one thing the Labour party was doing following its latest change of policy—in some areas, particularly the health service—was grudgingly returning to the agenda of the Thatcher-Major reforms. There have been increasing echoes of the course on which we were set in recent ministerial pronouncements, or at least in the behind-the-scenes briefing that accompanies them. For reasons that are understandable if one looks at Back-Bench Labour Members, the Government are in a state of denial and cannot acknowledge that. The Secretary of State for Health had to exhume every cliché in the old Labour book to defend himself, when in fact he is anxiously looking up Conservative White Papers of 10 years ago to see where he went wrong and how he should start again. The next election in the Vale of Glamorgan will be dramatically different, given the Secretary of State's plans.

However, the Secretary of State remained undaunted. At least he is resilient and can take a bold line to win over the House of Commons. He even dragged up the old argument about the Conservative vote against the establishment of the NHS in 1947. No old cliché was left unturned, but I suspect that most hon. Members present today were not even born when that vote was cast.

It is downright foolish to assert that the Conservative party does not want to deliver better public services. Every sensible politician wants to improve them. The myths about cuts and charges are nonsense, and an attempt to detract from what really happened.

Tony Cunningham (Workington) *rose—*

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre) *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: The obvious object of government, by any party, must be to improve the NHS, the education system and the transport network. I want to try out a few of the propositions on which any approach to the great public services of this country must be based.

Experience shows everyone bar Liberal Members—or Liberal Democrat Members, as they are now, although the fact that the new party's proposals are as silly as the old party's used to be means that I am not greatly concerned about nomenclature—that the answer to improving public services does not consist solely in increasing funding. That lesson has been learned by every Government who have had to tackle the problem. Of course increased investment is needed, according to the capacity of the real economy to finance it, but everyone from the Prime Minister downwards in the present Government now accepts that a combination of finance and structural reform is needed in each and every case.

Mr. Dawson *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: That was what underlay the evolution of the reforms of the third Thatcher Government, and it is the agenda to which we all must return.

He was not allowed to utter a word of it as he stood before his Back Benchers in the Chamber, but I thought that I had detected in some recent utterances from the Secretary of State the proposition that more diversity of provision was required, and that monolithic uniformity imposed centrally on a national level does not work. Why are the Government talking about specialist schools, for which the previous Conservative Government used to argue? Government briefings on education echo the words used in the argument on health.

Dr. Stoate *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I also believe that it is clear that the Government acknowledge the benefits of some competition in provision, especially in health. That competition is one of the benefits that arise when people have that most valuable thing—the ability to choose. The words were slipped into the Secretary of State's diatribe, but it is clear that the Government aim to give patients some choice about when and where they are treated in the NHS.

[Mr. Clarke]

That is only one example of a sinner come to repentance. The Government spent their entire first term trying to minimise such choice.

Dr. Stoate *rose—*

Tony Cunningham *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I was hoping to establish a consensus, at least with the more loyal members of the Labour party. I shall finish my list of propositions, and then give way.

The Government are also accepting, at last, that extra finance in public services over and above what comes from public funds must come from the private capital markets and from private finance.

That sticks in the craw of most Labour followers and is not readily acknowledged by many Ministers but has plainly become central to the proposition. It has taken some time to convert them. All those are propositions to which the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary of State for Health and probably the Secretary of State for Education and Skills are being grudgingly converted. Far be it for me to help those right. hon. Members with their followers.

One has to tackle management in public services. The Government seem to have bought that concept completely in the case of London Underground. At least I prefer their proposals to giving public funds and credit to the likes of Ken Livingstone and Bob Kiley. I do not like the Government's proposals either but a history of mismanagement—which London Underground certainly has—is often at the root of many problems.

Private sector management often has skills that the public sector has never produced. It is astonishing that the Secretary of State for Health completely avoided mentioning one of the biggest revelations that has come to him in the past six weeks. He did not mention it even en passant because he knows that the dead wood behind him finds the proposition impossible to bear.

Phil Hope: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I am not finished yet. These are, I hope, consensus points. Localisation of responsibility for choosing priorities and making decisions is essential to great public services. It has taken the Government five years to realise that they cannot sit behind a desk in Whitehall listening to a lot of swivel-eyed young men from the party's research department and deliver priorities and targets nationally and monolithically. It has even been suggested that the role of Ministers has to change to one of monitoring and facilitating, but not to owning and micromanaging everything in east Kent, Oxfordshire and Nottinghamshire—as they have been trying to do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Having made those unkind references to the dead wood behind the Minister, the least I can do is give way to one or two of them.

Dr. Stoate: In the interests of consensus, I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about diversity. Surely he agrees that when his Government introduced a measure such as GP fundholding, they failed to ensure that practices that chose not to be fundholders got a fair crack of the whip. Some fundholders forged ahead in innovative ways but only at the expense of others. That bred deep dissent and resentment in the health service, which did a huge amount of damage. If the right hon. Gentleman had been more interested in consensus, we might have got somewhere.

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted with the hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement that he agrees with some of my propositions. I am sure that the promotion he so richly deserves is at hand. I am glad to have done the hon. Gentleman a service by helping to further his career.

We offered the possibility to all general practices to become fundholders, and we were going to lower the patient number threshold. We adopted the same principle used for NHS trusts in trying to get clinicians on board. All the hospitals that chose NHS trust status did so voluntarily. When local management was tried out, it became so popular that by the time we left office, all had changed to NHS trusts.

GP fundholding was fought by the Labour party and the British Medical Association, so we looked for volunteers because we needed doctors committing themselves to making the system a success. Having taken the step of volunteering, they felt under a compunction to make sure that fundholding worked. It was spreading and becoming popular with most general practitioners. It would have become the norm and a universal provision but an ill-prepared new Labour Secretary of State—who came in on a few slogans and nothing else—committed the great mistake of repealing that innovation.

Tony Cunningham: I understand that for Conservative Members, 1997 was year zero—nothing happened before then and they cannot be blamed for anything. I will not concentrate on the past but will consider 2001—or year four, as far as the Opposition are concerned. In *The Independent*, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was quoted as saying:

> "This is electoral suicide. Five years before the next election, Duncan Smith is saying he will cut spending and force people to pay for NHS treatment."

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman still believe in that statement?

Mr. Clarke: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on making the first Labour intervention that has not referred to the past—indeed, almost no speech has referred to anything but the past—and on being the first to have the nerve to glimpse into the future. I do not think that the quote is wholly accurate. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] For the avoidance of doubt, I have repeatedly made it clear that I am completely committed to the national health service, which I do find an extremely attractive way of delivering health care. We must tackle the problems that are making it fail so badly at the moment.

These debates, and Prime Minister's questions, get coloured by repeated assertions that the Conservative party is now committed to a policy of cutting public spending and introducing charges for health. As a member of the Conservative party I have never heard any of my colleagues put that forward as the party's policy. It is not the policy.

Mr. Salter *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I return to my consensus points, which no Labour Back Bencher has had the nerve to gainsay because they probably all wish to be promoted at some dim and distant time in the future. Given where we are now, the only reference that I will make to the past is to say that when we were introducing those propositions into public service, they were always described as privatisation. In election after election, not just the Vale of Glamorgan by-election, we fought a parody of the policies that we were putting forward. That continues to the present day to be the position of the Labour party because the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring was greeted by an attack which, whenever it referred to what we were proposing, bore not the slightest relationship to anything that I had heard my hon. Friend say from beginning to end of his speech.

Mr. Salter *rose—*

Phil Hope *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Let me make some progress if I may, because obviously others wish to speak and I obviously do not wish to continue to engage in further exchanges in which people try to attribute to the Conservative party policies and motives that are a myth, have always been a myth and are not what we are supposed to be debating today.

Mr. Dawson *rose—*

Phil Hope *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I have said that I will give way again soon, but I shall make some progress first.

Having arrived at those basic propositions, Labour Ministers are having more than a little difficulty with them. One difficulty that they have to contend with is that they are finding it necessary to repair the damage that their predecessors in office did during the first four years of Labour Government. I cannot range over the whole field, but I probably give the Home Secretary the prize for being the Minister who is most rapidly disowning just about every policy of his predecessor in office from the same party. But the idea that the present Secretary of State for Health says a word that resembles any word ever uttered on the subject of health by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is fatuous. The current Ministers are finding it necessary to reverse policies, return to where they started and alter the agenda.

Nowhere is that process more striking than on the question of funding. I have said that I believe that public services improvement depends on funding and structural reform, but the Liberal Democrats' arguments on funding must be addressed. The Liberal Democrats are the only people left, I hope, who will continue to mislead the public by trying to persuade them that the only debate that we need have on these issues is about who can spend more. That debate is characterised by sterile arguments in which party representatives say, "We spent more than you did" and arguments about who increased spending by how much in a given year. We hugely increased the resources going into health—and most of the other public services—over our period of office. The real question is at what rate resources should be increased. In answering that question, it is essential to bear in mind the real economy and the wealth of the country. The answer to that question represents the actual division between the parties.

The Government did make one terrible error in funding in the first Labour period in office, about which I have always agreed with the more sensible Liberal Democrats. The first two years were a complete disaster and the funding arrangements that the new Secretary of State for Education and Employment and the new Secretary of State for Health accepted were a disaster from which both services are still reeling. *[Laughter.]* Labour Members are busily laughing, but they invented the completely bogus claim that they took over the previous Government's spending plans, which they most certainly did not. The only decision that the new Chancellor took and imposed on his colleagues was to cancel the anticipated annual spending rounds on which the Red Book had been based.

Anyone who says that Labour did what a Conservative Government would have done is presumably claiming that, having produced a Red Book in 1997, we would not have had an annual spending round and that we would not have revised or increased the figures. As someone who lived through every annual spending round for 18 years, I can only say that we never did that for 18 years and, when we settled the Red Book in 1997, not a solitary man or women in office thought that we would not revise or increase the figures. The then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), is sitting in front of me. I know her well, and if I had suggested to her when I was negotiating in 1997 that she would have to live without a change in those figures in 1998–99, she would have gone to the then Prime Minister and said, "Either he goes, or I go."

That fatuous proposition was imposed on naive Ministers by a Chancellor who was desperate to show the City that he was tougher than I was and that he was the iron Chancellor. Well, he ain't tough now—he is pouring out money. We have had two lean years, followed by four years of plenty, as the Government try to restore the damage, but a public spending round is coming up and that rate of increase cannot be easily achieved. A bitter spending battle will take place in the next month between the public service Ministers and the Treasury about the next three-year cycle. The Chancellor hints that he cannot maintain spending without increases in taxation and the Prime Minister will not hear of any increase in taxation, so the Labour party's policy on funding the public services is not out of the wood yet—a large number of difficulties remain to be resolved.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is clearly in denial. May I just remind him that at a recent meeting that I had with representatives of local government, they contrasted the continuous increases in spending since this Government came to power in 1997 with what happened when the Conservative party was in government? They specifically referred to a meeting that occurred in the period that he has just described in which the then Minister for Local Government, the right hon.

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), came into the meeting and told them quite openly, "We have been stuffed by the Treasury." Would the right hon. and learned Gentleman like to recall the reality of those years and acknowledge that this Government operate quite differently?

Mr. Clarke: If the present Chancellor is to maintain the level of health and education funding, he will have to stuff quite a lot of Whitehall Departments to avoid causing immeasurable damage to this country and raising taxation to an insupportable level. That is the job of a Chancellor. The right hon. Gentleman looks happy because he is responsible for local government, and the Government have taken the cap off local government spending and told those involved to go out and get the money through the community charge. I have to tell him, however, that the residents of my constituency are seeing the community charge increase year by year, beyond their capacity to pay. *[Interruption.]* I am in favour of capping local government expenditure, and in my opinion every party that wins government eventually gets converted to capping it, so I have not changed my mind.

Phil Hope *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I shall not be diverted. Let me get back to my proposition, which, I am glad to say, no one has risen to challenge and with which one hon. Member rose to agree. What I described—it is a wonder of wonders, given what the Secretary of State for Health says—is a set of the basic propositions on which the Government will have a second go at structural reform of the public services, but they will have some difficulty with their own people, as has been made only too clear in this debate.

I shall resist the temptation to gloat—welcome is any sinner who repents. I shall try to be constructive because it is important to realise that someone—it is more likely to be someone who sits on the Conservative Benches—has eventually got to deliver those propositions in a serious, joined-up and worked-out way. That includes, for example, depoliticising many of the key decisions that take place. That is why we privatised, why we brought in the private sector and why we tried to devolve.

I always used to think it absurd that, whenever a site had to be chosen for new hospital, there would be a Conservative policy, a Labour policy and a Liberal policy in the locality on where the hospitals should be built. Whenever some new rolling stock needed to be ordered, one party had one proposition on where it should be ordered from and the other party went about it another way. That is an absurdity, and it is one reason why those public services for which Governments are most responsible are bedevilled. One has to allow patients' needs, pupils' and parents' needs, passenger priorities and the views of those who have responsibility for managing and delivering the services in the locality to have some freedom from the kind of political knockabout in which every Labour Member, including Ministers, who has spoken in this debate so far has found it irresistible to engage. Let me try to be constructive, but I am bound to be sceptical.

My scepticism about the Government's ability to deliver has been strengthened in the past hour just by listening to Labour Members. I believe that I am right to say that they have been converted in principle to what I have said, but the conversion is more dramatic than that of St. Paul on the road to Damascus for most of those on the Government Front Bench. I can remember most of them sounding off when those propositions were first introduced to an extremely unwilling Labour movement, and they have not all been converted by their first four years of centralised planning, initiatives, spinning and re-presenting, and so on.

What about the poor Transport Secretary? He—alas, poor soul—has not noticed that St. Paul has seen the light. No light has struck him. He is left—for a very short time in future, I suspect—wandering off down the same road, holding himself out to the Labour party as a hero who has renationalised the railway industry. However, the small print shows that he has not renationalised anything; he has just put the infrastructure company into a state of limbo for 12 months and made it more expensive and more difficult to raise the private sector capital that he needs. Only the Liberal Democrats are left with the policy of tax and spend and the reactionary old left agenda. A lot of Labour Members love to recall their old battles and wish that their party was back where once it was.

Let me put some more flesh on the bones—which the Liberal Democrat spokesman certainly did not do for any of his proposals. Let me give some examples of why I think that funding is not the problem and how we shall make progress. First, the basic proposition that we have to bear in mind when listening to what the Secretary of State for Health says is that the purchaser-provider divide has been left in place. That is the key to the reforms; it sounds very technical, but it would have a very practical and very human consequence if it could be put properly into practice. The Labour party called it the internal market and used to denounce it. When the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was Secretary of State for Health he used to claim that he had abolished the internal market, but, fortunately, he never did any such thing.

The Government's proposition is now that primary care trusts—the successors to GP fundholders—will be responsible, they say, for disposing of 75 per cent. of this country's health budget by 2004. We are told that the PCTs will be given much more freedom, that they will be monitored and that their performance will be managed by the new strategic health authorities that are being put in place and will take over by April 2002. If the Government make that change without causing chaos and confusion, it sounds like a promising step back in the right direction. That is what the temporarily silent Labour Members call the internal market, and it is being taken further by the present Secretary of State than I was ever able to go—thanks to obstruction in the Vale of Glamorgan and elsewhere—when I was in office.

One good thing is that at last the Government recognise the key role of primary care providers in the health service, which is always forgotten in such debates. One of the great strengths of the British health system is the general practitioner. A huge range of other people are involved in delivering primary and community services. The Government's proposal will do what we in the Conservative party always wanted to do—put the GPs back into the driving seat in relation to local priorities—so long as the Secretary of State generally lets go and allows them to do that. The proposal will repair some of the damage done by the abolition of GP fundholding—

GP fundholding would have been better than the current policy, but let us proceed with what we have. I hope that Ministers can protect the proposal from the Treasury—Mr. Wanless and all—because it never likes such a degree of devolution. It likes central control and, as the Chancellor is working on his policy for the health service, I have a feeling that the proposal may run into difficulties.

I am sceptical about the Government's abilities to deliver their promises for devolution given their position on the purchaser-provider divide, but I have some questions for them. How much genuine devolution of responsibility will there be? How much genuine competition and choice will they allow to take place? What incentives will they give to the Cinderella services and to prioritise the treatments that are required? The Government are made up of lifelong control freaks who are trying to put devolution into practice. On their past form, I do not think that they will succeed.

How will the Government manage the confusion and overload that their repeated conversions have imposed on the system and that are causing widespread disillusion and despair in the service? They believe in permanent revolution. Even though this conversion may be one of the more desirable ones, they are handling the abolition of the health authorities, the setting up of the new primary care trusts and the negotiation of GPs' contracts with those who manage the service. There is a fantastic amount of overload and, if one talks to people in the service about it, one learns that their reaction is one of total despair that such a great deal of work is being thrown upon them.

What about all the recent burdens imposed on people in the service and with which they are meant to contend while they carry out the revolution and introduce the new internal market by early next year? What about all the local modernisation reviews that they were asked to carry out last year? The NHS Modernisation Board is supposed to be supervising all that. What about contracts with Downing street? Only in December last year, the Downing street delivery unit set more than 100 targets and milestones for the service to achieve. What about the public service delivery targets that have been agreed with the Treasury and what about—heaven help us—Mr. Wanless, who only two or three months ago dominated the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement with a new blueprint for the health service? I am not sure that a great deal will be devolved.

On 10 December 2001, an article in the *Financial Times* described the state of affairs that the Government have produced. It explains why I am sceptical about their ability to deliver devolution. The report states:

> "One senior civil servant said: 'Not even Margaret Thatcher when she got involved in the NHS review in the 1980s tried to micro-manage the NHS like this. Number 10 is involved in the day-to-day detail in a way that has never been seen before.
>
> Another added: 'The secretary of state is now doing the right thing by the service [in devolving power and responsibility], but Downing Street is doing the wrong thing by him.
>
> The Department is trying to protect the NHS from all this, and trying to reconcile the conflicts between the public service agreements and the delivery unit's contract.
>
> But if the going continues to be as tough as it has recently . . . then it is going to be very difficult to hold the line. NHS modernisation won't work if we revert to command and control.'"

That was said just weeks ago and explains why the Labour party's conversion has not reached the point at which it will be able to deliver on its promises.

I will not go on about the hospital service. The Government accept the private finance initiative, and more than 100 hospitals are being modernised or refurbished. That Conservative policy was opposed by Labour when it was in opposition. However, the benefits are now being delivered by this Government.

The Government have even welcomed the idea of private sector management, but their approach to it is extraordinary. Private sector management is held up as a kind of punishment to be imposed on failing hospitals. The idea of giving more freedom to hospitals and providing them with a little more competition and choice is complicated by the ridiculous star system and the endless demand for streams of statistics, priorities and targets that Conservative Members have already said cause so much difficulty.

For the first four years in government, the Labour party did damage and it is only just beginning to realise how it has to swallow every word it has uttered and to return to reform. It is like the Vandals and Huns who sacked Rome. They are now trying on the togas and trying to erect the pillars in the right place. However, as they all say different things on different occasions, they will not succeed. They must correct the public misconceptions about reform of services that they did a great deal to create.

My prediction is that the Government will not succeed. They began this Parliament in the same foolish way as they began the last one. The Prime Minister immediately raised expectations that he has no prospect of delivering. He will not deliver them in this Parliament and he may not ever deliver them unless he undergoes a further considerable conversion on how to go about reform.

A Conservative Government will eventually be able to return to their agenda and they will find that the political climate has been changed by the utterances of the past few months. Labour politicians will no longer be able to deny the basic tenets of reform in the way that they did in the past. However, at the present rate of progress, better public services of the standard that we deserve may take a generation to achieve. So far, the Labour Government have done more harm than good and I see precious little sign of real progress in the right direction.

6.5 pm

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester): I am pleased to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and to hear him refer to conversion, particularly his conversion to depoliticising decision making. I suspect that, when a former Chancellor considers the depoliticisation of decision making, it is because he has plans for a long-term career permanently in opposition.

The test raised by the debate is whether there have been improvements in public services since May 1997, and that is the point that I will consider in my speech. I will describe what the people of Worcester have seen the Labour Government do since May 1997.

In the battle against crime, police numbers have gone up. In the 12 months to September 2001, an extra 88 police officers were found for West Mercia and, just last week, a further 13 extra were allocated to the Worcester division from the crime fighting fund. The distinguished newspaper, the Worcester *Evening News*, proclaimed:

> "Thin blue line getting thicker".

[Mr. Michael Foster]

I accept that the West Mercia police authority has relatively few police officers per head of population. It is important in the battle against crime to see a greater and more visible police presence on our streets. Therefore I pay tribute to Chief Superintendent Simon Adams of Worcester division for his innovative work on Operation Terminate, which was specifically designed to put police officers in highly visible clothing into the city centre late at night when many disturbances take place. That helped to cut crime in Worcester city centre considerably.

I said that West Mercia has relatively few officers per head but, since May 1997, funding for the authority per head of population has risen by nearly 22 per cent. That is against an average of almost 17 per cent. We are starting to make up ground, and my constituents and I are grateful for that. The chief constable of West Mercia wants an extra 100 police officers, and I support his view. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to take note and to support the chief constable in his aims.

Extra police officers are only part of the answer. In Worcester, a Home Office grant provided £640,000 for investment in closed circuit television. That will make the city centre and the car parks servicing the city centre safer. The system will be run from the brand-new police station that was opened by Her Majesty the Queen in March last year. A new police station, new closed circuit television and extra police officers are all contributing to the fight against crime.

Antisocial behaviour orders also support the police in the battle against crime. However, I have to point to their non-use in Worcester. West Mercia has the highest rate of issue of such orders per head of population, but only one has been issued in Worcester. The Conservative-controlled city council, with its independent lapdogs, claims that the procedure is at fault and that this explains the failure to issue such orders. I disagree and, more important, so does the chief executive of Worcester city council, who wrote to me on 11 December 2001 to say:

"The failure by"

Worcester city council

"to secure an ASBO cannot be attributed to procedural shortcomings . . . What we have not been able to do is allocate the resources which other Authorities have dedicated to ASBOs. Some training of staff has been undertaken but we have not got officers dedicated full time on this which is, I believe, the case in"

neighbouring

"Wyre Forest. Any ASBO work has been undertaken by officers in addition to their other duties."

It is the lack of commitment by Worcester city council that is responsible for the lack of the issue of ASBOs.

On the health service, much has been said in the House and outside about health care in Worcestershire. I do not intend to reopen old wounds as regards the debate surrounding acute services, but more nurses, doctors and consultants now work in the NHS in that county. They deserve our full support and our help in tackling the challenges that face us. Waiting lists and waiting times are falling, but I accept that there is much more to do before we have a national health service that we want our constituents to thank us for.

The House has a long history of listening to Worcester Members of Parliament who want assurances on the future of the new district general hospital. The people of Worcester have been on a promise for more than 40 years regarding a new hospital. The Conservative Government promised, promised and promised again to build the new hospital, and they failed to deliver. They introduced the private finance initiative, and failed to build a single hospital. In the 1997 general election, I supported the PFI as a way to build Worcester's new hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To be fair, Worcester's new hospital was one of the principal objectives that we had in mind when we developed the PFI, and we had advanced discussions on that. New hospitals are not built in four years flat. Worcester has a new hospital because the plans that began when I was in office and the Conservatives were in government came to fruition in Worcester. It is absurd to pretend that that was suddenly invented after 1997.

Mr. Foster: The manifesto platform on which we stood for election was to reform the PFI to make it work. I well remember Conservative health spokesmen saying in that general election that Labour would not deliver the new hospital. We said that we would, and I am pleased and proud to say that in two months' time patients will start to move from the Victorian building that is Castle Street and the second world war Canadian army hospital that is Ronkswood into a new hospital that will be the envy of the country. It is just short of four years since the first sod was cut by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). The hospital has been delivered on time and it should be seen as a model for the way in which health care will be delivered.

Two years ago I was pleased to participate in the launch of a new CT scanner for Worcester's hospital, which represented a £400,000 investment, paid for by the NHS. It replaced the CT scanner that was bought in 1988 which was financed by public donation. In 1988, begging bowls had to be sent around Worcester to collect money to pay for a vital piece of health care equipment. That is another example of the difference between the Conservative party when it was in power and the Labour party when it is in government.

I like to think, as a former member of the teaching profession, that I have a great understanding of education. I pay tribute to teachers and support staff for the improved results in our schools since May 1997 at key stage 1, key stage 2 and GCSE level. Worcester has always benefited from consistently good A-level results at Worcester sixth form college and Worcester college of technology. More than anything else, the Government are delivering higher standards for our young people. We are also delivering better buildings and a better environment in which pupils can learn and teachers can teach.

Chris Grayling: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the concerns that are being expressed by head teachers and teachers around the country about the burden of bureaucracy that the Government have imposed on them? I hear that again and again when I visit schools. I do not think that I have been to a single school without that issue being raised. Can the hon. Gentleman really be confident that the Government's policies are doing the right thing for the education profession when our teachers are so frustrated with what they are doing?

Mr. Foster: Before I was elected, I was a school governor at a high school in Worcester. I remember the head teacher's frustration at having to decide which members of the teaching staff to make redundant. It was not a case of facing the challenges of recruiting extra teachers and support staff to our schools. The Government are making a difference to educational opportunities for young people.

Worcester college of technology has just bought the old police station in the town to provide more classroom space. Worcester sixth form college recently had a new teaching block opened by the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), who was a former member of staff at the college. The education maintenance allowance, which is being piloted in Worcestershire, means that more 16-year-olds are staying on in our colleges. Their results are better, not only in terms of their achievements, but in terms of their retention rates. I am keen to see that rolled out across the country.

University college Worcester has just had a £2 million sports hall built for community and student use. It will house national and international teams. Importantly, it plays a big part in a project, with which I am associated, to widen participation in education. It uses sport as the tool to get young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into university and on to the campus so that they get a taste of university life. In that way we raise the aspirations of young people in all our schools.

The school system has undergone a remarkable investment programme in Worcester city. Let me give a few examples of the extra investment that has gone into capital infrastructure projects as a result of the new deal programme for schools. Elgar high school now has a lift for the disabled. Bishop Perowne school refurbished its craft, design and technology facilities. Perdiswell primary had all its warm air heating replaced. Cherry Orchard primary implemented a £75,000 project to refurbish its library. Christopher Whitehead high school completely refurbished its showers and changing rooms. Pitmaston primary, Dines Green primary, Redhill primary, Our Lady Queen of Peace primary, St. George's Roman Catholic primary, Cranhan primary and Ronkswood junior all received emergency replacement of their fire alarms and safety equipment which was necessary because of the state of their buildings.

Pitmaston primary has replaced its mobile classrooms. Nunnery Wood primary has a new classroom extension and Gorse Hill primary has two new classrooms. Lyppard Grange also has two new classrooms and Northwick Manor is in the process of completing a three-classroom permanent replacement of mobile classrooms. Nunnery Wood high school is about to have two new science laboratories built. St. Barnabas primary will have four new classrooms completed later this year, and St. Clement's primary will have two new classrooms completed.

Those examples are testimony to what is being delivered by the Labour Government. The acid test is what has happened since 1997, and we are seeing improvements. However, I must tell Ministers—I know that they are sympathetic to this—that there is concern in Worcestershire about revenue funding for education and the standard spending assessment. I am pleased that the Government intend to reform the SSA. The indicative increase in SSA this year of 6.1 per cent. is a record for the county. Worcestershire has never had an increase that large. I am delighted that we can make a real comparison between the increased investment in schools and the cuts that we experienced in Worcester in the 1990s. The legacy of underfunding in our schools is holding back educational achievement in our county, but it is not the only reason for a lack of achievement.

In the early 1990s, when the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was Secretary of State for Education, we had a Conservative-controlled county council that was proud of its record of low spending. It boasted that it returned money to the Government and spent less than the standard spending assessment. That decision cost schools and pupils in Worcestershire nearly £50 million. I cannot remember whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman objected to the decision by the locally elected Conservatives—he may tell me—which ensured that Worcestershire did not have adequate nursery provision. Only now is nursery provision starting to be enhanced by the Labour Government's investment. All four-year-olds have places at nursery schools and, increasingly, three-year-olds have places as well, which will help us to deliver a better education service. The budget for adult and community learning was cut in the 1990s because it was discretionary expenditure. As a result of that cut, poor nursery provision and a low base of revenue funding, Worcestershire does not do as well as it should. With the support of the Government, I am determined to raise educational standards in the county.

The debate about the state of public services should have taken place in the early 1990s, but Conservative MPs from Worcestershire kept quiet. If they were ambitious, they realised that that was in their best interests; if they held office, they boasted about the low funding of Hereford and Worcester county council. To them, value added, which should be a measure of educational standards, meant delivering average educational performance from below average funding. In government, the Tories were good at low spending and low achievement. We must guard against that in future and never ever let people in Worcestershire forget.

Chris Grayling: Could I take the hon. Gentleman back to a recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which praised this country for its pupils' educational achievement? I remind him that the pupils who were measured in that survey went through key stages 1 to 3 under the Conservative Government following the reforms that they made to the education system. Those results were a tribute to the achievements of pupils ensuing from the reforms. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise the contribution that the Conservative party's education reforms made to raising the standard of achievement and delivering an excellent result in an international survey?

Mr. Foster: I am about to conclude my contribution, but I want to tell the hon. Gentleman that Worcester is a relatively prosperous city. We have relatively low unemployment and are classed as middle England, so much so that, in 1997, Worcester woman was seen as the archetypal person whose support had to be attracted if we were to win the general election. Does the hon. Gentleman expect five of 12 wards in the city to appear at the bottom of a league of 2,000 for educational achievement? The Conservatives should not be proud of that record; I am not proud of it, and I want it to improve.

6.23 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate because, as has been demonstrated already, it has raised issues of enormous interest to both to the public and to the many dedicated people who work in the public services. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on his success in securing an Opposition debate on these matters and on his introductory speech.

The speeches so far have been of great interest. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) for his obvious dedication to education in his constituency—his knowledge of the subject clearly comes from past experience—and for the little spiky touch that he put in, just reminding Ministers that all is not entirely well yet. I was entranced by the presentation of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) of himself as a master of consensus; I never thought I would live to see the day. His description of our discussions on the funding of education in the final days of the Major Government was much more his line on consensus than that which he has been attempting to preach today. He may have had his tongue in his cheek, but he did not seem to elicit many consensual responses from Government Members.

I may do better, but I am not certain that I will, as I wish to begin by making some fairly hard points. I hope that today's debate will help Ministers to grasp a number of important facts. There has been more investment in public service during the life of this Labour Government and the previous one, elected in 1997. Investment is not as great or as new as Ministers would have us believe. Their hyping of that investment, their exaggerated claims—"24 hours to save the NHS" and "Education, education, education"—and their announcements and reannouncements of extra spending have been so blatant that the public have stopped listening and do not believe a word of what they say about improvements to public services. If I were in government, I would take careful note.

It would be nice if the Government began to accept responsibility for the fact that they are in government. Things that are happening now, especially in practice, must be considered their responsibility. I intend to describe some of those things. It is a little tiring for the public to hear Ministers continuing to try to visit deficiencies in the public services entirely on the legacy of previous Conservative Governments.

Mr. Rammell: Given that, during 18 years in government, the Conservative party constantly referred to the winter of discontent, is not the right hon. Lady's criticism a bit rich?

Mrs. Shephard: That is a rather off-the-wall intervention, but it gives me the opportunity to remind the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues that today's debate is about the record of his Government and what they have done. No Opposition Member will make any apology for drawing attention to those matters.

I hope that Ministers will note that announcing extra resources, while at the same time making complicated announcements about earmarking and ring-fencing those same resources, apparently with no idea of how contradictory policies will impact on one another, is rapidly becoming a discredited exercise. The public's daily experience, particularly in rural areas, of those same public services, is so far removed from ministerial hyperbole that the Government should stop describing what is happening and try sampling it instead.

As I said, more money has indeed been allocated to public services. However, little effort seems to have been devoted to making sure that services work: to ensuring that behind the flattering headlines there are genuine improvements that people experience daily and that policy intentions announced in one area do not cancel out improvements in another—in short, to ensuring that resource allocation is underpinned by practical and workable strategic thinking. Consequently, every time the public hear yet another hyped announcement, they say, "Where is the money going? We can't see the benefits for us." That is a relevant question for the public to ask, because it is their money.

Mr. Dawson: The right hon. Lady properly acknowledged that more money had been spent on the public services, but criticised Labour Members for hyperbole. Is she seriously suggesting that her constituents have not received any of the benefits of that extra public spending? Will she tell us what new public sector resources are available in her constituency?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall most happily do so. Indeed, I shall be devoting my entire speech to that matter, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to stay and listen.

In short, there is a mismatch between Ministers' claims and people's daily experience, and that is what I intend to demonstrate. Understandably, this debate has been majoring on the shortcomings of the national health service. I say to the hon. Gentleman that I intend to make some observations about the way in which it is working in my own rural area. However, local people are as concerned about teacher shortages, lack of school places and police funding as they are about the health service.

Ministers' pronouncements on those matters give no indication that they have the remotest idea of what it is like to try to access public services in a rural area. Travelling from the village where I live to the nearest GP's surgery means making a round trip of 15 miles. Ministers say that they understand. Indeed, they produced a rural White Paper and countless quangos to try to demonstrate their understanding, but sadly, their policies still show no sign of demonstrating in practice that the lesson has gone home. The point is that rural sparsity has implications for the delivery of all public services. That is the case whether we are talking about the NHS, schools or the police.

Dr. Stoate: I agree that there are difficulties with GP practices in rural areas. The right hon. Lady said that some of her constituents had to travel seven miles to a GP's surgery. What does her party suggest that we should do about that? The Government are increasing the number of GPs and investing in the modernisation of their surgeries. We are even investing in improved public transport links. What would her party offer that this Government are somehow failing to achieve?

Mrs. Shephard: It is, of course, under this Government that the cost of motoring—the only alternative that is open to many of my constituents—has risen sky high. I ask the hon. Gentleman to remember that and to bear in mind the fact that, as I said, we are talking about the achievements of his Government.

Mr. Dawson: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Shephard: No, not at the moment. I have given way a number of times and I shall certainly return to that point.

Ministers should be congratulated—this is a consensus point that I draw to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe—on embracing the PFI principle, on the basis of which all £229 million worth of the Norfolk and Norwich hospital is being provided. It is a good Conservative principle. It has certainly delivered the hospital in good time and people in Norfolk would be delighted about it, were it not for the implications of the accelerated opening of the hospital. Its opening has been brought forward from March to now and has been marked by local press headlines such as "Disaster looms" and "Crisis talks over hospital beds shortage". I accept that some of those problems result from a combination of severe winter weather and staff illness, but it would be interesting to know why the opening has been brought forward from its scheduled time in March. Has that happened because of the requirements of the PFI contractors? If so, it might have been better for health managers—I assume that that must include Ministers—to avoid the problems of winter and illness, and keep to the timetable.

It is a disappointment and a pity that the memory of Norfolk people of the opening of the hospital—after all, it was conceived and planned under the Conservative Government—will be accompanied by memories of the huge problems associated with the shortening of the timetable. Norfolk people are also asking whether the hospital will be adequate for Norfolk's needs. Access is one of their main concerns. I am delighted to see the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) take his place; he is right on cue. Ministers should be concerned, like the people of Norfolk, that only one access point to the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital has been planned. When the Minister visited Norfolk to celebrate the beginning of dualling on the A11 in my constituency—he was very welcome—I asked his officials to drive him past the site of the new hospital, so that he would be able to see for himself the problems of accessing it through a residential and suburban area. Activity is now under way on that front and I think that we are getting help from the Highways Agency, but to the people of Norfolk, it seems a bit wasteful to spend £229 million on a hospital that one cannot get to in a rush hour, especially because by definition in a rural area, easy vehicular access is an absolute requirement.

The new hospital is one thing, but the knock-on effects of its provision are quite another. It would be interesting to know whether the hon. Member for Worcester, who described provision with regard to the new hospital in his constituency, is experiencing any of the same problems. The Wayland hospital, which is situated near Attleborough in my constituency, is to be sacrificed to help provide funding for the new hospital. This much-loved hospital, with its 70-plus beds and strong local support, is to close in April, despite the fact that its closure will mean that there is no community hospital provision in the whole of the southern half of the county of Norfolk. People will be expected to undertake a round trip of 60 miles to Norwich for community hospital care. In response to the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate), I point out that that is not a policy that was born of a former Conservative Government. We wished to retain the hospital precisely because of the travel implications of its closure.

Mr. Michael Foster: Let me intervene to put the right hon. Lady's mind at rest on one point. The community hospitals serving Worcestershire have not been affected by the building of the new PFI hospital. Indeed, they are part of the strategy to allow acute treatment to occur in the new district general hospital. Patients can be treated there and move into community hospitals at a later date. In terms of the acute service reconfiguration, all the options under discussion included the building of a new hospital, because, quite frankly, it was 40 years overdue.

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted to have that elucidation from the hon. Gentleman. He and his constituents are much more fortunate than my constituents and me. It is an extraordinary irony that people are being expected to travel 60 miles for community hospital care. What are we talking about? No replacement facilities have yet been provided, and even when they are provided, there will be no local community beds, as was originally promised. Instead, the health authority is

> "exploring options for providing such beds in nursing homes".

That is a deeply fruitless search, as I shall go on to demonstrate. An increasingly elderly population will be left having to travel scores of miles for services—where they exist. I cannot believe that that is the sort of improvement that has been so much vaunted by Ministers, but it will be the daily experience of people in my constituency and in Norfolk as a whole.

As if to rub the problem in, during the recent crisis at the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital—I emphasise that it was a beds shortage crisis—the chief executive of Norfolk health authority, Neil Wilson, made this bland announcement:

> "There are a number of community hospitals throughout Norfolk. Some patients who also need further care after being discharged from the Norfolk and Norwich are transferred to community hospitals to continue their recovery".

"But not in the southern half of the county, "he might have added", and nor can the pressure on the new flagship £229 million hospital be eased by care in the community provided by social services". That is why I began by emphasising that Ministers need to think out how one set of policies impacts on another: there can be unintended consequences.

Liz Railton, the director of Cambridgeshire social services, is quoted in *Public Finance* this week as saying that the flagship hospital cannot rely on social services because the Government grant is inadequate. She says:

> "Social services spending is increasing rapidly, but neither central government nor councillors are matching the increase with their budget allocations. There is now . . . an annual £1 bn deficit between what is allocated in the spending round . . . and what local authorities budget for social services".

In another example of micromanagement, the propensity of Ministers to set local authorities' priorities in social services, namely for child care, means that their own announced health policies are not working.

[Mrs. Shephard]

What about residential homes? Two years ago, I initiated a debate in the House on the implications for bed numbers in residential homes of the Government's approach to uniform standards in those homes. I said then that although everybody supported proper standards in residential homes, they have already had to contend with the impact of the working time directive, huge hikes in fuel costs and cuts in social services. I added that having to cope with the uncertainty and confusion surrounding the Government's new proposals would drive many out of business altogether, with a devastating effect on frail and elderly people, their families and in turn the NHS, which would have to cope with the result. Oh dear, that has proved to be all too true.

According to Laing and Buisson, also quoted in this week's *Public Finance*,

> "some 12,600 beds in care homes were lost in the fifth straight year of reduced capacity."

That figure is significant because it is

> "equivalent to more than 10 per cent. of the total number of NHS beds. If people whose care requirements can no longer be met stay longer in hospitals, bed blocking will get much worse."

Care home owners are not being paid their inflation costs, which are between 5 and 7 per cent., and receive instead an annual increase of about 2 per cent. That is why many are going out of business. Just as serious is the fact that, many are being redesignated as residential rather than nursing care homes precisely when the national need is for more nursing care in residential homes.

We can add to those bleak facts the additional problems in rural areas—I look at the hon. Member for Dartford—where closures occurring under this Government mean more travelling for families and staff, less choice for residents and a greater concentration of jobs in towns. One is obliged to ask if Ministers meant things to turn out this way—or has their concern always been the slick headline rather than what is happening to people?

Mr. Brazier: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way in the middle of her powerful case. Given that it costs between three and four times as much to fund an NHS bed as it does a typical bed in a nursing home, does not the experience of an area such as mine, which has lost 15 per cent. of its nursing home beds in just 12 months, show that it is possible for a really incompetent Government to raise spending and lower standards of care?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend's point is borne out by the comments of Liz Railton, who said:

> "The whole thing calls for a much more strategic approach, underpinned by financial planning".

Ministers' commitment to spend more of people's money is being eroded by the fact that they fail to think through the impact of one set of policies and headlines on the delivery of other services.

By no group is that more clearly perceived than by GPs. I recently did a survey of GPs in my constituency to find out their views on hospital provision and bed blocking. Their replies were very instructive for Ministers. Dr. Barton of the Campingland surgery in Swaffham replied:

> "We have never experienced so many 'Red Alerts' throughout the summer months, whereby we are implored to find solutions other than admission to hospital. The closure of beds was due to a lack of trained nursing staff."

I hope that Labour Members noted his use of the word "never"—his comments apply not to a Conservative Government but to this Government. He continues:

> "While we welcome the new Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, there will be fewer beds than at the existing hospital. We find it difficult to believe a lower number of beds will improve an already difficult situation."

Many of his patients would agree.

Dr. Grace Barlow of the Necton surgery wrote in December:

> "Of great concern to us in General Practice at the moment"—

not five years ago but now—

> "is the apparent shortage of acute beds within the local hospitals. Although we have in no sense moved into a 'winter pressures' situation, both the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn and the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital have been on red alert and closed to all but the most urgent cases on a number of occasions recently. Even when there has not been an official red alert, on a number of occasions when seeking a medical admission for a patient we have been told that there are no beds in the acute admission ward and the patient has had to wait in Casualty, often for a considerable number of hours.
>
> Having now worked in the Health Service for over 25 years, I am deeply saddened by the erosion in the level of care that I can provide for my patients . . . I would be delighted for any pressure you can bring to bear in Parliament to rectify this situation."

Well, there is fat chance of that, but it is worth reminding Ministers of their responsibilities in these matters.

Dr. Young of Watton says:

> "We feel that bed blocking is the result of insufficient beds and is just part of the general difficulty of providing treatment in the secondary sector. There needs to be a system for discharge from acute hospitals into intermediate care—which would probably require additional hospitals, or the development of existing hospitals in this sector."

Those are the views of GPs in my constituency, and they contain small comfort for Ministers. It is, perhaps, not strange but a little sinister for them to find, at every hand's turn, that professionals and the public seem more aware than they do of the effects of quick-fix headlines combined with a lack of strategic direction.

Most recently, the pressure of population increase locally has caused one surgery to announced the complete closure of its facilities in Brandon. That will affect many hundreds of my constituents in the nearby villages of Weeting and Hockwold. On 14 January, Mr. Tunstall of Weeting, in an interesting letter, wrote:

> "After watching our globe trotting Prime Minister in an interview with David Frost I thought I would take the opportunity of writing to you to express my concern about the general state of our country's facilities.
>
> Mr. Blair and his colleagues certainly seem aloof and out of touch with the basic problems and wastage in this country including the Millennium Dome, Wembley Stadium, Railways, Education, NHS Structure, the Police Force"

and so on. I wish that Mr. Tunstall were here because I think that if he were a Member of the House, Ministers would be having quite a rough ride. He encapsulates perfectly the views of the millions who experience daily the mismatch between what Ministers say and what they, the public, see.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): The right hon. Lady has given us a snapshot of her constituency. In my constituency, for 18 years under her Government the GP in the ex-mining village of Craghead held his surgery in a terraced house with a leaking roof. Last week, he moved into a £250,000 purpose-built facility provided by a Labour Government. That snapshot of Durham is certainly not the same as the picture that she is trying to paint.

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted to hear of the good fortune of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. He speaks as he finds. So do I, and so do my constituents. It is a matter of great mystery to them that they hear Ministers vaunting the improvements in the NHS and other public services made under this Government while their daily experience is a surgery closure. Frankly, while one would not want a leaky roof on a doctor's surgery, that is better than no surgery at all, which is the experience of my constituents under this Government.

Ministers have been approached by dentists from my constituency and they will have received a letter dated 31 December 2001 from Mr. Carmichael of Downham Market. His practice has served that area of west Norfolk since the mid-1940s and he recently lost one of his associates. As a result, and despite six months of expensive advertising, he has had to

"deregister over 3000 patients and reduce staffing and it is unlikely that these Patients will find another Dentist."

Of course, dentist problems are not new. We too had difficulties in government, but under this Government 3,000 patients have had to be deregistered and they will not find another dentist. Given Ministers' hype, the public could be forgiven for wondering why that little problem was not solved in the 24 hours left to save the NHS. Either way, for people on the ground the problem is gross.

It is a pity that no Health Minister is here, but, in passing, I draw it to the Minister's attention that I made an innocent inquiry of Norfolk health authority to discover how many bodies are responsible for administering health in my constituency and in Norfolk. In 1987, there were four or five. There are now 16. Each has a chief executive, a glossy annual general meeting report, a chairman, travel expenses, premises—everything. Of course, that represents but a flea-bite in the overall NHS budget, but these things too are noticed by the public.

Turning to education, in no other field have expectations been so raised and exaggerated or so dashed. Consider the daily experience of parents and teachers in Norfolk. In my constituency a year ago, it was revealed that a head was regularly teaching classes of 94. That was disavowed by Ministers and the Labour-controlled local education authority. Alas, it was the case, although it is no longer. That scandal was drawn to my attention by the parents, who said, "Why are they going on and on about class sizes of 30? We have 94 in ours."

I also draw Ministers' attention to a letter to me dated 10 December 2001 from Dr. Brian Slater, Norfolk's director of education. He states that 30 of Norfolk's 52 secondary schools are over-subscribed, which means that if people happen to move to a town in which one of those schools is located, their children cannot be educated in that town. What does that extraordinary situation mean for rural investment, jobs, economic regeneration, children and parents and the schools themselves? It means more expense for council tax payers, bussing out of the county for many pupils and the end of choice. Talking of strategic planning, how can that have happened after five years under a Labour Government and, up to last June, eight years under a Labour-controlled county council? These people's priority is "education, education, education", but do not try to get a child into one of those 30 secondary schools because he or she will not get in. Apparently, these paragons—these enthusiasts for education—did not notice planning permissions, house building and new developments.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Shephard: Not at the moment.

It could be argued that, by definition, authorities have 11 years' notice of the need for a secondary school place, but that was not enough. The situation is without precedent in my 30 years' experience of the education system and it represents the most extraordinary lack of strategic planning. It is a marvellous example of the mismatch between ministerial claims about public services and people's daily experience, and the blame must be laid at the door of the Labour Government and the Labour county council.

On police funding, my constituency was deeply affected by the Tony Martin case. In its aftermath, anxieties about the level of rural policing, the pointlessness of reporting crime when the police are so stretched and the fear of crime all surfaced only to be allayed by ministerial pronouncements on what would be done, but what we were told bears little relation to the chief constable's current perceptions. He has written to all Norfolk Members of Parliament to point out that there is a £162 million gap nationally between Government support next year and police need and that the Government propose a 3.6 per cent. budget increase in Norfolk even though the police authority calculates that it needs 4 per cent. just to stand still.

The debate has been informative and it is illuminating to hear the experience of Members from both sides of the House. It is to be expected that Labour Members will find constituency examples, which are perfectly accurate, of course, to support their Ministers' claims. Alas, public perception has moved on and they are sick to death of ministerial hype, which often bears no resemblance to their experience.

Ministers have only themselves to blame for the disbelief—or worse, cynicism—in the public mind over the state of the public services. Ministers make overstatements and exaggerated claims of improvement, but they have failed to grasp that there is a mismatch between what they say and what people experience. They will pay for it.

6.57 pm

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I am grateful to be called in this important debate, but I am disappointed with the contributions made so far, particularly those of Conservative Members, who have failed to grasp the

[Dr. Howard Stoate]

opportunity to draw out important public sector issues. I for one was looking forward to hearing what the Conservatives have to offer for the public sector. It is no good shadow Minister after shadow Minister ranting on about how terrible things are. We want to hear what they have to offer instead.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) appeared to want a spirit of consensus and appeared to lead the debate forward into constructive areas, but, unfortunately, all he really wanted to do was defend his record and knock the Government yet again—on and on and on he went.

I speak as the only practising doctor left in this honourable House and as one who has some expertise in the health service. There, as in so many areas, size does indeed matter. I shall not rehearse all the arguments made this evening, but it is impossible to defend the claim that the Government have not been funding the health service properly. Look at the figures: £49 billion for 1999–2000 and a projected £68 billion for 2003–04. That represents a real-terms increase of about 35 per cent., which must be the largest ever sustained increase in health service expenditure.

Chris Grayling: Has the hon. Gentleman considered the possibility that the Government may have increased spending, but delivered no results? On running the health service, has he considered the possibility that the Government might not be doing the right job?

Dr. Stoate: Oddly enough, the hon. Gentleman is beginning to engage in constructive comment. Perhaps we should be considering that matter. I want to focus on the way in which we should deliver services. Sterile debates about putting a penny on income tax, which party would put the most money in—

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Stoate: I want to make progress before giving way again.

I cannot understand the point of such debates. We go round in circles, trying to score points off each other. For example, the Liberal Democrats say that they want to put 1p here and 50p there. It simply does not make sense to people.

It is not only size that matters, however, but what we do with it. I want to consider reforms that the Government could introduce to improve the NHS and provide services with which not only hon. Members but the public are happy. We need to reform. Opposition Members have gone on and on about the Government's failure to deliver; they should suggest methods of putting that right. I want to try to tackle that.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made an interesting statement about the three Ps, and said that we believed in patients, pupils and passengers. At least that is a constructive way of looking forward, and it is different from Conservative Members' three Rs—rant, rave and rhetoric, which get us nowhere. Opposition Members spend too long talking through their "Rs" and too little time on methods of improving things.

The NHS is a complex and convoluted organisation. It has taken 50 years of custom and practice to get where it is today. My right hon. Friend's leadership and vision is beginning to cut through that. The monolithic structure of the NHS is one of its problems because its size and complexity make it difficult to steer. The analogy with a supertanker is therefore apt. The Government have shown vision, determination and bravery in setting some of the units in the health service apart from others to ascertain whether they are able to provide services in a way that has not previously been done. That affords us an opportunity to find what can be provided. I welcome some of the pilot schemes that the Government are currently undertaking. They may show how far the NHS can go and the number of new initiatives that can be introduced.

I want to focus on some comparators. This week's *British Medical Journal* contained an interesting article, which compared the Kaiser Permanente group in California with the NHS. The group is a non-profit-making health maintenance organisation, which serves a similar population to the NHS and is largely based in California, where it has 6 million members. The paper in the *British Medical Journal* considers whether anything can be learned from comparing the organisations. It states:

> "The per capita costs of the two systems, adjusted for differences in benefits, special activities, population characteristics, and the cost environment, were similar to within 10 per cent . . . Kaiser members experience more comprehensive and convenient primary care services and much more rapid access to specialist services and hospital admissions."

The most important finding was:

> "Age adjusted rates of use of acute hospital services . . . were one third of those in the NHS."

We talk about bed numbers as though they were the linchpin of whether the NHS can deliver, yet an organisation in America that covers a similar population and has broadly similar funding and pressures can somehow provide a service that uses only one third of the bed-day numbers per 1,000 people a year.

Chris Grayling: I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's reference to the work of Kaiser Permanente. Does he believe that it is right to explore the management of the NHS, and would he support Conservative efforts to think out of the box about health care in this country and consider solutions that could provide genuine options for it rather than sticking to the old paradigms?

Dr. Stoate: Would that the comments about the Conservative party were true. What have we heard from Conservative Members about their vision for the health service? Nothing. We have also heard nothing from the Liberal Democrats. I was looking forward to a constructive debate on the health service because the people of this country expect nothing less from a Parliament of this stature on the world stage. Yet Conservative Members have simply ranted about the way in which we have spent less than they might have spent. I want a constructive debate on providing services.

The Kaiser Permanente study bears close examination because of the much shorter bed stays and fewer bed occupancy days a year per 1,000 of the population. It invests far more money in primary care, information technology and communication technology to enable that to happen. It provides a seamless service from admission to convalescence. The Government and the NHS could learn from that. Rather than ranting about the differences between the Labour party and the Conservative party, we should consider improving the health service for people in this country and matching the achievements in other parts of the world.

The conclusion of the paper in the *British Medical Journal* stated:

> "The widely held beliefs that the NHS is efficient and that poor performance in certain areas is largely explained by underinvestment are not supported by this analysis."

That is a fascinating statement because it contends that underinvestment is not the problem. We recently heard that the NHS underspent last year. Throwing money at the problem did not solve it because structural difficulties meant that we were unable to spend the money that was given to the health service. Rather than concentrating on the sterile argument about cost, let us consider provision, types of services, improving efficiency, communication technology, wiring up GPs' surgeries to hospitals and wiring up hospitals to social services to ensure a seamless transition for patients through the service.

Mrs. Shephard: If the hon. Gentleman looks at all the nods and smiles from Conservative Members, he will realise that he is bringing us dangerously close to consensus. I congratulate him on his constructive approach.

Dr. Stoate: Those congratulations are unexpected and welcome. I am happy to accept consensus. We do not have to confine ourselves to a sterile, narrow debate, which upsets people, turns them off politics and damages us all.

Mr. Barker: I share the enthusiasm of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and I, too, welcome such thoughts from Labour Members. It is a refreshing change from the usual ideological rant on the NHS. However, the big difference between Conservative and Labour Members is that Labour Members constitute the Government. They have been in office for almost six years. When will people in this country experience an improvement in the service after Labour Members have grasped the idea that simply throwing money at the NHS is not the answer?

Dr. Stoate: It is so disappointing to listen to Conservative Members. They have nothing to say on the subject. I offer them a chance to set out part of their stall and present their alternative policies, yet all they say is, "You've been in for six years and we're not getting anywhere."

Mr. Salter: Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend, whose speeches we always enjoy. As an acting GP and health professional, perhaps he would care to comment on Conservative policy as set out on 12 November in a memorandum from the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), the shadow Treasury spokesman. It fortuitously landed on my desk and is now on those of many other hon. Members. It states:

> "The reforms, which we will be proposing, will end the NHS monopoly and will entail those who can afford it making some payment for healthcare services."

What does my hon. Friend believe Conservative Members mean by that? How much will the sick have to pay under the Conservatives should they ever return to power?

Dr. Stoate: I thank my hon. Friend, but he should look on the bright side: at least the memorandum set out a policy, which is more than we have heard from Conservative Members this evening. Of course, I disagree with it. It would be interesting to hear how much they propose to charge. Conservative Member after Conservative Member has refused to admit the existence of the so-called charges. One of their spokespeople admits to the prospect of charging, yet others refuse to own up to that. I wonder if any of them are brave enough to admit to the policy.

Chris Grayling: Kaiser Permanente, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, is part of a health care system in which there is no NHS-style monopoly, as described in the memorandum, and to which individuals make a financial contribution. Has the hon. Gentleman not admitted that it provides better-quality health care than the NHS?

Dr. Stoate: The programme fascinates me because it is a managed care programme that works on a non-profit-making basis and is therefore similar to our NHS. People contribute to it throughout their lives, and it is a pooled risk system. That means that few people in it need to buy top-up private health insurance because it covers all their needs. Even more interestingly, the Kaiser Permanente system does not allow specialists to work outside the organisation. No consultants rush off to the private sector to top up their incomes; they cannot do that. We could learn from that.

I want to consider wastage. I chair the all-party group on pharmacy.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that an important aspect of policy is blunder avoidance? One of the Government's great blunders is that they have ended up with massive bed blocking because they have lost 49,000 care home beds, which is something about which the Opposition warned them.

Dr. Stoate: The care home sector is extremely important, but the hon. Gentleman fails to recognise that the net loss of beds in the sector is only 19,000—though of course that is still serious. The hon. Gentleman also fails to take into account the Government's policy of care at home and managed care in the community, which reduces the need for beds. He is right to say that we need to address the problem of so-called bed blocking, and to move people on through the system much more effectively. I get irritated when my local hospital has so-called blocked beds, reducing the flow of patients. Of course that is irritating, and we have to look at the problem. That is why I am proposing a system in which the patient pathway from entry to exit should be seamless, as has been achieved in the Kaiser Permanente system.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Is it not the case that, over this year and next, we are investing £300 million to tackle bed blocking head on, in a way never seen under the Conservative Government?

[David Taylor]

That should allow at least 2,000 elderly people to leave hospital, rather than blocking beds while they wait for parts of their treatment to be completed.

Dr. Stoate: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The Select Committee on Health, of which I was a member, carried out a study into reducing the Berlin wall between health and social services, and we were able to work with the Government to enable that to happen, and to allow shared budgets and the pooling of resources so that the unblocking of beds could begin. That has been quite successful. My hon. Friend is right to say that the £300 million being put in for that purpose will make a big difference. It will allow a lot more packages of care to be bought not only in nursing homes but in terms of care at home—which is, after all, where people want to be, with their family and friends.

We have not concentrated on the problem of wastage of medicines. As I said earlier, I chair the all-party group on pharmacy. One of the reports that we considered showed that about £220 million-worth of drugs a year is handed back to pharmacists. If we assume, as is reasonable, that that is only the tip of the iceberg, the figure will probably be much higher. One report that we examined showed that about 50 per cent. of people did not take their medication precisely as prescribed by their doctor. There could therefore be enormous wastage in the system.

I am pleased that the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), is on the Front Bench at the moment, because I know that he takes a great interest in this issue. I would like to see how the Government can work with the pharmacy profession to tackle issues of medicines management and medicines concordance in a way that would significantly reduce wastage. If my figures are even partly right, there is a significant amount of wastage of the £5 billion budget that the NHS currently spends on drugs each year. That wasted money could be put to much better use.

I would like to see a scheme in which primary care physicians and nurses can work with pharmacists, and with patients, to ensure that patients take the appropriate medication, to check that that medication is being used appropriately, and to ensure that patients get the chance to discuss with their pharmacist and their GP exactly what they should be taking and when, thereby freeing up significant resources for other uses. There could be enormous benefits from that. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) had a debate in Westminster Hall only this morning to discuss issues relating to pharmacy.

David Taylor: Ten per cent. of the almost £60 billion cost of the NHS is devoted to its drug budget. About 25 per cent of that £6 billion—£1.5 billion—is the cost of generic drugs. A review is under way to determine ways of driving down the cost of generic drugs, because too much of our investment in the health service is leaking out to inflate the already large profits of the pharmaceutical companies.

Dr. Stoate: I thank my hon. Friend for his expertise. He has an interest in this matter and has been examining it closely over the last few weeks, during which time I have discussed it with him. These are exactly the issues on which we should be concentrating.

We also need to find a way of freeing up far more resources into primary care. Working as a GP, I find that increasing the number of community nurses can reduce the number of hospital admissions quite dramatically. In my own practice, when we are fully staffed with district nurses, our admission rate to hospital is extremely low, and our ability to take patients back into the community after they have finished their treatment is extremely good. When there is a shortage of nurses in the community, however, our hospital admission rate goes up, and our ability to take ill patients back when they have finished their treatment is hampered. Such shortages make life much more difficult. I would like to see much more real work done to increase the number of community nurses and other support staff, so that we can keep patients at home, and in some way emulate the Kaiser Permanente system, under which the average bed-stay is about three days, as opposed to our average of about five.

Mr. Redwood: Has the hon. Gentleman noticed how people are turning more and more to alternative therapies and herbal remedies? What does he think GPs and the NHS should do in response to that movement?

Dr. Stoate: That is a very big question, and slightly off the subject of the debate on public services. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that people are turning more to complementary medicines, which certainly fulfil a need for some. I have a lot of respect for people who carry out research in this field, and who are trying to find out which alternative therapies have something to offer. I have no problem with such therapies, and it would be helpful if GPs were better informed on some of these issues, because they could then explain to their patients which remedies might be of use. However, this is far too big a subject to discuss in detail in a debate such as this.

We can improve the efficiency of the public services, particularly the NHS, if we can determine where the cost-pinching and blockages are occurring—for example, in accident and emergency, or in relation to discharges or waiting times to see consultants. If we examine those pinch points, try to develop alternative strategies to smooth them out, take advice, and examine information and studies of alternative health care systems throughout the world, we should be able to introduce a far more seamless care system in this country.

I want to reassert that this is not just about money. Size matters, but it is not the only factor. It is what we do with it that really matters. The Government have made a brave decision to consider alternative ways of freeing up hospitals, PCTs and individual practices to provide different models of care, and to learn from and disseminate best practice. That is the way forward, and I am sure that, as a result, we shall see the genuine improvement that people in this country have a right to expect.

7.16 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to address the question to which this debate enables us all to respond. It is the question that the public are putting to all parties, and to every Member of the House. The public want to know how this country can have world-class public services. They are puzzled as to why, despite the claimed—and in some cases, real—injections of additional money by the Government, those services appear to be getting worse in many sectors.

The public are puzzled, and they want a thoughtful, reasoned answer from people in the House. They will be profoundly disappointed by the response from the Secretary of State today. They will not be pleased that his reply consisted only of negative, bad-tempered, partisan attempts to blame everything that is happening now on the past and on his predecessors. They have a right to expect something more reasoned, thoughtful and forward-looking from the Secretary of State, particularly as he has vouchsafed to the media outside the House his thoughts and inklings of his plans, which he failed to mention here today.

I want to try to address some of those issues. I hope that I can claim some respect across the House for being not exactly partisan on this matter. My departure from the Front Bench and from the deputy leadership of my party was precipitated by a speech that I made on the importance of focusing on and improving public services, and the limited role that private enterprise would have to play in that process. That evoked anger and horror in *The Times* and other organs of extremism that now relish reflections of what I said when they are uttered by the Secretary of State for Health.

Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), I seek consensus, but I shall begin by spelling out a few facts as they appear to my constituents, based on their experience of public services in Hertfordshire. I shall focus on health in due course, but I shall start with education, and with the size of classes and the pupil-teacher ratio in maintained secondary schools in my constituency.

I was worried about what appeared to be happening, which seemed to contrast with what I was hearing from the Government, so I tabled a question asking what had happened to the pupil-teacher ratio since I was first elected in 1983. The answer showed that the pupil-teacher ratio improved during the period in which the Conservatives were in office, but in the secondary schools of Hertfordshire it has deteriorated every year since the Government were elected.

Class sizes have got bigger. A Government who told us that their top three priorities would be education have given us bigger classes, bigger classes, bigger classes. That may be partly because of the difficulty of recruiting teachers. Hertfordshire is a high-cost area and, despite the fact that our schools are attractive places in which teachers would generally like to teach, we have recruitment difficulties.

I therefore tabled another question asking how many teacher vacancies there were in Hertfordshire. The Minister for School Standards came back with the figures, on the central definition that he used, and said that there were just 50 unfilled vacancies in Hertfordshire. I issued a press release to that effect and, to my embarrassment, the local newspapers came back asking, "What do you mean by this? There are far more than that." Indeed, the county council figures show that the actual number of vacancies is more than four times as high as that revealed by central Government. *[Interruption.]* The figure recorded and collected by officials at Hertfordshire county hall is 209, not 50, and they believe that that understates the position because it does not include temporary cover in certain circumstances.

On transport—

Mrs. Shephard: Before my right hon. Friend leaves the subject, can he throw any light on the reasons for such a discrepancy? He was enjoined by Labour Members to give facts, and he seems to be in possession of two kinds.

Mr. Lilley: It could be that the Government's rhetoric is not accurate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: This causes such horror among the loyalists anxious for promotion that I must give them their chance.

Mr. Rammell: Totally fortuitously, I happen to have information on teacher vacancies in Hertfordshire in my possession, because some months ago I was making a comparison between Hertfordshire and Essex, where my constituency is based. The definition of a vacancy has not changed. The figure for Hertfordshire in 2000 was 17, whereas in 1990 it was 216. Can we have some credibility and frankness on this issue?

Mr. Lilley: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman's figures are as unreliable as, and rather similar to, those deployed by the Government.

Mr. Rammell: They are from the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Lilley: I am comparing figures given by Ministers with those given by county hall officials. I have got hold of the questionnaire used by the Government, and it applies a more restrictive definition than that used by county hall officials, which explains how it is possible to get the figures that the hon. Gentleman is deploying. The head of teacher recruitment came to Hertfordshire for a one-day think-tank seminar on how to recruit extra teachers, and he acknowledged that the figures used by Government generally across the country are only a third of the number reported to local education authorities. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for enabling me to elaborate a little on that point.

David Taylor: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: No. I now wish to move on to transport.

We were told that Thameslink 2000 would produce more train services and thus ease some of the problems on the already overcrowded line from Hitchin to King's Cross and from Harpenden down the existing Thameslink line. The cost of the project has risen from £250 million when it was first proposed to an estimated £2 billion now, yet the Strategic Rail Authority, a Government-created body, which made this proposal, now admits that the £2 billion will not, as formerly believed, result in any extra services. There will not be a single extra train at peak hours down either line. It will allow these trains to go further through London, and that is welcome. It will

[Mr. Lilley]

also make the service more attractive, but there is no point in attracting more passengers if there is not room for them on the trains because there are no extra trains to carry them.

Although those facts have emerged during the public inquiry, the effective renationalisation of Railtrack has so bemused and paralysed management that they have been unable to respond to it or to produce alternatives, which would have given us a little extra capacity for the £2 billion worth of public finance that it is proposed to put into this project.

As I said, I want to focus above all on health, so let me give a few facts about the situation affecting the NHS in my constituency. In 1997, we were told that it would take just 24 hours to save the NHS. Since then, I am afraid that in some material respects, things have got worse in Hertfordshire. There are now 60 vacancies for GPs in the county, and that figure has risen 20-fold in a year. The shortage of nurses has become so worrying that it has been necessary to close not just the special care baby unit but the maternity unit and the children's unit at Hemel Hempstead and transfer them all to Watford. We are awaiting the outcome of an inquiry, which may have reported to the Minister today, on whether that move will go ahead and, if so, whether it is likely to become permanent. If so, we fear that it may precipitate the undermining of Hemel Hempstead as a viable general hospital with its own acute and accident and emergency units.

That problem springs from the current shortage of nurses and the difficulty of recruiting staff.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Given that it takes more than four years to train both nurses and doctors, surely those problems were created by the previous Conservative Administration and can be nothing to do with the current Administration.

Mr. Lilley: The Government have been in power for more than four years. More importantly, there is in this country a substantial number of nurses who are qualified but not working in the NHS. There is therefore a vast pool of nurses from which recruitment could be made. However, rather than doing that, the Government have often recruited from the Philippines, as has been done for units elsewhere in Hertfordshire.

Andy Burnham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way again?

Mr. Lilley: I have already given way once. The hon. Gentleman has done his duty by his Whips.

We then have the issue of waiting times. In 1997, the national figure for the proportion of patients waiting for more than a year was just over 2 per cent. Now in Hertfordshire, it is three times that proportion. Although improvements have been made in some areas during the 50 years in which the health service has been in existence, on a number of key issues things have got worse. The broad move forward that we were promised has not happened in the NHS and people are worried about what is happening.

The Government's response is to promise more money, and then to go on promising more money in the future. They have set a target that this country should raise spending on health as a proportion of national income to the European average. That is an absurd target to set. Surely one should set a target—I hope that my hon. Friends will agree that this is their ambition—to match or surpass the standard of care achieved by comparable countries, not simply to spend as much money. Anybody can spend money without necessarily achieving improvements or higher standards.

Mr. Dawson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: I shall give way in a moment.

When my right hon. Friend the leader of the Conservative party illustrated that point, the Prime Minister had no response to it. My right hon. Friend said that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland already spend a higher proportion of GDP on health than the continent spends, which is the target that the Government want to attain. Does anyone pretend that the quality of care, of health outcomes, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is one that we should seek to emulate and universalise across England? Does any Labour Member say that his or her ambition is to make the English health service as good as the Scottish health service and no better? None of them does, but that is the Prime Minister's ambition. That is why we believe that the answer does not lie just in spending targets.

The problem with the NHS, now and in the past, is that it is too centralised; Labour has made it even more centralised. Again, in my area, one sees that. The Government have taken away the right of the patient and GP to choose which hospital to go to. My area is surrounded by five general hospitals. We used to be able to choose which hospital to attend, despite some obstacles, but we can no longer do so.

Instead, the Government gave that responsibility to primary care groups. They then merged primary care groups into bigger primary care trusts. They merged the four health authorities in Hertfordshire in twos, so that there were just two. Those were merged into a single one for Hertfordshire. Now that is to merge with Bedfordshire. There is constant merger and increase in size. Across the country, about 95 health authorities are to be merged into 28 big ones.

Dr. Stoate: May I inform the right hon. Gentleman that it was his Government who got rid of the freedom of GPs to refer someone to whichever hospital they liked? Following the 1990 health reforms introduced by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), I phoned up Guy's hospital because I had a patient with a very rare type of leukaemia. The specialist said, "Have you got a contract with this hospital? If not, we cannot help you." It was the only hospital in the area that could help. In the end, I won my case but it was the Conservative Government who ended the right of GPs to refer patients to where those patients wanted to go.

Mr. Lilley: That is not the case. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry. What ended that practice was the circular that I have in my hand: circular 177 from 1999, which abolished extra-contractual referrals. The hon. Gentleman said that he achieved his aim in 1991—an extra-contractual referral.

Dr. Stoate: In fact, I had to argue my case. A very kind consultant from Guy's said, "I will bend the rules for you." I had lost the automatic right to refer a patient with a very rare form of leukaemia automatically to the hospital of my choice. I had to move through a very circuitous route before I was able to win. I had to persuade the consultant to accept my case.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman cannot say that we abolished that right and he none the less achieved it. It may not have been as easy as he would like or as I will propose, but the practice was certainly abolished as a right by the circular issued in 1999. Since then, my constituents have not been able to choose which of the five surrounding general hospitals to go to.

I have had deputations of surgeons and specialists saying that the problem of specialist care has been intensified and exacerbated by that policy change. That was repeated by the president of the Royal College of Surgeons, who said that it had seriously undermined the provision of specialist care of the kind that the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) mentioned.

Centralisation has been going on in the health service under this Government, at least up to now. It has culminated in central Government specifying in micro-detail what hospitals and parts of the local health service will do. My local hospitals are set about 248 targets. That is an archetypal sign of Stalinist centralisation: the belief of the people at the top that they can micromanage by laying down directives from on high, which all hospitals have to meet.

Nowhere in the modern world attempts to manage large organisations such as that. The lesson from most large organisations is that, increasingly, one should take the opportunity to delegate responsibility locally, to give much greater autonomy, to make much more use of flatter, leaner management structures and of the opportunities that modern management methods and information technology make possible. However, that has not happened under this Government.

That is partly because the mindset of the left is to centralise; it believes in central planning and control. That perhaps explains to some degree what has been going on, but it does not explain why new Labour Ministers who thought that they had shed the centralising tendency, or at least who were open enough to recognise that it had been at fault in the past and who declared themselves to be free of it in the present, have been involved in centralisation: the attempt to control everything from the centre. It is partly because of that other aspect of new Labour Ministers: they are initiators. They demand an initiative a day or a week to get the headlines. The simple way to get a headline is to launch an initiative from the centre, which inevitably involves some central decision imposed on the people at the sharp end of the service. That is why all those ring-fenced funds have been established, all those targets have been set, all those central directives have been laid down—so that new Labour news managers can get cheap and initially favourable headlines at the expense of a much more centralised, rigid and inefficient health service. That is what has happened in the health service.

I have been advocating a move in the opposite direction. I published a document, which is already going through its nth print run, called "Patient Power". I recommend it particularly to the hon. Member for Dartford, who did not remember accurately the history of how these things have come about.

I have advocated that we return power, decision making and choice to patients and to the GP who advises them. That is the most important direction in which power should move. We should restore the right of the patient to choose which hospital to use, certainly for all normal operations; for more specialist procedures the choice will inevitably be limited.

As I say, from 1999, that choice was removed by circular 177. It has meant that, instead of the individual patient making a choice, the local health bureaucracy, the primary care trust in most cases, enters into contracts with hospitals, and patients follow the money rather than the money following the patient.

It is important to enter into the history and to acknowledge that the problems have not always been recognised, even by my own party. Choice existed before the establishment of the NHS and was perpetuated when it was established. It was recognised that patients could choose whichever hospital they wanted, although normally they went to the local one, which was right and proper.

However, patients should have the right, if they want, to go to a hospital with a shorter waiting list and to which the journey is shorter. They should have the freedom to go to a hospital that is nearer relatives should they want that. If they want to go to a hospital that specialises in the operation that they want, or has a particularly good record in it, they should have the right to choose that hospital, even if it means a longer wait than if they went to the local hospital. If they want to go to a hospital that they know has wonderful standards of cleanliness and care, they should have the right to opt for that. They may want one that does not have mixed-sex wards. For all those reasons patients may want to exercise choice, as they were historically allowed to do.

Then problems began to arise with tighter budgeting in the 1970s and 1980s. All too often, patients chose, naturally, the most popular hospital. Therefore, the most popular hospitals ran through their budget before the end of the year, and it was the most popular wards and most popular hospitals that tended to close.

That caused great perturbation among Members of Parliament in the early 1980s, and it was recognised that something needed to be done. Hence reforms were introduced by the then Secretary of State for Health in 1991. He gave GPs the right to be fundholding, which gave them greater flexibility, but where GPs were not fundholders and local authorities entered into contracts, the over-reliance on the contracting process—I accept the point—restricted choice and made it more difficult to exercise.

Hon. Members can score points about that. They can say, "You got it wrong, so it does not matter that we made it worse."

Dr. Stoate: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: No, I will not. I am being frank and honest and not trying to make partisan points. I am saying that not everything was perfect about the reforms. We should try to make them better, not worse. If the problem was that the system was based too much on contracts and not enough on money following patient choice, we should move towards a system in which money follows patient

[Mr. Lilley]

choice. That is what I want, and what I hope my hon. Friends will increasingly propose as an alternative.

Dr. Evan Harris: I have listened to the right hon. Gentleman with interest, and I think he is right in that abolishing extra-contractual referrals and renaming them contract service level agreements reduced, at the margins, even such choice as was available. Those were reforms introduced by a Labour Government who claimed that they would get rid of the internal market.

Mr. Lilley: Indeed, and not only I, or politicians in general, have said it. No less a person than the director of the College of Health said of the directive that did abolish the residual right of choice through ECRs that it would mean patients' having "less choice than ever" in the history of the NHS. She was absolutely right, and we should go back to giving patients more choice. A precondition of that, however, is our giving patients and GPs facts on the basis of which they can make informed choices. There has been some progress in that regard, but I want to see more.

I welcomed the announcement that information would be provided about the performance of individual heart surgeons. I hope we will learn from the example of the Americans, who ensure that such information is related to patients' pre-operative condition. That makes possible a much better assessment of surgeons' performance and ability. There should also be sensible discussion of what the figures mean. Mr. Yacoub, a surgeon who deals with the most difficult heart cases, may sadly lose more patients than someone dealing with minor cases; but everyone knows that he is the best heart surgeon, and will therefore be anxious to be treated by him. People are intelligent enough to use the information that they are given, so let us make more facts available to patients.

Most important of all, let us make the money follow the choice. When a patient chooses a hospital, that hospital should be rewarded for treating the patient; it should receive the money it needs to provide that treatment. The more popular and successful a hospital is, the more able it should be to treat patients. Funding should not depend on how soon a hospital runs through its budget and has to close wards. We must also give hospitals more independence and autonomy, so that they can reflect the desires of patients without needing to respond continually to directives from on high.

Mr. Dawson: The right hon. Gentleman is making interesting points, some of which I agree with; but is he not missing the most fundamental fact of all? It is a commonplace among Labour Members that poverty underlies ill health. The right hon. Gentleman's Government did not face that fact—they hid from it—but this Government are prepared to confront it. Is it not the case that until the Conservatives are ready to face that uncomfortable truth, they will never have any credibility in terms of reform and improvement of public services?

Mr. Lilley: I do not agree that the cause of ill health is poverty. Poverty is a bad thing: we ought to be against it, and try to get rid of it. Ill health is a bad thing, which often causes poverty, and we ought to try and get rid of that.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to an article that appeared in the *British Medical Journal* on 5 January this year. It stated

> "Evidence favouring a negative correlation between income inequality and life expectancy has disappeared."

According to the *BMJ*, the latest analysis of the figures suggests that there is no longer any attempt to pretend that inequalities in society create the problem of poor health. That, however, is not the central issue of the debate, and it is certainly not the issue on which I want to concentrate. I think we all agree that we want to get rid of poverty, regardless of its precise correlation with health.

I have emphasised the importance of restoring choice, giving people information that will enable them to make informed choices, ensuring that money follows choices, and giving hospitals the independence they need to respond to those choices. I can give a constituency example showing how important that can be. As I have said, the constituency is surrounded by five hospitals. One—I will not name it, because steps have now been taken to improve it—has the worst record in the country for treating patients after hip operations. One in six patients used to die within 30 days of their operations. My constituents had to go to that hospital, however, because the local primary care trust was contracted to send them there. Only when we exposed concerns about the figures did the doctors say "We knew, but we could not afford to change the contract because that would have destabilised the health economy". They could not make a marginal change; it was all or nothing.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lilley: I am glad to be the hon. Lady's friend, and I will respond to the warmth she has displayed by giving way in a moment.

Only if hospitals can respond to the choice of patients, and those patients are allowed to move if they want to, will changes be made. The change will usually be modest; even if the information is made available, we see no huge change in referral patterns. If that happens, however, there will be a sufficient change to induce hospitals to recruit surgeons who are more skilled in certain areas, and return others to performing operations at which they were particularly good. I now give way to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh).

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, and apologise for embarrassing him by calling him my friend.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned statistics relating to orthopaedic surgery in a hospital in his constituency. Is it not significant that the Government have introduced the Commission for Health Improvement? Is it not significant that local people do not have to worry about those figures, because they have been made public? Although the system is not perfect yet, I assure the right hon. Gentleman that it has brought confidence to people in my constituency who now believe that St. Helier's problems are understood. Would he care to congratulate the Government on CHI?

Mr. Lilley: I have already welcomed the increased release of information. We began a process; it has been continued, and I welcome that unreservedly. I do not think that it was NICE that released the figures—[Hon. Members: "CHI."] Some Greek letter of the alphabet, anyway. Whoever released them, however, I am all in favour of it.

I do not think we should pretend that everything the Government have done is wrong, or that everything we did was right; but, clearly, the Government's general tendency has been wrong up to now. I want to investigate the possibility that they are now beginning to move in the right direction.

The Government's initial response to my proposals was to dismiss them. They said that choice of the kind I was advocating had never existed in the health service, and that it was nonsense to say that they had removed it. They then said the exact opposite—that they had not removed it, and that it still existed—until I pointed out that it had been removed. A Minister then said that, under my proposals, patients would be chasing around the country for shorter waiting lists. That is a bit rich, coming from a Government who are sending patients chasing around Europe—around the Mediterranean now, we understand—in search of hospitals with shorter waiting lists. Why cannot patients at least be given the right to go to hospitals that may have shorter or no waiting lists if they are prepared to do so, or find it convenient?

The Prime Minister said that my proposals would lead to hospitals competing with hospitals. That is just a bit of silly rhetoric. No one wants to see anyone doing down another hospital; what we want to see is hospitals striving to satisfy patients, and to offer them the best care in the most convenient and favourable conditions. We certainly do not want people to slag off competitors in the way that the Government may have implied that they would.

It seems that the Government are beginning to move in the right direction, at least in their rhetoric. Having spent four years centralising, they are now at least talking of decentralising. Having ridiculed the idea of patient choice, they have now said that heart patients who have been on the waiting list for six months—and who are still alive—will be allowed to go to another hospital elsewhere in this country, or even abroad.

That is welcome. It is extraordinary that the Government have chosen to enshrine the move in a bureaucratic process that almost requires minders for anyone considered foolish enough to avail themselves of the choice, but the idea is right in principle. It is sad that it is so limited, and that it is available only to people who have managed to stay alive for six months while waiting for a heart operation. I should like the opportunity to be spread more widely.

The Government have also said that they will encourage greater independence for some hospitals. Those that have met their 248 targets will be allowed to be independent of those targets. Those that have not met the targets will be required to remain in the system and will be threatened with the terrible possibility of private enterprise management, as has been mentioned before. Well, that will be the day. I would certainly welcome other management groups making available other services to people, with money following choice and standard costs applying to other not-for-profit hospitals, as well as to NHS ones.

Is the Government's recent change of tack a genuine conversion? Will it be successful? I hope that it is genuine, but I fear that it will not succeed. There is something innate in the left-of-centre mind that makes it find centralising, regulating and controlling solutions more satisfactory than those involving delegation, individual choice and independence.

By and large, Labour Members—on the Back Benches, but on the Front Benches too—remain centralisers genetically. All the Government have done, I am afraid, is to steal some Conservative rhetoric while retaining the Labour substance. They have spliced together our right-of-centre rhetoric with the left-of-centre practice that is in their genes. The result is a sort of genetically modified Government—a particularly dangerous and odious form of Government.

However, I hope that I am wrong and that the Government are moving in the right direction. I am certain that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) is doing the right thing by examining what is happening in other countries and looking at best practice abroad. He is wise to take a measured and timely approach.

I am pretty sure that, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green has completed his studies, he will conclude that other countries very often offer greater diversity of provision. They have local autonomy in management, more money follows patient choice, and patients have more opportunity to make choices. If we adopt elements of successful best practice abroad and incorporate them into the NHS, we will do more to improve the quality of health care and ensure more successful treatment outcomes than anything that this Government have so far done or promised.

7.53 pm

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I should like to thank the Opposition for giving us the opportunity to debate public services. It is hardly their strongest suit, but they get to choose the subjects for Opposition day debates.

I shall concentrate on three themes. I want to highlight what has been achieved in my constituency, to give my personal and very unspun account of my experience with public service issues, and to examine the Conservative party's lamentable failures, both in terms of performance and in terms of winning the political and ideological arguments.

By way of introduction, it is worth saying that public services are a new concept for most Thatcherite Members of Parliament, whereas most Labour Members have practical experience of them. We have either worked in or delivered public services, as exemplified by the excellent contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate). He spoke with authority, and commanded the House's attention.

My record is more humble. I spent two years as the co-ordinator at the Reading centre for the unemployed. That centre, funded by Berkshire county council until it was axed by the Conservatives, provided welfare rights, advice and education, and training opportunities for unemployed people in my town.

I spent nine years as a regional manager for a tenant-controlled housing association that delivered affordable homes and empowered tenants with a genuine say over the delivery of their housing. That is hardly a leftist, centralising agenda. In fact, I remind hon.

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Members that the principle of co-operative ownership is at the heart of the socialist movement and of the work in the 1830s of Robert Owen and the co-operative movement.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salter: No Conservative Member would give way to me, and I fully intend to return the compliment until a later point in my speech—which, I assure the hon. Gentleman, will be considerably shorter than the 35 minutes of tedium to which we have had to listen from some Opposition Members.

I also spent 12 years on Reading borough council, nine of them as deputy leader. I am proud that, even in the dark days of Thatcherism, we in Reading always put public services first. We have never been frightened to say to people that they cannot get owt for nowt. We have made it clear that people must pay and that, if they want a top-quality service, it will cost.

As the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) will know, council tax levels in Reading are substantially higher than in neighbouring authorities. However, it is worth looking at the Labour council's electoral record. The right hon. Gentleman can only envy the record of the Labour party in comparison with his, in our respective bastions of power.

Since 1983, Reading Labour party has not lost a single council seat. It took control of the council against the swing in 1987, and has won seat after seat since. A solid Conservative authority that had swept to power on a promise that it would cut rates was swept out of power after it cut public services. The Conservative rump now consists of three councillors, who are in opposition to 36 Labour councillors.

My first message to my Front-Bench colleagues is to be bold and to stand up for public services. They must be honest with the public, as people will pay if they think that they are getting value for money and that the council or the public service provider is in touch with them and their aspirations.

David Taylor: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Salter: I shall take one intervention from a Labour Member, and I am more than happy to give way to my hon. Friend.

David Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, but does he not think that the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) was right in one respect at least? He has suggested that there is no automatic link between inputs and outputs, and that we should decouple resources from quality. Newspaper articles earlier this week showed that, despite the extra investment and costs associated with private education, the results achieved represented especially poor value for money. Is not that something that we should bear in mind?

Mr. Salter: I thank my hon. Friend, but I remind him that I have been present for the whole debate. By the time the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden reached that point, I had lost the will to live. I am afraid that I am not able to comment coherently on whether what the right hon. Gentleman said was right or wrong.

I turn now to public services in my constituency and in Reading as a whole. As I have said, standing up for public services is nothing new for us in Reading. However, it will not hurt to take a quick look at the state of public services in my constituency, especially in connection with health, education, crime and transport.

Berkshire health authority has been allocated £528 million in the current financial year. That compares with a funding settlement in 1996–97, the final year of the previous Government, of just £278 million. There have been radical improvements in health service funding. Waiting lists now stand at 14,435, as against 17,452 in March 1998.

I agree that that does not tell the whole story, and that there is a debate to be had about waiting lists versus waiting times, but those are measurable improvements. I am perhaps more proud that despite the high cost of living in Berkshire, the health authority has 60 more qualified nurses than it had in 1997.

We are spending an extra £540 per pupil, compared with 1996–1997. The number of five, six and seven-year-olds in Reading, West in classes numbering more than 30 pupils fell from 636 in 1998 to 62 by January 2001. Eleven-year-olds have achieved record primary school results. Conservative Members did not seek to condemn the Government's education achievements. The feeling that I get on the streets and in my constituency surgery is that although there may be a long way to go in health and transport, the public recognise and appreciate the tangible improvements in the delivery of education policy.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Salter: No, not yet. The hon. Gentleman must be patient. His time will come.

There has been a fall in recorded crime in the Thames Valley, although a worrying increase in violent crime. At long last, we have started to turn the corner on police numbers. I will return to defects in current Government thinking on crime.

Reading has seen the opening of the long-awaited A33 relief road—a capital project that stalled for years under successive Governments of different political persuasions. We are proud of providing free pensioner bus passes, which sets Reading apart from other authorities in the area. There has been record investment in road maintenance and the introduction of a popular night bus service. Real improvements have been made in my constituency and it would be wrong to contribute to a public services debate without highlighting them.

Since 1997, there have been significant increases in major capital programmes. I noticed the exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) and the former Chancellor of the Exchequer about the future of a Worcester hospital. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) will remember the incessant delays in refurbishing the Royal Berkshire hospital. That project was on hold for nine years. One of the first decisions by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on becoming

Secretary of State was to release £71 million of direct public funding. Ministers were non-ideological enough to recognise that in that instance, the private finance initiative did not stack up and they delivered for the people of Reading in a way that the previous Government had not.

Private finance has worked—in particular for greenfield sites. While some of us are ambivalent about the wonders of the private sector—I wish that my right hon. the Secretary of State for Health would not smirk at me—I give my full support and backing to the PFI when it delivers a new psychiatric hospital on a greenfield site in my constituency, replacing the disgraceful, crumbling, Victorian facilities at the Fairmile asylum on the outskirts of Reading. If PFI works, more power to its elbow—but where it does not, direct public funding must be delivered.

I am pleased to see in his place the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead). As he is my office mate, that makes it easier to say that Reading needs funding for a third Thames bridge. I am sick and tired of operating in a town in which people wanting to travel from north to south to join the M4 have to drive through the centre of the capital of the Thames Valley. If someone wants to drive from Oxford to join the M4, they have to go through our town centre or rat-run through the picturesque village of Sonning to cross a single-track bridge—purely because we have been unable to break the deadlock between Berkshire and Oxfordshire councils. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is making copious notes and that a third Thames bridge will be a shopping list priority in the comprehensive spending review.

We have won election after election in my town using the slogan, "You're better off with Labour". With economic prosperity, record low levels of unemployment, high wages, fantastic job opportunities and quality public services, that slogan has some resonance.

I am not attempting to be consensual but in the spirit of the contributions by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and others, I intend to be frank. I spent some instructive time on the parliamentary police scheme, which I commend to other right hon. and hon. Members. It taught me that the police service is in urgent need of radical reform. It must be the last public service in the country that still uses carbon-paper forms. I cannot believe that police officers work in an environment that can take them out of circulation for five hours to process a simple arrest. In these days of laptop computers and Psion organisers, police officers should be able to make an arrest, file the information down the line electronically and move on to the next job. Police reform is vital.

Every Home Secretary in recent times has the scars on his back. Conservative Home Secretaries will remember the problems of trying to implement Sheehy and ending up implementing the worst parts of that report. At long last, we have a Home Secretary who is prepared to take on vested interests. I am confident that he will get support from all parts of the House.

In my region, the cost of a two-up, two-down terraced house built for a railway worker or a factory hand at Huntley and Palmer costs between £120,000 and £140,000—£50,000 or £60,000 beyond the reach of a newly qualified police officer. A cost-of-living allowance is vital. London Weighting has had its day. I was working at Heathrow airport in 1979 and moved to Reading because, believe it or not, it was a cheap place to buy a house. Now it is one of the most expensive. The same logic that introduced a £6,000 cost-of-living housing supplement for Metropolitan police officers should be applied to other hot spots of high housing costs throughout the country. Areas of Cheshire, Bath and other parts of the country fall into the same category.

I was disappointed at police reaction to the wholly sensible notion of street wardens. The Police Federation—perhaps the last redoubt of unreconstructed trade unionism, and I know a little about that—described street wardens as policing on the cheap. What absolute nonsense. How many police officers object to performing functions for which they are ill equipped by their training and which could easily be undertaken by active citizens? If street wardens are policing on the cheap, cannot the same be said of the neighbourhood watch CID? The police cannot have it all ways. I sense a mood change, with progressive elements coming to the fore in the police service. My message to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and other Front-Bench colleagues is that they should keep up the battle against the forces of conservatism because until they are defeated, public services can never be reformed.

Mr. Don Foster: I entirely agree with the remarks that the hon. Gentleman has just made. Will he go further and agree that we should be looking at other ways of breaking down barriers? I would love, and perhaps the hon. Gentleman would also love, to see traffic wardens taking on a wider role so that they, too, could keep their eyes and ears on what was happening in the area in which they were operating.

Mr. Salter: With due respect, I should like to give that idea further thought. The idea of backing traffic wardens at this stage does not have active appeal to me, primarily because in Reading we have just privatised our traffic warden service and the wardens are, as one would expect with a market-oriented service, approaching the job with tremendous gusto and even ticketing war veterans on Remembrance day. Although my seat is not as marginal as it once was, the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not join him in the love-in with traffic wardens. I suspect that he likes traffic wardens only because they wear yellow.

On health, I share all the instincts and prejudice of my tribe when it comes to the involvement of the private sector. However, I can live with the private finance initiative if it delivers better and quicker services to my constituents. I have no problem with using spare capacity in private hospitals to deliver badly needed operations that avoid the need for people to wait in pain and discomfort. Those in the private sector are trained by the public sector, so they certainly owe us something.

I warn the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), that the involvement of private sector managers in the delivery of a national health service needs to be proceeded with with extreme caution. Remember that the private sector has no magic wand. Look what happened at the privately run, privately owned and privately operated Portland hospital recently, with that dreadful dereliction of duty—something that the consultant said would never have happened in the

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worst-performing NHS trust. To quote the Prime Minister, which is always good at these times, the guiding principle must be:

> "What matters is what works."

The same principle surely needs to be applied to transport policy. While the Secretary of State for Transport has won himself many friends among Labour Members by having the courage to take on the vested interests of Railtrack and Railtrack shareholders, I wonder whether we are at a halfway house for the future of the rail infrastructure. The argument that the Prime Minister made in the Chamber that we gave rail privatisation a chance has some validity. It was not top of our list. It was given an opportunity to work and it failed.

I do not envisage that the City will run a mile if the track and infrastructure are taken back into public ownership with a guaranteed level of investment on which the private train operating companies can operate, with certain guarantees of safety and guarantees that certain standards will be met. After all, our private road haulage companies run on public roads and public motorways. I do not understand the Government's reluctance to go the final mile.

I have a hint for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions: he and his colleagues at the Department would be well advised to concentrate on and perhaps pick a few winners when it comes to transport policy.

The failure of successive Governments to address the school run is incomprehensible. I took the trouble of digging out from the website the report of STAG—the school travel advisory group. The period of its deliberation was 1998-99; there have been many other such studies. That is yet another report that is long on analysis but, unfortunately, short on conclusions. Twenty per cent. of all morning peak-time congestion is a result of the school run, but have we anything to say about it?

I am not necessarily saying that America is a wonderful model for the delivery of public services, but I am certainly in favour of the American-style school bus. It is easily identifiable. Parents feel secure about their children using it. It can penetrate the estates in a way that the ordinary public transport network cannot. I should like to see more radical, more comprehensive thinking at least to address the issue of school travel. In my town, which is one of the most congested in the country outside London and Birmingham, it is more than 20 per cent. easier to get around town during school half-term. I hope that other hon. Members with a similar experience will add their voices to mine on this issue. I am surprised that successive Governments have been slow to pick up on it.

After being frank and honest about my own Government, it is worth taking a look at the Conservative record. If four and a half years is long enough for us to have made a difference—or is it five years?—18 years was certainly long enough, so let us have a brief look at the Conservatives' performance over those four key areas.

In those 18 years, police numbers fell and crime doubled. The Government axed the police housing allowance, triggering one of the greatest recruitment and retention crises that we have witnessed in the Thames Valley police, which has been replicated in other parts of the country. You never had it so good under the Tories—if you were a criminal.

In transport, we had the £6 billion rip-off that was Railtrack—£6 billion of public money stolen to fund a botched and barmy privatisation which even in the most optimistic circumstances was never going to succeed. Some people have been reluctant to blame privatisation for the causes of the Hatfield and Paddington rail crashes. Yes, it is not the whole story, but I refer hon. Members to Lord Cullen's report, in which he said in black and white that the fragmentation of the rail network caused by privatisation led to a diminution in safety standards.

Chris Grayling: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Cullen report says clearly that safety on the railways has improved since privatisation?

Mr. Salter: The Cullen report said perfectly clearly that the fragmentation of the rail network led to a diminution of safety standards as a direct result of privatisation; one cannot have it both ways.

Bus deregulation also took place under the Conservatives, following the passage of the Transport Act 1985. It had a bad effect on my town but a worse effect on many other communities where they were not able to keep the public transport network in public ownership. Bus journeys fell by 25 per cent. in that period; no wonder congestion has risen. There were cuts in spending on road maintenance in the order of some 13 per cent. We had 18 years of transport under the Conservatives. They were anti-car, anti-train and anti-bus. That just about gives them a full house.

In health, the hospital building programme ground to a halt. The failed internal market created a postcode lottery in health care and there was a 25 per cent. cut in training places for nurses. We had a national health service starved of buildings, equipment and nurses but, inevitably, awash with accountants.

In education, there were funding cuts per pupil of £60 per pupil over the last three years of Conservative Government; 500,000 five, six and seven-year-olds were being taught in classes of 30 or more; and higher education funding was cut at a rate of 36 per cent. per student between 1989 and 1997. We saw lower funding, larger classes, crumbling school buildings and LMS, which we all knew stood for not local management of schools but less money for schools. Even the most impartial observer would conclude that on the issue of public services the Conservatives have very little to say and have a pretty lamentable record.

I want to turn to the Conservative party's political ideology and the failure not just to make a fist of political tactics, but to persuade the British public to accept its ideology and philosophy. Yes, we all remember the Ridley and Thatcher quotes. Nicholas Ridley's idea of local government was that councillors should assemble once a year and award the contracts to private firms. He even joked—ha, ha—afterwards that he would be prepared to pay those councillors more generous expenses. At the height of Thatcher's power and influence, that was the driving ideology behind the delivery of a local government, and it failed. Of course, Thatcher said:

> "There is no such thing as society."

Well, I am pleased that certain changes are occurring in the Conservative party's mood music—I shall call it no more than that. Given the leader whom it has elected, I will need a lot more than mood music to convince me that there has been a change of heart.

The last general election was notable not for the appallingly low turnout—although that should worry us all—but for the fact that, for once, we were able to make the argument for public services versus tax cuts, and the British people voted for public services. Ministers should remember that we have a mandate to deliver improvements in public services, and we should be bold about it.

I believe that we are starting to see a sea-change of the kind that we saw with the 1945 Government, whose influence considerably outlasted their six years in office and fed through into the body politic and the political consensus that led to the fact that Harold Macmillan built more council houses than any Labour Prime Minister. It may be ironic, bizarre and macabre to hear the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) say that tax cuts are now less important than improvements to public services, but that at least means that the Opposition are starting to dance to the Labour tune. They may not like that, but it is happening. They tried their policy of greed, tax cuts, "me, me, me" and individualism, and it has failed at two elections.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the official Opposition for giving us an opportunity to showcase our policies and expose the deficiencies in theirs. I should like to end with some advice to Opposition Members, not from me, but from Peter Kellner in the *Evening Standard*. I say this in the context of the last opinion poll, which, if the press coverage is to be believed, will have put the Prime Minister several points behind the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, the Prime Minister is on 61 per cent. approval, compared with 15 per cent.—hon. Members will pleased to know—for the leader of the Liberal Democrats and 14 per cent. for the leader of the Conservative party, who has yet to make any impact on his own party, never mind the public at large. Mr. Kellner writes:

> "Another week, another fashion. Suddenly the talk is of a Conservative revival.
>
> However, seven days of clement headlines cannot expunge a decade of"

disaster. He continues:

> "Much more needs to be done. Here is a five-point plan for the Tory leader for the rest of his Parliament.
>
> [1] Break with the past.
>
> [2] Arrange a public execution of your party's extremists."

I am against the death penalty, but I would buy the video. He continues:

> "[3] Neutralise the negatives"—

a tough job; most of them have been put on the Front Bench. The list continues:

> "[4] Make sure your party is as varied as the rest of 21st century Britain.
>
> Don't be deterred by people like John Redwood who said yesterday that the Tories should concentrate on public services rather than the social liberal agenda. These are not alternatives. You must do both."

Lastly, he says:

> "Be patient. Millions of voters still have bitter memories of the last Tory government. These will take time to fade . . . Your ambition for the next election"—

hon. Members should listen to this carefully—

> "should be more modest. The Tories would do well to gain 50 seats. That would take its total to 216. If you are bold and persistent in tackling all of the tasks listed above, then, with a little luck, your party could do almost as well next time as it did in 1945."

I welcome the Tories to the Damascus. I welcome their conversion to public services; I do not necessarily believe it—they may have convinced the Tory press that they are now the party of public services, but it will be a generation before they convince the British people.

8.23 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interests in the register.

When a governing party decides that it wishes to offer heartfelt advice to the Opposition, it is usually beginning to lose it in a big way with the British public. There was a sign of hubris in the remarks of the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter). He certainly has a rather different view of local services in our part of the world from mine, although I am glad that there was a slightly veiled threat towards the end of his remarks about what may happen if he does not get the third river crossing, which is much needed, and the proper improvements in our health service, for which we have waited too long. Of course, he did not tell the House that Reading hospital was in the queue to follow the very large Milton Keynes project. That went through under the Conservatives and—sure enough and on cue—when it was completed, the NHS went on to carry out the Reading project. What has happened under the Labour Government would have happened under the Conservatives.

I give the proposal one rather than three cheers. We need a new hospital, but it is a pity that many other health facilities are being closed at the same time. As my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) said, it is a pity that the new hospitals come with a reduction in the number of beds available and with a scale of development that means that there definitely will not be enough beds to meet local demand.

The debate began with the most touching and interesting scenes that we have seen in the Chamber for a little while. Rather like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the Secretaries of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and for Health were together on the Government Front Bench. They gave an exceedingly good impression of being great bosom pals—two peas in the pod—as they used to be in the early days of the so-called Blairite project. They were meant to be the two white hopes, at the cutting edge of a technological revolution, rising through the ranks until they displaced the Chancellor, the Foreign Secretary and all the other grandees whom the new leader had inherited.

What a difference a year or two has made. If we are to believe the spin in the press, these senior figures of the Blairite project have come to two totally different judgments about where the project is going and about how much support it has from Labour Back Benchers.

In the red corner is the Transport Secretary. He is trying to give the impression—good spinner that he is—that he is in the process of renationalising the railways on the cheap. In fact, he is trying to give the impression that he is renationalising them for absolutely nothing; he has reinvented renationalisation without compensation. I see that the hon. Member for Reading, West hopes that the

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Transport Secretary has done exactly that. The hon. Gentleman looks extremely perky but, if he has studied the small print—with this Government, we must always study the small print—he will know that there is a small snag: renationalisation is not on the horizon.

The Transport Secretary is dealing with a private sector company that had begun to make good progress in investing and developing a better railway in the first five years of privatisation, and Ministers acknowledged that themselves until a year ago. The message was sent to the pagers of Labour Members who were meant to say that there had been a big surge in ridership of the railways, that passenger numbers were up by a third and that freight was up by 40 per cent. They all knew the figures and they trotted them out. They made good salesmen for privatisation. Then the position changed and their pagers told them to write off those achievements.

The Transport Secretary has bankrupted a private sector company by refusing to supply the money that most people reasonably thought would be supplied. He will now discover that it will cost him twice or three times more to try to pump life into a bankrupt Railtrack than it would if he had done a sensible deal at the time of the original negotiations. Railtrack remains a private sector company as it is under the control of private sector accountants who are earning hearty fees.

The stated policy is that Railtrack will be returned to the private sector. There is some argument about the exact nature of the private company that will emerge and interesting troubles will be faced in getting it into the shape that the Transport Secretary would like. However, Labour Members must understand that, on current form and policy, he is not renationalising the company in the way that he suggests.

In the blue corner is the Secretary of State for Health. He takes the view that the Blairite project is on track. He does not think that he needs to make a leftward genuflection to Labour Back Benchers. He thinks that his future is best assured by being the very model of a modern Blairite general. In contrast, the Transport Secretary thinks that he needs an awful lot of support from Back Benchers and that, if he has enough support, he will terrify the Whips and the Prime Minister into promoting him because otherwise he will become a confounded nuisance. The difference in strategy is interesting.

The Secretary of State for Health is no more likely to privatise the health service than the Transport Secretary is to renationalise the railways. Again, we have to look through the Health Secretary's excellent spin. He is not about to say that people will have to pay a fee to go to the doctor or to have an operation and he is not about to sell off all our hospitals as profit-making operations and turn them into companies in the private sector. Nor did Conservative Ministers ever plan or wish to do that. We did not put that to the electorate or do anything similar during those long years in power.

I make a confident prediction that my colleagues and I will not fight the next general election on a ticket of profit-making hospitals that are privatised out of the NHS; nor will we fight it on the ticket of making people pay to go to the doctor. Given that there is meant to be a better spirit in the Chamber during debates, it is disgraceful that such stupid ideas are still being retold by Labour Members who say, "Ah ha! Vote Conservative and you will have to pay £10, £20 or £50 to see the doctor." There is not a shred of truth in that, and I hope that Ministers stop saying it.

Mr. Salter: The right hon. Gentleman, with his political career behind him, is known for his frankness. Will he interpret the contents of the memo issued by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), the shadow Treasury spokesman, to the shadow Chancellor, which was copied to the shadow Cabinet? It states:

> "The reforms, which we will be proposing, will end the NHS monopoly and will entail those who can afford it making some payment for healthcare services."

The right hon. Gentleman has rejected that concept. What does the memo mean?

Mr. Redwood: I have not rejected that concept. Indeed, it is the policy of the Labour party, too. Hon. Members tend to be better off and we all contribute to our health care costs when we pay for prescriptions, eye treatment and dentistry. We pay for chiropody and for drugs that are purchased across the counter in a chemist's shop. The hon. Gentleman should understand that we have a mixed system in this country which has been supported by parties of both persuasions. He is trying to read something into the memo that is not there. It could cover his interpretation, but I am telling him that it does not. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends have not been sitting around in smoke-filled rooms in the shadow Cabinet planning to charge people for visiting the doctor. They have made no such statement; there is no such policy; and we have received no such instruction on our pagers.

I am going further than I should, but I am sure that members of the Conservative Front Bench want to rule nothing in or out because they are having a genuine and thorough policy review. They are listening to people and studying a wide variety of systems abroad. I am confident in predicting—I only predict when I am sure of my ground—that the Conservative party will not go into the next election with the proposal that people should be charged for going to the doctor.

We think that there is one popular principle in the NHS which has been defended by all major parties in government since the founding fathers set it up after the war: if someone needs and wants health care of a stated range it should be free at the point of use. The first limitation on the wonderful promise that it would all be free came from members of the Labour party, the very founding fathers themselves, who decided to impose prescription charges. That policy has become bipartisan. Other changes, such as charges for checks on eyes and teeth, have also become bipartisan. The Labour party has had five years to change them, but it has seen the wisdom of keeping them as charges and of the generous exemptions.

There is no great wish in the country to go far beyond those proposals. Indeed, there is a wish to honour the pledge that if we need and want care, it should be available in reasonable time to a reasonable standard with a reasonable amount of choice, to echo the thoughts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), the former Secretary of State for Social Security, who had good ideas on how choice could be introduced.

The Secretary of State for Health would be well advised to be a little less pugilistic in such debates and a little more humble about the problems that many constituents face. I receive many letters from people whose GPs and, in due course, consultants at the local hospital have established that they need treatment. They have discovered that it will take a year or more to get the treatment that they need now, not after such a long wait. Quite a few of them, although not particularly rich, are busily privatising their health care because they are so frustrated and in so much pain. They want to get on with their lives. Some of them are of working age and want to get back to work, but the pain and the problem are impeding them from working properly or at all. So they simply cancel the holiday, sell the car, do whatever it takes, and pay a few thousand pounds for the operation in the private sector. That is happening on a large scale; for many people, that fundamental promise, in which I believe and in which I hoped the Government believed, is not being met.

What do Members of Parliament usually discover when we write and complain or represent our constituents' views? I am not going to parade my constituents' problems in the House as they deserve a little confidentiality. However, some of them are suffering and in pain; they need my support, so I write confidentially to a Minister. I do not want to highlight their problems in the press because that is not terribly helpful. The reply always comes back, "Oh well, everything is now wonderful because we have spent £300 million on this, £400 million on that, a billion pounds on something else" and so on. Those numbers are meaningless to my constituents. As my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk said, there is a growing gap between the way in which the public want the Government to respond to their problems and the way in which the Government are responding in practice.

I invite Ministers to imagine going to their local department store to buy red socks. They would not be impressed if the department store said, "Sorry, we haven't got any. You could have some ties; perhaps in a year's time, we may have some red socks." They would probably not go to the store again or would kick up a fuss and tell it to get some socks. If they wrote a letter of complaint, would they be impressed if the shop's general manager wrote back, "I am sorry that there weren't any red socks, but you will be delighted to know that we spent £0.5 million on the sock department last year and will spend £1 million on it next year. Of course, for that £1 million we cannot guarantee that red socks will be available on the occasions when you may choose to come here, but please keep trying. Please keep taking the pills because one day we may have spent enough to have red socks when you come shopping"?

People are paying an average of £1,000 each in taxes every year, or £4,000 for the average family, for the NHS. Of course, lots of transfers are going on; I am glad that the rich subsidise the poor and that the well subsidise the sick. Sometimes, transfers go the other way; the poor can subsidise the rich because it is possible to be rich and ill, although some Labour Members do not seem to recognise that, or poor and healthy. The main subsidies, however, go in the direction of which we all approve, from rich to poor and from the well to the sick. Ministers should accept that £4,000 for an average family of four is still a lot of money; people would like to get something more for it than they are currently getting.

An interesting thread has run through the more thoughtful speeches in our debate. How is it that a new Labour Government can sweep to power, pick up where the Conservatives left off, and even, after two or three years, start hurling more money at the problem than the Conservatives, despite missing a couple of years when they first came to power, and yet nothing seem to improve? Indeed, as some of my right hon. Friends argued powerfully, in some ways and in some places, things are deteriorating; the money is not getting through and we are not getting what we want. In my own locality, we are waiting for a new hospital, which will not have nearly enough beds when it finally opens. Over the years, I have urged both Labour and Conservative Ministers to get on with the scheme and allow more beds in the redevelopment. I am always told by health experts that more beds are not needed because there will be more day surgery and hot-bedding. People will zip in and out; they will have a hip operation, then leap out of bed within three hours so that someone else can come in and do the same. Life is not like that; there will be considerable, growing demand for beds in which people can stay overnight or for a couple of days.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a visit to New Zealand, the Select Committee on Health, met a medical manager who told us that when a hospital was allowed to have more than 400 beds, it ceased to be properly managed. I wonder whether in thinking about beds, we miss the real issue—that we are not getting suitable management to use what we have properly.

Mr. Redwood: That is a valuable point; our system is over-administered and undermanaged. As described by my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk, it has layers upon layers; an increasing number of trusts and committees preside over that massive expenditure and absorb a lot of money.

What do we get? We do not get more operations; we get more glossy brochures. We do not get more nurses and doctors where we want them; we get more assistants, administrators, advisers and other consultants. We get more accountants and so-called financial control, but we do not seem to get the health care that we require.

There was a certain poetic justice in hearing on the radio only this morning that the curse of the cuts has at last caught up with the Labour Government. I remember all those regular occasions when Conservative Ministers were invited into studios to be pilloried on that basis. Having announced hundreds of millions or billions of pounds of extra money, they were told that it represented a cut, because it was bespoke and people in the service for which it was destined always wanted more. Of course they did; that is the nature of the political and administrative bargaining process.

As Labour spokesmen stoked up those issues in those days, it was apt to hear on the radio this morning no less a figure than the Secretary of State for Health clutching his billions and saying, "Haven't I done well?" but having to face a letter from a senior chief executive in the south-east health region. The letter was sent to all the chief executives of the hospitals in that part of the world. It said that they were in a dire financial situation and had immediately to make cuts of £60 million in the last two months of this year in order to live within what the Minister has described as very generous budgets.

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The letter went on helpfully to state that that would involve making very difficult decisions and damaging the clinical and medical services to the people in each of the areas concerned and in respect of each hospital and trust.

The Secretary of State said that £60 million was rather a small sum, as that part of the country was getting £6 billion, and that anyone should be able to manage things better in order not to need the £60 million that the chief executive thought to be missing. The right hon. Gentleman is probably right, but the problem is that his chosen chief executive, who is responsible for finding the £60 million, could not do so. She said that it was impossible and that she could find it only by damaging medical and clinical services. The Secretary of State should be a little more humble. He should either decide that he has got the wrong person running that great big chunk of the health service—if it is so easy to find the £60 million, he must find the person who can get it without doing any damage—or accept that there is a problem and that these sums are not enough and he is at least £60 million light in that particular part of the world, and probably light in other parts of the world as well, as we will discover.

When the national health service was launched in 1947, before most of us here were born, I imagine that its establishment was a great relief for many people who had voted Labour, or indeed had voted Conservative and were wedded to a similar type of scheme. It was a bipartisan view that people should be taken away from fear of the doctor's bill and that there should be much more state involvement. It was the question whether the hospitals should be nationalised that caused the dispute between the main parties. None the less, a bipartisan church had been working on the issue, as had Labour people. I can understand why. It must have been great. When the health service was set up, people on low incomes were offered a much higher standard of health care than they could previously have aspired to in terms of the voluntary arrangements and charging that predated the national health service.

I often wonder what would have happened if, at the same time as launching the health service, or instead of doing so, Labour had said, "It is terrible that a lot of people are not rich enough to have a holiday, so we will set up a national holiday service." One can see how attractive such a proposal would be. Everybody would have a week's free holiday in a resort of their choice.

Mr. Lilley: Not in the resort of their choice.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend is ahead of me. First, they would have been offered the resort of their choice, just as they were offered the health care of their choice. However, if the then Government had introduced such a service and nationalised the buses and railways to get people to their destinations, we would now be sitting around debating why it cost so much to run the service and asking why I had been told that I must go to Skegness when I wanted my two weeks in Bournemouth. We would be asking why, although I said that I wanted to go on holiday in August, I was told that I had to go in February in two years' time, because there was a long waiting list. If somebody had then told me, "By the way, when you get there, you'll have to share a hostel dormitory with lots of other men, although I hasten to add that you'll be given your own bed," I would by that stage have decided that I had grown out of the national holiday service and that the lack of choice and the frustrations were not very good.

Labour Members have been kind enough to giggle a little about that prospect, but I ask them to think about why we have not modernised the offering of the national health service as we should have done. Is it right that people should now be told that they have to go into mixed or even single-sex dormitory wards? Why is there not a choice of separate rooms or better partitions? Is it right that patients are offered a fairly standard table d'hôte menu? Could there not be more imagination in the range of meals and eating times?

Is it right that there are so few additional services available even for those patients who would like to pay a little to enjoy different services while they are in hospital? Why cannot patients rent digital multi-choice televisions and computer systems to play with while they are trying to recover from an operation? Why cannot they have a range of services available at their bedside or, even better, in their room, to cheer them up? We are not thinking creatively enough about what people would like or about how we could use the money that people would freely choose to spend while still enjoying the benefit of the fundamental pledge to give them a roof over their head, the operation that they need and the nursing care that they receive in hospital.

I know that the Health Secretary has said that he will consider such matters, and I hope that he does. I hope that he will also consider how private finance can be jazzed up and made to work a little better. There are too many cases of private finance delaying necessary developments and of a failure properly to transfer risk, which is part of the purpose of having a private finance initiative. Why does the Secretary of State not decide that it would be a good idea to alleviate the bed crisis by allowing private enterprise to build blocks of rooms on or adjacent to the sites of leading hospitals where that is physically possible, as it must be in many cases? People could then choose to rent the room of their choice while receiving free NHS care. Would that not build a proper bridge between the NHS and the private sector and help to create capacity, which is clearly lacking at the moment?

We could then concentrate more NHS money on clinical and medical care, hiring more nurses and doctors, because we would not need as many ancillary staff if part of the hotel functions were paid for by patients choosing to spend their own money. Pay beds used to be anathema to Labour, but there are still some left. They would now be seen as a public-private partnership. I am happy to use that language because that is the sort of PPP that we need generously to expand so that we can give people more choice, modernise the service, bring in more money and provide more care and treatment.

I still have too many constituents who cannot get the treatment that they need for the simple reason that there are not enough beds in the local hospital and there are not enough nurses and doctors to service the number of beds that we need. Those problems can be solved. The Government always say that there are not enough nurses and doctors because they inherited a situation in which there were not enough nurses and doctors. It takes three years to train a nurse. If the Government were very worried about the number of trained nurses in the country, all they had to do in their first or second year was to increase training, and by now they would have had as many nurses as they wanted.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden has said, there are many trained nurses throughout the country who choose not to work as nurses, either in the NHS or at all. The Government ought to address that because it shows that there is something wrong with the terms and conditions of employment in our hospitals. If the Government have so much money and the problem is one of pay, the solution is simple—to put up pay to a level that people find acceptable.

I hope that the Government will listen to their colleague the hon. Member for Reading, West, if not to me, on the issue of pay differentiation. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it would be fair to give nurses throughout the country a fairly equal standard of living rather than to pay them all the same amount. If they are paid the same, nurses in Reading and London will have a pretty miserable quality of life, while those in cheaper parts of the country will do a bit better, and that would not be terribly fair. The Government ought to consider how they can find a better solution to the pay problem, particularly in depressed parts of the country.

If the problem is morale, as I fear in some cases it is, and working conditions, the great bevy of managers that the Government have brought into the NHS ought to be able to tackle it. If they cannot, the Government must sort out the management. I fear that the management is too cumbersome and complex; there are too many people in the chain of command, and health service managers often take a very defensive approach. It is much easier to have another consultation, hold another committee meeting or send out another glossy brochure than to make somebody responsible for something and try to make something happen as a result.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we cannot run the public service if we do not have the right people in it and that it is no surprise that we cannot recruit enough nurses, policemen and members of the armed forces if we cannot offer them the right working conditions? We should get back to giving them the right conditions, and to the situation that used to pertain when those who worked for the public services were regarded as key members of society.

Mr. Redwood: I entirely agree.

I must move on to transport, and I am glad to see the Transport Secretary in his place. He has set out the plans for what he thinks is a massive investment in new transport facilities. We have had the much advertised and much delayed £180 billion blockbuster 10-year plan. What strikes me about it is the poverty of expectation on private capital over such a long period and in such a large and prosperous country.

What are the figures? The Secretary of State believes that we can raise only £56 billion from the private sector to supplement the substantial sums of public money going into the £180 billion. There are difficulties with the right hon. Gentleman's arithmetic, and when the figures are unpacked we discover that a lot of the £64 billion for railways—or is it now £67 billion?—is subsidy for existing activities. Not a great deal is investment in major new projects.

Mr. Don Foster: Following the 10-year plan, we had the Strategic Rail Authority plan. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that it involves a 14 per cent. reduction in the private sector money that the Government expect to bring in? What does that say about Government confidence in that private sector investment?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is ahead of me and he is absolutely right. The Government and the SRA have had to reduce expectations for the good reason that their plans are much delayed and much damaged by the actions taken recently. The original plan is some 18 months out of date, but the Government appear to have rolled it forward. It is still called a 10-year plan rather than an eight and a half year plan because they are worried about the gap in investment and new finance this year, which results from the problems generated by Railtrack's bankruptcy and the delay in agreeing the new franchises with the train companies.

The investment in the railway is too small, so how could it be increased? The Secretary of State could and should immediately do two simple things to speed up and magnify that prospective private sector investment. First, he should return Railtrack to the private sector as quickly as possible. I hope that Ministers segregate that task. If the Secretary of State wants to, he should be the proponent of a company limited by guarantee— that will need a lot of detailed and hands-on work from the Government and the people who put it together—but a completely independent Minister, if one can be found, should judge the competition between the bidders, who would then need a licence from the Government.

Whether the Secretary of State's CLG gets going or not—that will be expensive and difficult—I hope that he returns Railtrack to the private sector as quickly as possible. Why does he not tell us today that he intends to put out a sale memorandum within a month and that bids will close two months thereafter? That would show a sense of urgency. If Railtrack could be up and running as a private sector company by autumn—the first feasible date that the right hon. Gentleman could possibly achieve—we would lose only about a year of the investment programme and we might be able to rebuild more quickly.

On the timetable that the Government seem to be following, however, a much longer period in administration is in prospect. I am sure that there are all sorts of problems in compiling an accurate and detailed sale memorandum, but they are exactly what the Secretary of State must cut through if he is serious about private sector investment in the track.

An even easier task for the Secretary of State or his SRA is getting investment in rolling stock going again, although it has been badly damaged by a company's discovery that there is not enough power in the network to run the new trains that it has bought. That will deter other companies from buying other types of new train that might be power hungry. More importantly, delay and damage have been caused by the failure of the SRA and the Secretary of State to renew franchises. Worse, they have told the industry that they do not like the current structure and that they want the train operating companies to be merged.

We have not heard the exact way in which the Secretary of State and the SRA want that to happen or how they can insist on private sector companies ~~doing~~ it. We live in expectation of learning that. They have devised the

[Mr. Redwood]

particularly silly policy that only one train company can use a specific London terminus. Why does not the Secretary of State apply that to aviation? Why can all sorts of different airlines use a single airport, where management problems are greater because not allowing a plane to land is a serious matter? By contrast, holding a train outside a station is a relatively easy task, which does not entail worrying about safety.

It is odd that the Secretary of State has such a tidy mind that he wants only one train company in any London terminus. What happens cross country is more difficult to judge; I presume that he would allow more than one train company to use Crewe or Reading, where different companies go although they may travel to a different London terminus.

The policy that I have described would delay ordering new trains because sorting out the mergers and the amalgamations of franchises will take time. It would delay negotiations of the new franchises, and companies will not order new rolling stock during that time. They want to know whether they are winners or losers—whether they will survive or go down. They want to know the sort of franchise that they will get before they commit a decent amount of money to new investment.

The Secretary of State could make two decisions today to begin to solve the problems. If he does not do that, we will not get a fair proportion of the money for the 10-year plan in the next two or three years, and there will be nothing to show for it before the general election.

Why will the remainder of transport receive only £120 billion? That is not much money. Let us put it in the context of British people buying 10 per cent. fewer cars each year than they bought last year, which was a good year for buying cars. That applies only if one likes buying cars. It was a bad year for the Government, who do not like people having cars.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): What is my right hon. Friend's view of the plans of the Mayor of London to introduce congestion charging and the likely burden that that will place on public sector workers such as firefighters and ambulance drivers who work inside the charging area but cannot afford to live there because of property prices? They have to drive their cars to work because they work unsocial hours or have to carry equipment with them. I understand that the Secretary of State has the power to exempt groups of people from the charge. Does my right hon. Friend agree that he should use it?

Mr. Redwood: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend that if the Government were foolish enough to press ahead with such a scheme, they would have to make generous exemptions. I am sure that many Members of Parliament would expect to be exempted, too, because they regard themselves as important workers who do not live in London but clearly work there from time to time. The embarrassment caused by exempting Members of Parliament would be interesting. However, we are trespassing on private grief: the Mayor is keener on such a scheme than the Government. We shall watch this space.

I mentioned the scale of investment. If we assume that 10 per cent. fewer people than last year buy cars in the next 10 years and that, on average, they buy a modest new car, that would mean total investment of £180 billion over 10 years by private individuals and companies in private motor cars. That puts into perspective the figure that the Secretary of State claims is large. If we add the money that companies spend on lorries, vans and so on, the amount would be much more than £180 billion. Of course, the Secretary of State omits private investment in motor vehicles from the plan, but he includes private investment in trains. That is an interesting method of calculating transport investment.

The British people know their Government well. We had a record year for new cars last year, and that clearly suggests that people have decided that public transport will not work well or quickly under the Government. They will therefore continue to try to upgrade their cars and increase the number of cars per family because they have to use that mode of transport to get around.

It is not that many people are fanatics about their cars in the way that some Ministers suggest. Many people have no choice. In a rural area, there is absolutely no choice; in an urban area, there is no choice for certain journeys. It is becoming so difficult to get to stations in big towns and cities these days that people often decide that, instead of battling for three quarters of an hour or an hour to get to the station, they might as well spend 20 minutes getting on to the motorway network and getting somewhere. They conclude that they probably do not use much more petrol doing that, and that they will save a lot of money and inconvenience. Ministers will have to work hard to get the private capital into the system, and they will have to work with local government to understand why so many people are voting with their cars and with their feet, and are unwilling to take the public transport option.

The other day, I was invited to a presentation at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in my capacity as a Member of Parliament representing a Thames valley constituency. The presentation was designed to bring us up to date with the so-called multi-modal study affecting the M3-M4 area, from just outside the M25 to Reading. We had a long, academic debate about whether this was the right region to consider—apparently, many opinions have been expressed and many papers written on that—and we were told that one of the aims of the thing was to see how the Department could come up with a solution that would solve more of our transport problems with trains, and by switching people out of their cars.

I do not know whether the Secretary of State is aware that his Department is, at the same time, saying that Wokingham alone will have to absorb 7,750 new houses over a 15-year period. Families will move into those homes as they are built, and they will be two or three-car families, because that is the nature of the area. Far from limiting traffic or vehicle use, therefore, the Secretary of State's own Department is busily undermining his integrated transport policy with a planning decision that is deeply unpopular in my constituency and which will greatly increase the traffic problem.

The Secretary of State should also be aware that we are currently short of capacity on the trains as well as on the roads. It is not an answer to say that all we have to do is switch people out of their cars on to the trains that are waiting there for them. The trains are not there. The Secretary of State says in his plan that he reckons he can increase train usage by 50 per cent. over a 10-year period. As a starting point for that increase, we currently do only about 6 or 7 per cent. of our journeys on the train, so even if we increase train travel by 50 per cent., the trains will still only take up about a year's worth of total traffic growth. There will not be a switch, in terms of proportion, from cars to trains, on that very modest figure of 50 per cent. growth in train use. Unfortunately, achieving even that growth is going to be problematic, given the lack of decisions that we have seen so far.

I urge the Secretary of State for Transport to understand that, in an area such as mine, people are buying cars and using them. They are very frustrated; they cannot get to the stations easily, and when they do, there is insufficient capacity on the trains. South West Trains does not have a renewed franchise, and it is not making any investment until it gets one. The local council and South West Trains cannot put in the new station until the Railtrack problem is sorted out and South West Trains have a franchise. The reality on the ground is that the billions being talked about by the Government are not achieving any improvements whatever, and things are often getting worse.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will be able to come to the House in a couple of years—if he is still Secretary of State—and say that much more money has been spent on the railways over those two years. But most of that money will be tipped down the drain. It will go on the fees of the administrator and the consultants, the losses being built up by a business whose morale has been shattered, and the losses that will be incurred because the business is no longer controlling its costs in the way that a private sector company would have done. Public capital will be going in, where private capital could have gone in if the company had not been bankrupted.

We have seen great problems in the public services, and they are getting worse. More money is sometimes helpful, but in all too many cases, more Government money is going into the wrong things and making the problem worse rather than better. We need a massive expansion of private capital in health and in the railways. The two spinners—the two Secretaries of State who sit there like Tweedledum and Tweedledee—suggest to their Back Benchers that they are going in different directions, but they are fundamentally united in their purpose. They believe that the art of government is in spinning, and they will both preside over a substantial deterioration in the services in their care.

9.4 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a small contribution to this debate. Indeed, I am grateful to the Opposition for tabling the motion, because it gives me a chance to focus on a public service that has been a huge success story in my constituency: the police service. Incidentally, Opposition Members have hardly mentioned that important public service during this long debate. I believe that that is because of its success in the past four and a half years.

Given that I have had the dubious honour of listening to most of the speeches made by Opposition Members on their chosen topic, I shall make a couple of observations about them before going on to the constituency issue that I wish to raise.

I cannot ignore the unsolicited references by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) to my constituency and the Vale of Glamorgan by-election, not once or twice but, as *Hansard* will confirm, six times. That convinces me that it must be haunting him—and so it should. I remind the House that that by-election in 1989 was based on the state of one of our most important public services, the health service, all that time ago when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was pushing through the Tory health reforms.

I am eternally grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for my getting elected in that by-election. Had it not been for his personal intervention, I would not have been elected. I thank him for the fact that I have won every election—I have had the majority vote from my electors in every election—since 1989, which is in part due to his intervention. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) shouts from a sedentary position that I lost in 1992. Let me tell him that my electors elected me in that election. It was 64 South Africans who made the difference in the fiddled election system that the Tories introduced in the meantime. *[Interruption.]* Ask them to check the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is a pity that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe is no longer in his place. In his speech, he said that the Tories lost the 1989 by-election because there was a conspiracy between the Labour party and the British Medical Association to fight the election under the false claim that the Tories intended to privatise the health service and to introduce charges. He may believe in conspiracy theories, but I do not and he is wrong to think that there was one then.

The doctors acted entirely independently. They put forward a GP candidate and fought the election on the argument that the Tories intended to privatise the health service. I do not believe that that was the right hon. and learned Gentleman's intention. Nor do I believe that there was at that time a specific proposal to introduce charging, but it unravels the argument put forward in the Conservative motion today. The truth is that the Tories do not support the national health service or public services. The motion makes no reference whatever to support for, or commitment to, the public services, or to enhancing or strengthening them.

Chris Grayling: I wonder whether I could pose a question to the hon. Gentleman. If it is the case that the Conservative party has no interest in the public services and in the national health service, and that the Labour party has that interest, how can it be that the chairman of the Labour party recently admitted that the state of the health service in many ways is worse than it was under the Conservatives?

Mr. Smith: That has nothing to do with the mood music of the parties today. There has been a week or two of bad publicity regarding public services, so the Tories have jumped on the bandwagon and tabled a motion for an Opposition-day debate on public services. That is very brave of them, but no one in the country believes that they have any commitment whatever to the public services. If they do not believe me, they should look at the opinion polls in today's newspapers, which show that despite the difficulties in recent weeks, despite Captain Mainwaring,

[Mr. Smith]

the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, jumping on the bandwagon and all of a sudden coming out in favour of public services, no one in the country believes them.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): The Leader of the Opposition was a public servant a long time ago and a member of Her Majesty's armed forces, so he is hardly jumping on a bandwagon.

Mr. Smith: Absolutely. That is why it is amazing that that other great public service has literally not been mentioned until now by the Conservative party. The reason is—the hon. Gentleman may not be aware of it—that the Conservative party does not support public services or the public ethos. It believes that public service is a necessary evil that has to be provided because the private sector either cannot or is unwilling to provide it. The public services will never be safe in Tory hands.

The Tories have got on the public service bandwagon this week. The other week, we had another beauty: they came out in favour of reforming the second Chamber to have 80 per cent. elected peers, whereas 12 months or a little longer ago they did not even support the abolition of hereditary peers. The good captain in charge has panicked. He has literally been non-existent on the political scene for the past six months and he is picking up each bandwagon as it comes along.

As today's opinion polls show, the Tories will not win the argument and they will not win support, despite the order from the good captain, "Don't mention the euro." John Cleese in "Fawlty Towers" said not to mention something else, but that is the line in the Tory party: do not mention the euro, pretend we support public services and say anything we possibly can to get on the next bandwagon.

Chris Grayling: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that week by week we as individual Members of Parliament receive either letters or visits in our surgeries from people who are suffering as a result of the failures of his party to deliver improvements in public services? How can he say that it is us who have no interest in this area, when it is palpably his party that is presiding over a situation that is getting worse, not better?

Mr. Smith: Because the Conservative party had 18 years in charge of the public services and they ran them down to an appalling level during that period. There was no transport plan for nearly 20 years. Hospitals were closed. There was a reduction in the number of beds, nurses and doctors. That happened not because the Tories wanted to take health care away from the British people, but because of their ideological belief that the private sector is always best. They believed that if a gap were created in health care services it would automatically be filled by their friends in the private sector. Of course, that did not happen.

Andrew Selous: Like several of his colleagues, the hon. Gentleman seems to be keen to give us a history lesson, but will he remember that it was his party which was unable to fulfil its hospital building programme and to fund nurses' pay when they were in power in a previous Administration? If we are going to look at history, perhaps we should look at it fairly on both counts.

Mr. Smith: I am happy to make historical comparisons, particularly this one. In the last few years, the country has seen the biggest hospital building programme that it has seen for decades, and a greater increase in nursing recruitment than it has seen for a long time. According to an answer given in Health questions this afternoon, 10,000 were recruited last year. Yes, I am happy to make comparisons showing the record of a Labour Government who are committed to the public service ethos—who believe in public services, considering them to provide not just the best but the fairest way of ensuring that the many benefit, not just a few who can pay.

That is not just my view, but the view of the British people. It will not be changed by a couple of policy pronouncements that have been made in the last couple of weeks, or by a motion that does not even state that the Opposition support public services.

Much has been said today about some of the Government's difficulties in providing services. It should be recognised that the climate in which they are being provided now is very different from the climate under the Tories. We now have a successful and growing economy. We have the lowest unemployment for more than 25 years, taking into account regional variations, and we have growth rates that have not been enjoyed for a long time. We have the lowest inflation for nearly 40 years. That successful economy is the backdrop to the current situation.

One consequence is that the problems we now face in delivering public services are very different from those experienced during the 18 disastrous years of Tory provision. Of course it can be difficult to recruit nurses and teachers, because competition in the labour market is 10 times greater than it was during that disastrous Tory period. That means that we must be more innovative, and introduce new policies to overcome the problems.

I want to draw Ministers' attention to the arbitrary tests imposed on new nursing recruits. I have reason to believe that they do not necessarily reflect the ability and aptitude of potential recruits. I understand that many young women, in particular, want to move to the profession from managerial and other backgrounds, but cannot surmount that initial hurdle. The same applies to teachers. We are offering incentives for teacher training, but it seems that potential recruits are being put off. I think we should examine the standard of access to teaching and postgraduate certificate of education courses.

The main issue that I want to raise is the success of the police service in my constituency. We can, I think, be very proud of the Government's record in regard to the tackling of crime. In the past four years, we have reduced crime by 22 per cent. In my constituency, there has been a 33 per cent. reduction in recorded crime in the past five years alone. There were 15,000 recorded incidents in 1996, but the latest crime survey figures show that the number fell to 10,000 last year. That is a fantastic achievement by the police and their partners in my constituency.

That would be a wonderful achievement in its own right, but 10 years ago the crime rate in my constituency, and in the town of Barry there, was the highest per capita among all comparable communities in the UK.

Angela Watkinson: The hon. Gentleman is extremely lucky to have either a good police service in his area, or adequate resourcing. My neighbouring constituency has the largest concentration of night clubs in the Metropolitan police district, apart from the west end of London. The demands that have to be met in the late-night entertainment centre in that constituency mean that there is often no police officer on duty on Friday and Saturday nights in my constituency.

Mr. Smith: I sympathise with the hon. Lady, as my constituency's principal town, Barry, is a major seaside resort. We have many clubs and entertainment centres that attract lots of people, especially through the summer. They create difficult policing problems, but even so crime has been reduced in the way that I described.

There is no doubt that the fall in the crime rate is due in part to the extra resources that have been given to police in our area, which mean that there are more police on the beat. It is also in part a result of close work with communities in the area. There is a very close partnership between local authorities, voluntary groups, the police and the schools. Large-scale preventive measures have been taken to help reduce the crime rate, and they have been incredibly successful.

A number of other reasons for the fall can be adduced, and one is that we have damn good coppers. Another factor is the good leadership in the area's police force. For the first time in a long time, many serving policing officers in the Vale of Glamorgan division who work in and police the area also live there, and bring their children up there. Their children go to local schools, so the officers have a shared and vested interest in seeing crime tackled in the area. We have moved away from that strategy over the years, and we should return to it.

The achievement in my area has been so remarkable that it was recognised at the end of last year by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary. South Wales Police achieved one of the highest reductions in crime in the UK, and the chief constable, the local superintendent of police, whose name is Colin Jones, and some serving officers were invited to No. 10 Downing street. They were congratulated on the excellent public service that they had been providing over four or five years and on the excellent statistics that they had achieved. They were invited to discuss with my right hon. Friends some of the reasons for their tremendous record.

I emphasise that the record is tremendous. I recall bringing business and community leaders to the House to make representations to Home Office Ministers about the level of crime that existed some 10 years ago. The crime rate was so bad then that I would not mention it in debates in this House. I did not want the area that I represent to suffer from any associated bad publicity, but we wanted something to be done. The problem facing local businesses, clubs and entertainment establishments was not that they were struggling in a difficult economic climate, but that the crime rate was so bad that they could not get insurance companies to insure their buildings or stock, and they could not trade as normal. That is how bad the situation was, but 12 years later we have the safest community in south Wales and one of the safest in the United Kingdom, with one of the largest reductions in crime figures in the UK.

I want my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to know that we are extremely grateful that the chief constable of South Wales Police was recognised with a knighthood in the new year honours. I have no doubt that had something to do with his excellent achievements. I hope that the achievements of other officers—in particular Superintendent Jones and his team in the Vale of Glamorgan division—will be recognised in the same way. They have all played an important role.

The Government's success in public services in my constituency is not just the result of increased resources, preventive policies and working in partnership. A major contribution has been made by the radical reduction in poverty and unemployment. There is a direct relationship with the reduction in crime. Do not ask me—ask any local bobby. When the police used to apprehend someone who was up to no good, the first two questions they asked were, "Are you working?" and "Where do you live?". The officers could usually narrow down their suspects by knowing their income or the area or conditions in which they lived. That has disappeared because of the dramatic improvement in the elimination of poverty and the reduction in unemployment. In my constituency, unemployment has fallen 40 per cent. in the past four and a half years. Youth unemployment, which produced the biggest perpetrators of crime, has fallen by 70 per cent. Neither unemployment nor poverty excuses crime but they do explain it.

Today's Opposition debate was rumbled when the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), the former Secretary of State for Social Security, said that there is no relationship between poverty and health. That is the one statement people will remember from today's debate. The Opposition do not believe that there is any relationship between the health of the people of this country and their ability to get a job, live in a decent house, enjoy a decent diet, wear decent clothing and look after their children properly. Conservative Members do not make that connection because they do not in their hearts believe in the ethos of public services—and never will. Today's debate has been an absolute sham and the people of this country will rumble them.

9.29 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I refer hon. Members to the declaration that I made on 14 January 2002 at column 33.

This has been an interesting debate and there have been several excellent contributions from Conservative former Secretaries of State, but in many ways it has been a tale of two debates, because many Labour Back Benchers have simply taken us on a ramble through history. They seem to think that the world stopped in May 1997 and that nearly five years of Labour Government is a thing of fiction. Sadly for patients, pupils and passengers, the Labour Government are too much of a reality—a reality that is delivering deteriorating public services and a demoralised work force.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) put his finger on the truth when he said that Labour Members should understand that

[Mrs. Theresa May]

outside the House there was widespread anger and shame about the state of our public services, and that people's disillusion came from a despair that the current politicians would ever resolve the problems that had been created in our public services.

People would be even more angry and disillusioned if they had heard most of Labour Members' speeches tonight, because their cavalier attitude to the chaos in health, transport and education—their disregard for the devastation that their policies have wrought in public services—was breathtaking in its arrogance.

Perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe gave another clue when he said that he had hoped to find a consensus today on the need for diversity and choice and the involvement of the private sector, particularly in the health service, but saw instead the dead wood on the Labour Back Benches failing to recognise not only the needs of patients, parents and passengers, but even the policies of their own Ministers.

I said that we had a number of rambles through history. The hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) indulged in a very slow ramble through history, completely ignoring the record of his own Government in its first term from 1997 and completely ignoring the reality of the services that people have to use day in, day out.

The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) painted a picture of Government success in Worcester. He even spoke about success in education. That is not the sort of success that I remember from the delegation of heads from Worcestershire who came to see me when I was an education spokesman, to complain about levels of funding for their schools.

I am sorry that I missed the speech by the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter).

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend missed nothing.

Mrs. May: My hon. Friend says that I missed nothing. I am sorry that I missed the speech, because the hon. Gentleman has previously been quite critical of his own Government's record in the past four and a half years. [Hon. Members: "Where is he?"] Indeed, sadly he is not here to listen to these winding-up speeches.

When the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) took an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) about the comments by the chairman of the Labour party about how bad the health service was under Labour, the hon. Gentleman said that that did not count because it was not part of the mood music. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman stands on doorsteps and tells patients who have been waiting on trolleys for hours that it does not matter because it is not part of his party's mood music and sees what sort of answer he gets from them.

The honourable and notable exception to all those speeches by Labour Members came from the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate), who is present. I was a little concerned when he started his speech by saying that it is not just size that matters, but how you use it.

Dr. Stoate: I can prove it.

Mrs. May: It is a good job that my husband is not present to hear the hon. Gentleman suggest that he could prove it to me, but the hon. Gentleman's speech revealed a refreshing approach from a Back-Bench Labour Member. He said that the monolithic structure of the health service was a problem and that money was not the only answer. He cited several examples of the way in which innovative thinking should be introduced into the health service to solve the problems. I suggest to the Secretary of State for Health that he watches out for his job, because it sounds to me as though the hon. Member for Dartford has rather more ideas about the future of the health service than the Secretary of State has.

We made an amazing discovery in the speech—I have to say that it was a shambles of a speech—made by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). We know that the Liberal Democrats say one thing nationally and another thing locally and that Front-Bench Liberal Democrat Members disagree among themselves and have different policies, but what we heard tonight was a Front-Bench spokesman for the Liberal Democrats disagreeing with himself within five minutes in his own speech. He denied, but then confirmed, that the Liberal Democrats are considering charging for access to the NHS.

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady; I am genuinely grateful to her for mentioning charging. When we last debated public services in the House, the shadow Chancellor refused to repeat his party's manifesto commitment to an NHS free at the point of use. Does she support the shadow Chancellor or her manifesto, on which she stood for election at the last general election?

Mrs. May: I would have more reason to answer the hon. Gentleman if his party knew what its own policy on the health service was—it does not know, as I shall go on to say later in my speech.

We heard particularly powerful contributions from my right hon. Friends the Members for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) and for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk made the very valid point that it is time that the Government took responsibility for being in government and for their record in government. Her criticism was particularly trenchant when she talked about the Government's complete failure to understand the needs of rural areas.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden made a number of very important points about the difference between official figures on teacher vacancies and the reality faced—day in, day out—by schools throughout the country. He pointed out what seems absolutely clear to everyone but the Transport Secretary: the Strategic Rail Authority 10-year plan for the railways fails to deliver what is needed—an increase in capacity. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham said, money is being thrown down the drain to advisers and consultants because Railtrack is in administration, while the Government completely fail to set out their criteria for bidders to take over Railtrack and to take it out of administration.

Let us come to the state of our public services. An insight was given into that recently by the Deputy Prime Minister in his speech to the Fabian Society. He spoke about part of his own constituency and said that it was not unique. He then said:

> "Across the land are neighbourhoods just like it—where public services have let people down, badly."

With observations like that, perhaps it is little wonder that the Deputy Prime Minister is now being rubbished by the likes of the Minister for Europe.

Phil Hope: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No, I will not give way.

The Secretary of State for Health in replying to this debate attempted to paint a different picture—one of delivery in the health service. Of course, that picture is totally at odds with the experience of patients who wait hours on trolleys and who return from holiday to find that their operations have been cancelled while they have been away and that they have been taken off the waiting lists.

The 2,000 more people waiting for operations for more than 12 months than were waiting in May 1997 and the 400,000 people waiting just to get on the waiting lists know the painful reality of the Government's failure to deliver on the NHS. I will give the Secretary of State for Health his due; he did say one interesting thing during his speech—that we have a very good Transport Secretary. That is the first time in the House that I have heard a Minister refer with such warm words to Lord Birt.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), in a powerful opening speech, reminded us clearly of the extent of new Labour's failures in health, education, transport and law and order. The list goes on. As he said, the problems faced lie in the very ethos of new Labour, because the Government's propensity to centralise, micromanage and interfere—overlaid with the obsession with spin that is so characteristic of new Labour—has led to problems in the public services.

Perhaps that is best revealed by the Government's obsessions with plans. In the health service, we have had the NHS plan, the Wanless plan, which was going to be the answer, and the Secretary of State's new plan that was brought out last week.

However, perhaps transport is an even better example. The Government issued a 10-year transport plan. One year on, it is being reviewed. That is hardly surprising given that a hole has been blown in it by the fact that Railtrack is in administration. Last week, the Strategic Rail Authority issued another 10-year plan and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions told us:

> "No more vague aspirations or grand visions strong on rhetoric but weak on delivery. This plan is an agenda for action."

A 10-year plan for delivery, or is it? The Secretary of State gave an interview to the BBC's "On the Record" programme on Sunday and the following exchange took place:

> "Mr. Humphrys: 'And that ten-year plan is now fixed. That is, that's there, that's solid, that's in concrete?'
>
> The Secretary of State: 'The obligations are there. I've said though I want it reviewed every year, because there's no point in having a ten-year . . . '
>
> Mr. Humphrys: 'So it's not really a ten-year plan then?'
>
> The Secretary of State: 'Well, it's a ten-year plan as we sit here today, but it's got to be flexible John, because if you set it . . . '
>
> Mr. Humphrys: 'So there might be a different ten-year plan this time next year?'
>
> The Secretary of State: 'It'll be the same ten-year plan, but we'll review it in the light of . . . '
>
> Mr. Humphrys: 'So it might be different, but the same?'
>
> The Secretary of State: 'Well. we'll explain.'"

Let me explain to the Transport Secretary that people are fed up with plans that fail to deliver improvements on the railways.

Who will be responsible for reviewing the plan? The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the No. 10 policy unit on transport, the No. 10 forward strategy unit on transport or the strategic transport unit in the Treasury?

One of the causes of the uncertainty in the railways is the fact that Railtrack is in administration. That has been made absolutely clear by the Strategic Rail Authority in its 10-year plan. No one knows how long Railtrack will stay in administration or what will replace it.

Again the Secretary of State made some interesting revelations in his "On the Record" interview. He told John Humphrys:

> "'Well, you're assuming that the model that replaces Railtrack is going to be the same as Railtrack.'
>
> Mr. Humphrys: 'We have to assume something because we don't know what it's going to be.'
>
> The Secretary of State: 'Well, you don't, but in due course, and basically, I mean people say, why is it taking so long? This administration, you know, three, six months, is it going to take longer?'"

That was the Secretary of State's answer to the question of how long Railtrack would be in administration. While it is in administration, it is the Government's responsibility; it is neo-nationalisation. They were happy enough for it to be in the private sector when they took £155 million in windfall tax from it in 1997, but they will put it back in the private sector in the same railway structure as before.

The Secretary of State has delivered a 45 per cent. increase in train delays, demoralised staff, Railtrack in limbo and a strategic plan that depends on £34 billion of private sector investment that has been jeopardised by his action on Railtrack. Perhaps he would do the House the honour of telling us what the overall private and public sector investment figure is due to be under his 10-year plan. Some say it will be £67 billion. In his response, will he confirm that the overall investment figure is, indeed, £67 billion?

Of course, the railways are not the only problem: there is London Underground as well. The Prime Minister says that the public-private partnership will go ahead; the Secretary of State says it might not. We now read that it will all be okay because the Prime Minister has taken charge. Tony's roadshow is here: he is going to take his jacket off, roll his sleeves up and persuade people that a botched PPP for the underground is the answer when people know that it is not. As the Transport Commissioner for London said:

> "it will . . . be the best thing since Barnum and Bailey".

The Government have presided over a shameful deterioration in public services. Patients are waiting longer, passengers are waiting longer, schools are waiting

[Mrs. May]

for teachers, and it is time that the Government stopped blaming others, accepted their responsibilities and started delivering on their promises.

9.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): The debate, initiated by the Conservative party, managed to feature only four speeches from the Tory Back Benches, each of which was delivered by former Cabinet Ministers parading their excuses for years of Tory failure in government. They cannot tolerate the fact that a Government are in office who are delivering on the public service agenda. We also heard, however, from constituency Labour MPs, who could see how we are delivering and the improvements that we are making.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) used his experience as leader of Coventry city council to demonstrate the difficulties that he had during a period of continuous cuts in public spending. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) explained that more police are being employed in his constituency. He said that investment is being made in CCTV and a new police station being constructed. He also pointed to the improvements in health provision in his constituency, with a new hospital that has been provided by the PFI, and the better results in education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter), not always a complete supporter of Government policy, demonstrated from his impartial position the way in which services across the board—education, health, policing and transport—have improved significantly. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) stressed the importance of real-terms increases in public spending. He also raised concerns about the need to ensure that pharmacists explore the better use of drugs, and reduce waste and the inappropriate use of drugs. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will take up those specific issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) stressed the importance of policing. He referred to the difficulties in Barry in his constituency and mentioned the reduction in crime there. He also drew attention, as did the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), to the lessons to be learned from the Vale of Glamorgan by-election in 1989. As my hon. Friend pointed out, although he technically lost his seat in the 1992 election, in reality he had a majority among people resident in the constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] The votes from those resident in South Africa won the day.

Most telling were the contributions made by former Tory Cabinet Ministers. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) clearly said that members of the Conservative Front Bench have not ruled anything out in terms of policy development. That is the real threat that hangs over public services in this country. When my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) asked the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) whether she would rule out charging for clinical services, she took a Trappist vow—no comment was made. She wants to be careful. Bearing in mind that this is the new, inclusive Tory party, as expounded by its leader, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) talked about playing in the big boys' league. The hon. Lady clearly has difficulty playing in the big boys' league if she cannot answer such questions. So much for the inclusive Conservative party as proposed by its leader.

I am pleased that the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) acknowledged that the Labour Government are investing more in public services—I welcome that refreshing honesty from the Opposition. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said that the Labour Government were building on Tory success and our great economic legacy from 1997—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Well, let us look at the former Chancellor's record. Between 1993 and 1997, when he was in office, national debt increased by £100 billion. In the last year of his chancellorship, there was a real-terms decrease in NHS spending.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman seeks to curry favour with his colleagues by trying to rehearse the Chancellor's arguments on economic policy before 1997. Will he turn to his transport policies for the present? How long will the Railtrack administration last, and what will be the consequences for investment in our railway network once he has managed to get an institution back in place to administer it?

Mr. Byers: I know that the Conservatives find it difficult—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I shall answer, but in my own terms. I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his hon. Friends find it difficult to acknowledge that we have killed off a failed Tory privatisation. We did so because we decided that we are not putting the interests of shareholders first, but the interests of the travelling public.

The most telling speech from the Tory Back Benches was delivered by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who revealed the depths of Tory thinking when he said, "We do not accept that poverty is a cause of ill health"—a classic example of the Tories not allowing the facts to get in the way of prejudice. Let us have some facts. At the end of the 20th century, a boy born into a family on the lowest income will, on average, live nine years less than a boy born to a family with a professional background.

Mr. Lilley: The Secretary of State should be a little cautious about being derogatory about ex-Cabinet Ministers, as he may shortly be joining that club. Will he answer my principal question about his responsibilities and confirm that up to £2 billion that is to be spent on the Thameslink 2000 project will not result in a single extra train service at peak times?

Mr. Byers: I shall come to Thameslink 2000—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not like the facts to be given. The right hon. Gentleman made an important statement about ill health not being linked to poverty. I have already made the point that a boy born into a family on the lowest income will, on average, live nine years less than a boy born into a professional background. Life expectancy in Manchester is seven years less than in Kingston upon Thames in Surrey. Infant mortality is 17 per cent higher among the most disadvantaged groups in the country.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden will know that, as a result of the failures of Railtrack, which wanted to stand down the team driving the project through, Thameslink 2000 has been delayed. With the new management of Railtrack, and with the Strategic Rail Authority operating, that contract and project will be put on track; we shall deliver the improvements that the right hon. Gentleman and his constituents want. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] We shall do so when negotiations are completed. Like the west coast main line, those projects, which were supposed to be dominated and controlled by Railtrack, have fallen behind because of the management failures of Railtrack.

Investment is crucial in high-quality public services, which provide the foundation of economic prosperity and social renewal; it generates wealth as well as supporting welfare provision. As a nation, we have suffered for generations from chronic underinvestment. It is because we in the Labour party believe passionately in public services that we will ensure that the extra money is made available. Ultimately, the hospital patient, the school pupil, the rail passenger and the potential victim of crime must come first.

The British people will not be fooled by the Tories' new rhetoric on public services. People know from their own bitter experience that the factors that have motivated the Tory party over the years—envy, self-interest and greed—are simply incompatible—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to calm down. I cannot hear the Secretary of State.

Mr. Byers: Envy, self-interest and greed are incompatible with the provision of public services. Of course, the great hope for the Conservative party is that there will be collective amnesia at the time of the next election and that people will forget the Tory approach to public services. That now seems to be the official approach of the Conservative party. In an interview with the *Financial Times* last Thursday, the Leader of the Opposition said that his children do not remember Margaret Thatcher at all. All I can say is that they are very fortunate. He went on to say that, as memories fade, so people's recollection of what was done fades.

I have a message for the Conservative party: we will keep reminding people of the Thatcher legacy and the consequences for individuals, families, communities and public services. We will remind them that every indicator of economic and social failure at least doubled under the Conservatives. Crime doubled, national debt doubled, those on long-term income support doubled, long-term unemployment doubled, homelessness doubled and child poverty doubled. We will remind them that, in the early 1990s, interest rates were more than 15 per cent., inflation was more than 10 per cent., and 1 million home owners were in negative equity. We will remind them that, by 1997, numbers on the waiting lists rose by more than 400,000; about half of our 11-year-olds failed to reach expected standards in maths and English; almost 500,000 five, six and seven-year-olds were in classes of more than 30; and, of course, there was Railtrack and privatisation.

That is a catalogue of prejudice, neglect and dogma from the Tories towards public services. Labour's commitment to public services reflects our values, principles and beliefs as a political party. Labour believes in opportunity for all our people and in social justice. Labour believes that there is such a thing as society and that we achieve far more acting collectively than we ever can in isolation. It is through collective provision delivering social justice and providing opportunity for all that, under Labour, housing waiting lists have been cut by 120,000. Under Labour, crime is down by 22 per cent. Under Labour, all four-year-olds are guaranteed a pre-school place. Under Labour, infant class sizes have been cut. Under Labour, there are 27,000 more nurses; and under Labour, Railtrack is no longer serving the interests of shareholders, but putting the travelling public first.

Labour in power is acting in the public interest. Labour in government is delivering for our people and our country. It is on that basis that I urge the House to divide and support the amendment in the Prime Minister's name.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 184, Noes 322.

Division No. 139] [9.59 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael

Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John

MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 189.

Division No. 140] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*

Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle

Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don

Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan

Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger

Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie

Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's commitment to investment and reform in the public services and notes the contrast with 18 years of Conservative government, typified by under-investment and botched privatisations; recognises the progress being made on raising school standards, improving safety on the railways, cutting waiting times for NHS treatment and reducing levels of crime; wishes to see the ethos of public service strengthened in the country and recognises the importance of high quality public services to the creation of a fairer society; acknowledges the important role of public servants in achieving a fairer society and the contribution made to staff morale of growing staff numbers and rising staff pay; welcomes sustained investment in health, education, police, transport and local government and other areas of public service; believes that the Prime Minister's Principles of Public Service Reform are important to maximise the benefit gained from higher levels of public service investment; further believes that where public services do well they should benefit from greater decentralisation of power and resources, lighter inspection and greater local control; further believes that where public services fail to reach acceptable standards the Government has a responsibility to provide additional support and intervention whether that provider is in the public sector or, as with Railtrack, in the private sector; and contrasts this approach with that of the Opposition which tolerates failure in the railways, has no coherent plans to raise school standards, supports charging for NHS patients and wishes to cap government spending at 35 per cent. of GDP resulting in cuts to public services of at least £50 billion.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

That the draft Financial Assistance for Industry (Increase of Limit) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 8th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

POLICE

That the draft Police Emblems and Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Raymonds Hill

10.32 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Raymonds Hill, Axminster, Devon and others, who declare that

the junction of the A35 trunk road and the B3165 at Hunters Lodge, Raymonds Hill is especially dangerous for motorists, other road users and pedestrians; that there is a history of accidents at the junction and that there has been a spate of recent collisions; that unless urgent action is taken, further accidents will occur, resulting in injury or even death; that 2,225 residents have signed a petition calling for a roundabout to be constructed at the junction; and that safety measures to improve the junction, including the construction of a roundabout, should be put in place as a matter of urgency.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to take such action as is within his power to ensure that a roundabout is constructed at the junction.

To lie upon the Table.

Haskins Report

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

10.33 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am pleased to have secured this debate, although I do not think that the ballot has been particularly kind to me. I first applied in November, and my speech has therefore had to be changed somewhat.

I want to examine the context of the Haskins report, and why it was necessary. I shall concentrate on Cumbria, because I know the area well, and especially on the outbreak of foot and mouth.

In February 2001, the world as we know it in Cumbria was turned upside down. Services were totally disrupted, there was despair in many parts of the county, and our economy was in a serious state. By July this year the foot and mouth epidemic had started to slow down—we were getting on top of it—but well over 40 per cent. of foot and mouth cases in the United Kingdom were in Cumbria. We had to work out how we were to survive the next 12 months, and how the county's economy could be rebuilt.

A meeting was held in July near Bassenthwaite lake, which I attended, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham), at which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was pressed by local members of the National Farmers Union to appoint what they called a chief executive to oversee the recovery of the economy in Cumbria. I was pleased when my right hon. Friend suggested Lord Haskins for the job, as I had previously proposed him to my right hon. Friend. More importantly, I was pleased because Lord Haskins had experience as the owner of a large farm in east Yorkshire, and of leading a large, national food company. He was known for his no-nonsense approach and straight talking.

Lord Haskins was appointed and he got on with the job. I want to place on record my thanks to him, and those of the people of Cumbria for taking on a job that was not easy. He was not paid and, at the beginning, the job interfered with his holidays. It gave him many sleepless nights, but not only did he visit Cumbria many times; he also went to the west country and to Northumbria.

Lord Haskins produced the report in record time. He was appointed at the end of July, and the report came out in October. It identified Cumbria's short-term problems, and offered a forecast of the situation in the county over the next five years. Haskins made 12 recommendations for the short term, and the Government responded in December—again in record time, given that the report had only been published in October. The Government accepted most of Haskins recommendations, and they are now being implemented. However, I want to bring two issues to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister.

The first has to do with footpaths. The Haskins report stated that all footpaths in Cumbria should be declared open by Christmas, as they are so important for the tourist industry. The good news that Cumbria is free of foot and mouth is contradicted by the bad news that nearly 10 per cent. of our footpaths remain closed. People do not understand that, and think that all the footpaths are open. However, I believe that it will be May before the final few footpaths are opened. I ask that my right hon. Friend looks at that, with a view to speeding up the reopening.

On Saturday, I addressed the annual meeting of the Ramblers Association at a venue in the lake district. The association's members are very worried about the matter. They are also well aware that, until the foot and mouth epidemic closed all the footpaths, walkers in Cumbria and throughout the land were looked on as a bit of a nuisance. The economic effect of footpath closures has been felt in all rural areas, and especially in those sparsely populated areas where the economy depends on people who go walking. One positive thing that came out of the meeting was that the association was going to develop a closer relationship with the tourist industry, with a view to developing more rights of way.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he join me in condemning P & O, which sought to exploit the foot and mouth epidemic? The right of way through Larne harbour was closed as a result of the foot and mouth restrictions. They have been lifted, but the company refuses to open the gate and restore access.

Mr. Martlew: I condemn anyone who keeps a right of way closed. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will reply to that point.

Lord Haskins said that in the short term, £40 million was required. In her statement last October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to £24 million but hoped that more would become available. Of the original £40 million, £20 million was supposed to go to Cumbria. I checked with Cumbria business link today and understand that it has received £17 million. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will find the other £3 million. Many people who applied for grants will have received them but others could lose out.

The Government have put about £1 billion into Cumbria. If the cost of the outbreak was £2.7 billion and more than 40 per cent. of it occurred in the county, £1 billion has gone into the local economy. Much of that will be lost when farmers buy stock outside Cumbria but that £1 billion has done a great deal. From February to September, unemployment in Cumbria dropped by 1,500. I have checked with the Library and jobless figures have dropped in every area in which there was foot and mouth, including Northumbria. Money going into the local economy has stopped the county's so-called economic meltdown.

Opposition Members said that there would be a major recession, and there was one estimate that 15,000 jobs were at risk. Fortunately, both predictions proved wrong. However, it is no consolation to people who have lost their jobs that others have not—and businesses have gone bankrupt. Some people, through no fault of their own, have not received compensation and their businesses will not survive—but the money put in by the Government will ensure a better economy next year.

Foot and mouth had not only an economic but an emotional impact—especially on farmers. Lord Haskins said that farmers generally were fairly compensated and that some were generously compensated. However, for farming families that had bred livestock for generations and saw it destroyed in not the best of circumstances, there was an emotional price to pay. Farmers whose animals did not get the disease but whose stock could not be moved and who found themselves isolated suffered the worst economically.

The NFU report was critical of the Government, as I can be because I refuse to defend the way in which they dealt with the disease in the first instance. The problem is that according to the NFU report, not one farmer in any part of the country was to blame for anything—not even the farmer at Heddon-on-the-Wall, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson). The report says that everything was the fault of the Government, the vets or the agencies—which is wrong. The NFU vacillated as much with regard to vaccination as the Government did, and the report shows that it is still doing so. I hope that the NFU will hold a small-scale inquiry into lessons to be learned by its own organisation.

Before I discuss the mid-term proposals of Lord Haskins' report, I should like to draw attention to two issues. The first is a very local issue that concerns the villagers of Great Orton, a village that became famous for all the wrong reasons. It has on its doorstep the mass animal burial ground, where 500,000 animals are buried. Those people have probably suffered more than the villagers of any village in the country. They saw the slaughter taking place. Heavy vehicles went by 24 hours a day, passing the school. The villagers saw their village on television.

The villagers attended a meeting with an official from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and asked for some money for a play area for the children, as partial compensation for the fact that they had had to suffer so much. Obviously, DEFRA does not have money for play areas, as I am sure my right hon. Friend will acknowledge, but will he join me today in asking that some of the money that DEFRA paid in the landfill tax for the Hespin Wood site, which has gone into the community landfill tax trust, be spent on a play area? I understand that DEFRA may have paid £20 million to dispose of beasts on that site. The county council, which owns the company, will probably make twice as much profit as it cost it to fight foot and mouth. I ask the Minister to support me in asking that the landfill tax trust in my area pay for that playground. It would be only just.

I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) in his place. The second subject that I wish to draw attention to is the problem of moving sheep around the country and identifying where they are. There has to be an identification system, whether electronic tagging of individual sheep or identification by flock. We need an office to run that system. We have a record in Cumbria of being able to carry out such tasks. In Workington we have the cattle movement centre, so if a site is to be selected to administer the movement of sheep it should be in north Cumbria.

I shall now discuss the medium-term recommendations. There was a belief in Cumbria that, because we now had all these empty fields, this was an opportunity, although a sad one, to transform farming there. In reality, that was never going to be the case. Cumbrian farming is back in business. Farmers are starting to re-stock. Some farmers will not return to farming. We shall have bigger dairy farms and perhaps fewer sheep. As I believe Lord Haskins said, if we can change the common agricultural policy we can perhaps look at Cumbria as a test bed, but until then we shall have to go back to our bad old ways. We should have spotted that at the start.

The Minister has agreed to the recommendation for a rural action zone in Cumbria, and the regional development agency is providing £75 million. I should have been happier if it had been a Cumbria action zone, because I am worried that some of the priorities in the county may be skewed. There is some deprivation in my constituency, in the urban area, and on the west coast. In the past year on the Furness peninsula there has been heavy industrial decline and job losses. I hope that priorities will not be skewed.

A recent example that has nothing to do with the rural action zone concerns subsidy. The Government have given more money for rural buses; I agree with that policy totally. However, in Carlisle, Stagecoach has decided to cut the frequency of the urban service and transfer the buses to the rural area to chase the subsidy, creating a worse situation in the urban area. Of course, the reality is that the company should have put extra buses on and run the service, but they have not done so.

The Government did not handle the foot and mouth crisis very well, and I hope that the Minister will not try to defend that today. However, the county's economy has benefited from the £1 billion that has been provided, and the predicted meltdown has not happened. We will have a problem this winter, but if businesses, especially tourism businesses, can be helped to get through the winter, many of them will survive. Again, Lord Haskins looked at what was happening and reached a realistic view. His report is excellent, and I am pleased that the Government have accepted the majority of its findings.

10.50 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on initiating the debate. He may have had to wait some time to speak on this topic in the House, but I congratulate him on his timing—he has introduced the debate on the day on which we have received the news of foot and mouth disease-free status, which is a big boost for everyone in this country. Indeed, this is a day on which we can really concentrate on looking forwards rather than backwards. That is not only good for farming, for tourism and for all of us who want the countryside to get back to normal and make a contribution to the national economy: it is good in so far as it helps to restore a sense of confidence in the communities that have been devastated during the past year. My hon. Friend's timing is brilliant, and he has initiated a useful debate in a positive way and raised some important issues that challenge the Government and all those who wish to see the economy recover.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham), to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle referred. Both my hon. Friends have been assiduous in ensuring that the Government have not overlooked the needs not only of their constituencies but of the whole area in recent months.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle in paying tribute to Lord Haskins, and I have the same view of the contribution that he has made. Lord Haskins has a capacity to challenge, to entertain and to apply common

[Alun Michael]

sense and experience in a practical way. It is fair to say that, on occasions, he challenged in a way that sparked vigorous debate, but it shows the character of the man that he did so without giving offence. He woke people up and made them respond to challenges, but, as my hon. Friend has said, it was clear from talking to people in Cumbria—I did so myself—after Lord Haskins had reported, that they had taken to heart the things that he said and did not feel hurt by or take offence at opinions that perhaps they did not share locally. That is a practical approach.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle said, the report applied primarily to those in Cumbria to whose request for someone to have such a role Lord Haskins's appointment was a response. However, Lord Haskins also looked for parallels with Devon, the north-east and the other parts of the country that had been affected.

The report was published on the same day in October as the report of the rural taskforce, which I have chaired since the election. That, too, made a significant contribution because there were so many stakeholders right across the piece—people involved in farming, local government and the tourism industry and people directly involved in Cumbria and Devon made a significant contribution to its work.

As my hon. Friend said, we made a formal response in December and at the same time considered the way in which the rural White Paper had been implemented in England in the previous 12 months. The document "England's Rural Future" demonstrates that an awful lot of work had been done even when everyone was focused on the job of eradicating foot and mouth disease. In many ways, the agenda of bringing the issue of the response to foot and mouth disease together with that of the implementation of the rural White Paper received support from a whole range of organisations. The document also demonstrates that the Government have sought to bring people together and unify them behind a sense of purpose in dealing with the countryside, which had been neglected for many years.

The response given in December built on the immediate response that was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in announcing an additional £24 million for the business recovery fund. That figure has gone up a bit in the meantime as we have announced a further £2 million in match funding for the voluntary sector scheme that has assisted with the stress and media problems that many people have experienced.

My hon. Friend made a specific suggestion about the landfill tax. He is right to suggest that we consider how the streams of funding that are available can contribute to the restoration of the local economy. I am not able to comment on his specific suggestion, but I will consider it and write to him. Specific requirements are involved in using such streams of funding, but the question is whether the funding available for a variety of purposes can be targeted at the place where it is most needed. None the less, my hon. Friend is right given our priorities at present.

My hon. Friend also referred to the importance of reform of the common agricultural policy. People increasingly recognise that that is necessary, and it would be good for everyone if reform happened sooner rather than later.

I pay tribute to the way in which people in Cumbria have united to look to the future. The members of the taskforce whom I met last week were joined by representatives of the regional development agency. That is an important partnership because we channelled resources to help the recovery of the economy through the RDAs. The members of the taskforce also brought with them representatives of the taskforces led by Cheshire and Lancashire county councils, and that demonstrates that people in Cumbria are looking out from their concerns to the wider needs of the region. It is easier to be sympathetic to people's arguments when one sees them working together with other organisations in that way.

My hon. Friend rightly said that I have expressed our support for the rural action zone. I can respond positively to his point on that, because it would be wrong to skew finances away from the social needs of the deprived areas and more needy urban areas to which he referred. It is more a question of using the resources that are available and directing them to where they are needed. We can also help to build strength by uniting different strands of finance and by local authorities, RDAs and central Government working together.

Often, money is available for a whole range of purposes—such as through the England rural development programme and the RDAs—but it is not used to best effect unless people have access to those funds. Very often the people who most need help—both farmers and non-farmers—are in the weakest position when it comes to identifying the right strand of finance to help their business.

On access, the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) asked a question about P & 0. I am not familiar with the circumstances, and I do not wish to take time from addressing the problems of Cumbria. However, if he wishes to draw the facts to my attention, I will be pleased to consider the matter and respond as appropriate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle rightly said that 10 per cent. of footpaths are closed. Like any quantification, the figure can be looked at either as 10 per cent. closed or as 90 per cent. open. Progress is being made on that. Although 10 per cent.—some 755 footpaths—of the network remains closed, arrangements are in place to open 438 of those over the next two weeks. By 1 February, only 317 footpaths should be still closed, which is 4 per cent. of the total network. So 96 per cent. of the network should be open by then.

There is a difficult issue to address. Remaining footpaths will be reopened as restrictions are lifted, but if farmers choose not to use sentinel animals prior to restocking at the end of January, the last footpaths should be reopened after the requisite fallow period of four months, which is towards the end of May. In the meantime, if it is possible to identify that a farm is significantly blocking the network—obviously, some footpaths are more important than others—we need to consider ways of diverting footpaths, on a voluntary basis, in the short term.

Although that has to be achieved by agreement, the problem was raised when I met the taskforce last week. I suggested that Cumbria should consider the details on that with officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, concentrating in particular on footpaths that have a significance for wider access or if they block access to a specific part of the network.

Although that is detailed, there was a positive response in the discussion and my Department will try to help if it can.

In conjunction with all those who are concerned about access to the countryside—this is not a top-down approach by the Government—we are also developing a campaign with the message, "It's your countryside; you're welcome in it," to reconnect in particular with urban dwellers. We want people to have opportunities to enjoy the benefits of the countryside by staying in it. That also contributes to the economy, which is significant not just for the lake district but for the towns around it, because there is an interdependence of town and country. We need to emphasise that and relearn it.

I am pleased at the positive response from those people who have agreed to be partners in that campaign. We have worked closely with my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting. The Countryside Agency has joined DEFRA in providing resources and has seconded a senior member of staff who is involved in helping to co-ordinate and press that campaign forward. In the course of the next week or so, we will promote that campaign. The Government are not acting on their own; we are supporting and working with those who want to make our tourism industry a success by making the most of access to the countryside. That gives confidence back to rural communities and businesses, whether they be farmers, involved in tourism or, in some case, both—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at three minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 23 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Staff Budget

1. **Mr. Peter Duncan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): If he will make a statement on the budget for staff in the Wales Office. [27057]

5. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will make a statement on the number of civil servants in his Department. [27061]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): For the period since April 2001 the average staff of my Department has been 44 full-time equivalents. The running costs budget of the Wales Office is £2.279 million for each of the financial years from 2001–02 to 2003–04. Staff pay normally accounts for about two thirds of running costs.

Mr. Duncan: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. Is he aware that as the Wales Office staff complement continues to multiply, manufacturing industry in Wales is in crisis and jobs are haemorrhaging everywhere, it seems, other than inside the Wales Office? Does he not accept that increased staff numbers are no substitute for delivery on the long-broken pledges to the people of Wales?

Mr. Murphy: On the increase in numbers, I can tell the hon. Gentleman, who has huge responsibilities as the only Conservative Member representing 112 Scottish and Welsh Members of Parliament in the House of Commons, that in 1999-2000 I had 38 people working in the Department, last year the number was 45 and this year it is 44. Those are hardly huge numbers.

On manufacturing, the hon. Gentleman might be aware that in today's edition of the *Western Mail*, the Cardiff chamber of commerce is reported as saying that the Welsh economy has returned to a firm footing, and in manufacturing in Wales, sales are up, confidence is up and orders are up.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): May I say to my right hon. Friend that the people of Swansea certainly have no complaint about that? Indeed, we have every praise for the Government's willingness to move part of the Pensions Service for Wales to Swansea, creating 500 good quality, permanent jobs in an area of high unemployment.

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for those comments. He is absolutely right to say that the Department for Work and Pensions move to Swansea has led to a considerable increase in employment. May I tell him that in his constituency, the claimant count is down by 1.1 per cent., and in Swansea, West it is down by 0.5 per cent? The House should know that the latest figures on employment in Wales indicate that unemployment is down by 7,000, the claimant count is down by 500 and employment is up by 6,000 since the last count.

Mr. Robathan: I thank the Secretary of State and his Department for their courtesy in giving me a week's notice that my question was grouped with Question 1, because that is very unusual with other Departments. May I pick him up on his figures? I have figures from civil service statistics which say that staff numbers in the National Assembly for Wales went up by over 20 per cent., whereas the number of his civil servants increased by over a third. Can he tell me exactly what improved service the people of Wales are getting from the increased numbers of civil servants in the National Assembly and in his own office?

Mr. Murphy: Obviously, it is for the National Assembly to answer the hon. Gentleman on the matter that he has just raised. However, on public services, I believe that the money obtained from the Government by the Assembly means that billions of pounds have gone into the health service, education and local government.

The hon. Gentleman is, of course, aware that the purpose of the Wales Office is to ensure that the devolution settlement is protected, that the block grant is negotiated and that legislation affecting Wales is steered through this place. Only this Session we have had special Bills on health and education which affect Wales. I can also tell the hon. Gentleman that at the last general election his own party was very much in favour of the retention of my office. That is something on which all parties in Wales agree, on the basis that we have to ensure that Wales is properly represented in the Cabinet and at all levels of government.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The report in the business section of today's edition of the *Western Mail*, to which my right hon. Friend referred, shows that optimism in manufacturing in Wales is now at a two-year high. Does not my right hon. Friend agree that it gives the lie to those—including, sadly, some Ministers—who constantly denigrate the currency of the country in which they live?

Mr. Murphy: I shall not be drawn into that argument by my right hon. Friend. I simply say that the claimant count in his constituency, Llanelli, has dropped by 1.1 per cent. The news that we have received for manufacturing industry in west Wales will benefit his constituents and many others as well.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): How many of the Secretary of State's staff are working on objective 1 projects and financing? Does he agree that his Department will be measured on its success or otherwise in attracting objective 1 funding to Wales? Does he share my concern about the fact that Labour local authority areas such as Ogmore receive less money from objective 1 than those under Plaid Cymru control, and will he direct his staff's attentions to that?

Mr. Murphy: The claimant count in the Ogmore constituency is down 1.7 per cent. and it has experienced one of the biggest unemployment reductions of any Welsh constituency. The hon. Gentleman's party never believed that we would get the objective 1 money, but we did, and there is about half a billion pounds extra in the block grant as a result of the decisions taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. He said that he would not let Wales down. We will not let Wales down either.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Does the right hon. Gentleman not accept that in every other arena in the private and public sectors, offices are becoming leaner, more efficient and cost-effective by using new technology? Are not Wales and the Wales Office lagging behind the rest of the UK? Is he aware, for example, that only 27 per cent. of homes in Wales are connected to the internet compared with 45 per cent. in London and 35 per cent. in the rest of England? Therefore, should he not urgently consider ways to reduce the number of pen-pushers in his office and in the Welsh Assembly and use the savings to increase the number of people and services online in Wales?

Mr. Murphy: The right hon. Gentleman is a little confused as to who does what in terms of the Wales Office and the National Assembly. We are talking about staff figures of 30 or 40—a tiny number that includes typists and people who answer the phone. My office is a slim operation and I have made it clear to the Welsh Affairs Committee that I am anxious to ensure that outside advisers have a look at the office to see whether people are being over-worked or under-worked, whichever might be the case.

I shall write to the Committee about the result of the outside investigation in some weeks, but on the basis that I know that all the people in my office work very hard and very diligently. They are responsible for the legislation affecting Wales that goes through this place and they work every hour of the day. It is important for Members of the House to understand that.

Hospital Waiting Lists

2. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): What recent discussions he has had with the First Minister regarding central Government support for reducing waiting lists in Welsh hospitals. [27058]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regularly meet the First Minister to discuss matters relating to the NHS in Wales. While the policy on waiting lists in Welsh hospitals is a matter for my colleagues in the National Assembly, the Joint Ministerial Committee and regular informal contacts ensure that there are opportunities to share best practice between the operation of the health service in England and in Wales.

Mr. Baron: I thank the Minister for that reply, but given that the number of people in Wales waiting more than six months for their first out-patient appointment has increased eightfold since 1997, and given that the Secretary of State for Health yesterday appeared to want to disown Wales entirely, what responsibility will the Secretary of State for Wales take for resolving the looming crisis in the health service in Wales?

Mr. Touhig: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, as at 30 November, the number of people waiting for in-patient care in Wales has dropped. Indeed, the number waiting more than 18 months to be seen has fallen by over 4 per cent. What is important about reforming, changing and improving the health service in Wales is that the Labour party is committed to putting in the resources and the reform, but his party is not. Instead, it is committed to cutting public expenditure, which would mean a deterioration in the health service in Wales.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Is my hon. Friend aware of the latest health statistics on my constituency released by the Conwy and Denbighshire trust? There are no in-patients waiting over 12 months, no orthopaedic in-patients waiting over 12 months and no cataract patients waiting over four months. Will he join me in congratulating Conwy and Denbighshire trust's management and staff on that magnificent achievement?

Mr. Touhig: Yes. I endorse what my hon. Friend says and I can tell him and the House that my colleague in the Assembly, the Minister for Health and Social Services, has introduced a number of innovations to tackle the problems of waiting lists in Wales. Under her innovation and care programme, every trust now has an out-patient improvement manager and new booking systems are being developed using patient-focused bookings whereby the patient agrees to the hospital appointment time. A pilot system is being developed to prioritise patients waiting for orthopaedic treatment. It could be a forerunner of systems for other waiting lists in Wales and it is a progressive and welcome attempt to tackle the problems that we face in the health service.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Is the Minister aware that the Welsh Assembly has, only today, announced the waiving of £41 million of loan repayments by Welsh NHS trusts and health authorities? Does he agree that that money can be used to address issues such as waiting times and other problems in the health service? Finally, does he agree that, whatever the people of Ogmore may decide, they would be advised to choose between the deliverers rather than the whingers?

Mr. Touhig: I am aware that my Assembly colleague, the Minister for Health and Social Services, has announced today that NHS trusts and health authorities can start the new year on an even keel because she has written off the debt to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I endorse what she has done. It is important to ensure that the resources be provided for front-line care services.

Currently, £3.5 billion is being spent on the health service in Wales—£49 million extra as a result of the Chancellor's pre-Budget report.

On the hon. Gentleman's last point, I have no doubt that when the electors of Ogmore come to make their choice, they will elect a candidate who represents the party that is working for Wales—the real party of Wales, not the whingers.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Although I welcome the increased health expenditure in Wales by the Government, does the Minister accept that hospital waiting lists could decrease dramatically if the Assembly stopped wasting money on projects such as the millennium arts centre in Cardiff bay and instead invested that money in the health service? Would that initiative have support in my hon. Friend's constituency, or are people queuing up in his surgery demanding yet another arts centre in Cardiff bay?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Touhig: I take note of the point that my hon. Friend and neighbouring Member of Parliament makes. The millennium centre will have a major economic impact across Wales, as it will attract tourists and employment and create industries in a fast-growing sector of the Welsh economic scene. We must bear in mind the fact that the Assembly's contribution to that project, which I think is about £37 million, is dwarfed by the £3.5 billion that is being spent on the NHS in Wales—a further £49 million as a result of the pre-Budget report. It is important that we continue to invest large sums in the health service and accompany that with the reforms that will be enacted as a result of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, which has just finished its passage through the House.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I do not know whether the Minister has had time to read the curt and offensive remark his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made yesterday about "not doing Wales". He said that one of the pleasures of his life was that he had nothing to do with Wales at all. What are the Minister and his right hon. Friend doing about the health crisis in Ogmore, for example? The Princess of Wales hospital is short of 140 members of staff. Perhaps he, too, is happy to wash his hands of Welsh health problems.

Mr. Touhig: The hon. Gentleman's reaction sometimes paints a poor picture of the Welsh people; we do have a sense of humour and we can afford a little laugh at ourselves sometimes.

On the Princess of Wales hospital in Bridgend, I am aware that the candidate for the separatist party in Wales in the Ogmore by-election made that allegation yesterday, but so far we have not been able to trace the source of that information. As far as we are concerned, the health service in that constituency is doing very well, with a new hospital, the Royal Glamorgan general hospital, nearby. I think that the people of Ogmore will recognise that a Labour Government and a Labour-led Administration will deliver improvements to the health service in Wales. The hon. Gentleman's party will be thoroughly trounced and rejected come 14 February.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): But it is a Labour Secretary of State for Health who said yesterday:

> "It is one of the joys of my life that I am not responsible for all things Welsh"—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 739.]

With 750 nursing vacancies, 10 per cent. consultancy vacancies, a massive increase since 1997, in those seeking a first hospital appointment, elective surgery being cancelled as bed spaces run out, and even accident and emergency patients having to wait several hours for treatment in both the Heath and Llandough hospitals in Penarth, does the Minister agree that if the buck does not stop with the Secretary of State for Health, it must stop with the Prime Minister?

Mr. Touhig: I am always in favour of the Welsh people being confident and taking pride in themselves.

Sometimes the hon. Gentleman takes the biscuit. He supports a party that is committed to massive cuts in public expenditure. What would that do for the national health service in Wales? His party's record in government of running the NHS in Wales was one of hospital closures, fewer doctors, fewer nurses and fewer people treated. That situation is now being reversed, and he should rejoice in the fact that we are investing more in the health service in Wales and making a positive difference to the health of the people of Wales. It is about time that he gave credit where credit is due.

Mr. Evans: I do not rejoice in the fact that in Wales under the Labour Government we cannot say the words "national health service" unless they are followed by the word "crisis." Even senior Labour Back Benchers do not believe that the ill thought out health reforms will help. One health trust last week cancelled 25 operations at short notice, and waiting lists continue to soar.

In the Prime Minister's 1999 party conference speech, he stated that everyone would be able to see an NHS dentist by 2002. In Abergavenny, the waiting list to see an NHS dentist now includes 441 people. We know that, because the person at the bottom of the waiting list has been complaining in his local newspaper, the *Abergavenny Chronicle*. That person happens to be the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards). Is it not about time that the Minister said sorry to him, and to everyone else in Wales who happens to be waiting on ever increasing NHS waiting lists?

Mr. Touhig: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman comes here month after month and does not learn anything. The cancelled operations occurred in Merthyr, when 25 patients had their hospital appointments cancelled owing to winter pressures. In an organisation that last year treated 667,000 people, there are bound to be problems and cancellations. We regret that, and we are sorry for the patients involved, but we are investing the right amount of money in the health service to improve it.

With 72,000 constituents, has the hon. Gentleman never had to cancel an appointment? The hon. Gentleman is being invidious when he carps month after month about the problems of the health service in Wales, but offers no practical solutions. All he offers is cuts, cuts, cuts in the health service.

Crime

3. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): If he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [27059]

4. **Alan Howarth** (Newport, East): What recent discussions he has had with other Ministers on measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [27060]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): Tackling crime is a priority about which I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues, and with members of the Cabinet in the National Assembly. Yesterday, I had a useful discussion with David A'Herne, the crime reduction director for Wales, who is charged with implementing our key policies and initiatives on crime fighting and disorder. I hope before too long to arrange a meeting with Mr. A'Herne and all the Welsh Members of Parliament, at which he will give a briefing and take part in a question and answer session so that we can better understand the work that he is doing.

Ann Clwyd: The provision of closed circuit television cameras has been extremely beneficial in Cynon Valley, and has been welcomed by the public, who get greater security as a result, and by the police. In view of the increased demand for more CCTV cameras in our communities, will my hon. Friend consider giving extra money to local authorities, so that they can attempt to meet the growing demand?

Mr. Touhig: I take note of my hon. Friend's point. So far, £285,000 has been made available for CCTV programmes and initiatives in her constituency. All Members will agree that CCTV is an important contribution to tackling and reducing crime and antisocial behaviour. I discussed this matter yesterday with Mr. A'Herne, and I hope that some time in the future another tranche of money will become available so that we can expand CCTV coverage.

Alan Howarth: I know that my hon. Friend is in touch with Gwent police, and he will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I also recently met them. Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to the remarkable work that they are doing on serious crime? Has he or my right hon. Friend discussed with Ministers in the Assembly the damaging consequences for policing in Gwent and elsewhere in Wales if the guidelines that the Assembly has issued to local authorities are not relaxed at least to take realistic account of the costs of maintaining existing levels of police activity? Has he or my right hon. Friend also inquired why Welsh local authorities should be so constrained when English authorities are not?

Mr. Touhig: As a Gwent Member, I pay tribute to the efforts of the Gwent police to reduce crime throughout our county.

I know that my right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently discussed the funding of the Gwent police with the chief constable. Along with parliamentary colleagues and colleagues from the Welsh Assembly, I met the chief constable last week and was given a very full briefing. Since then my right hon. Friend has raised the issue with the Assembly's First Minister, who will reply to the chief constable after further deliberations.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Will the Secretary of State press the Home Secretary to introduce a standard and honest way of measuring crime, so that standard and honest comparisons can be made between crime in north Wales and in other parts of Wales?

Mr. Touhig: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that crime has fallen throughout Wales. I think that that is due to initiatives taken by police services across Wales, and also to the funds that we have put in. There has been a considerable increase in the number of police officers—there have been an extra 206 in the past year—and funds have been provided for a further 259 until next year. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, like me, will welcome that, and will recognise that fighting crime is something in which all of us—the whole wider community—must participate. We want to ensure that our police service has the tools and resources to achieve what is needed. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the Secretary of State to answer the next question, let me say that the House is far too noisy.

Economy

6. **Dr. Hywel Francis** (Aberavon): What discussions he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales and Cabinet colleagues about the performance of the Welsh economy. [27062]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I meet the First Minister and Cabinet colleagues regularly to discuss a range of issues, including the Welsh economy. I welcome last week's labour market statistics, which show that unemployment in Wales fell by 7,000 over the last quarter.

Dr. Francis: The steel industry remains a vital part of the Welsh economy. I am sure that everyone will welcome—as I did in my constituency—last week's announcement of a £75 million investment in the rebuilding of the No. 5 blast furnace at Port Talbot, where, sadly, three men were killed in the recent explosion. No doubt the Secretary of State will welcome that excellent news for my constituency and for the neighbouring constituency of Ogmore, as well as the news that all but two of the injured steelworkers have been released from hospital. Does he share my hope that the new investment means a new beginning for the steel industry in Wales, and in particular a reaffirmation—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is enough for the Secretary of State to deal with today.

Mr. Murphy: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that he did on behalf of the families of the deceased and injured in Port Talbot. I went to Morriston hospital and saw some of the injured, and I also pay tribute to the medical team there.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend: the news that £75 million is to be spent on the new blast furnace at Port Talbot is great news for Port Talbot, and for the steel industry in Wales. It will safeguard 3,000 jobs in my hon. Friend's constituency. It represents part of the change in Welsh manufacturing that we have seen over the past few months, as a result of which 6,000 more people are now in work.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does not the fall in the three-month unemployment figures for Wales—whether it is measured on the basis of claimant or International Labour Organisation figures—compare favourably with increases in the United Kingdom generally? Surely it is a tribute to the Liberal Democrat-led partnership in Cardiff.

Mr. Murphy: I think that it is a tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and what he has done to make our economy one of the strongest in the world, with interest rates and inflation at a record low. In the hon. Gentleman's constituency the claimant count is down by some 0.03 per cent., and in all but one or two Welsh constituencies unemployment has fallen dramatically in the past few months.

Employment (Cardiff, West)

7. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What recent discussions he has had about the use of European structural funds to create employment in Cardiff, West. [27063]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I meet Assembly Ministers regularly to discuss a range of issues, including progress with structural fund programmes in Wales. However, day-to-day administration and individual project approvals are matters for the National Assembly for Wales and its executive agency, the Welsh European Funding Office.

Kevin Brennan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware of the potential of the Arjo Wiggins paper mill site in Ely in my constituency to create up to 2,000 jobs, and that it is next door to an area of high unemployment? There are long-term unemployment problems in Ely that we need to try to solve, so will he pledge the full weight of his Department, including himself, his junior Minister and all 44 of his staff, to work in partnership with the Assembly and the local authority to get the maximum job potential out of that site?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, I will. That project, which is the result of a good working partnership between a Labour Government and a Labour-led Administration in Cardiff, will mean 1,000 jobs, 1,000 new homes, retail expansion, a new school and a district centre.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [27087] **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 23 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further meetings later today.

Mr. Pond: The Government are investing heavily in public services, but does my right hon. Friend agree that we still need more nurses and teachers, and that we need them to be better rewarded? People working in schools and hospitals in Gravesham tell me that they welcome that new investment, but that our drive to improve standards in public services is placing them under extra stress. Will he do his very best to ensure that staff are properly rewarded, properly valued and fully respected?

The Prime Minister: I pay tribute to our public servants and the work that they do in our schools, our hospitals and in public services up and down the country. As a result of the additional investment that is going in, we are increasing spending on health and education as a proportion of national income, we are employing more people in our public services, and public sector pay this year will outstrip private sector pay for the first time in many years. That investment also means that we are training and recruiting more nurses, more teachers, more doctors, more policemen and women. That of course is why it is so important to keep that investment going through the system and not to cut it back.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Health dismissed as fiction the fact that Rose Addis, the 94-year-old mother of my constituent, was left lying in casualty for days because the local hospital did not have a bed for her. Will the Prime Minister now apologise to Mrs. Addis for her treatment, and more particularly for the Secretary of State's comments?

The Prime Minister: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman realises this, but the case that has been raised by the *Evening Standard* is strongly disputed by the hospital concerned. It disputes in particular the idea that Mrs. Addis was left untended for days. Let me read the letter that has been sent to the *Evening Standard* by the leading professor of medicine and consultants in that hospital:

> "Your newspaper has this week published misleading and inaccurate articles denigrating our standards of care.
>
> To deride health staff publicly for a callousness of which they are innocent does real, lasting damage.
>
> Along with those we serve, we recognise the problems caused by years of underinvestment in the NHS. We welcome the fact that this is changing, but it will take time, commitment, optimism and imagination."

Rather than the right hon. Gentleman and the Conservative party trying to denigrate everything in our national health service, let him for once applaud the people who work in the NHS, applaud the standard of care that they are giving and withdraw his allegation.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am rather pleased that the Prime Minister now chooses to use a letter written by those who apparently run the service. His Health Secretary did not bother to speak to my constituent, but if the Prime Minister had bothered to, he would have heard a quite different story. I am tempted to believe that story more than the stuff that he has pulled out.

My constituent said that, after two days, Mrs. Addis's clothes still had not been changed. Her daughter had to borrow a bowl of water to wash the blood that had become caked on her mother's hands and feet. Those are the facts, not the hyperbole of a letter. Will the Prime Minister now apologise for his Health Secretary's comments in dismissing the case?

The Prime Minister: I will not. The Leader of the Opposition says that he prefers the statement of his constituent to the statement that I have made, but it was the staff at the hospital who made the statement, not I. In addition, the two other cases raised by the same newspaper are in dispute.

The right hon. Gentleman was not present when his constituent was treated, and neither was I. However, I do not think it right for the right hon. Gentleman, in circumstances where the staff issue such a strong denial—and they strongly deny the allegations that the right hon. Gentleman has just made—to use the case to run down the national health service. No one should be in any doubt about why the Conservatives want to use such cases, disputed as they are, to run down the national health service. They use them because they want to say that the NHS has failed, that no one gets proper treatment, and that we should therefore get rid of a service on which so many people depend. They also want to say that the extra investment is worthless.

The truth is that the extra investment is providing new resources, more nurses, the refurbishment of accident and emergency departments, and new hospitals up and down the country. The worst thing that could happen to the health service is to go back to the Tory policy of cut, cut and cut.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Government have been in power for nearly five years, and it is so illuminating that the Prime Minister can never apologise for anything that has been done. If he would like to talk again to the staff involved, and to my constituent, he would find that what the letter from the hospital manager called a separate A and E ward—the space where Mrs. Addis's mother was put—turns out to be nothing more or less than a corner of the casualty room. The manager reclassified the space, instead of moving the patient.

Because the Government manipulate the figures, the reality is that there is a far bigger problem. Hospitals are now forced to manipulate patients. It is not just a matter of casualty wards being changed. Appointments are being offered to people on holiday so that their waiting times can be cancelled. Is the Prime Minister really proud of the culture of deceit that is now the hallmark of his health service?

The Prime Minister: First, according to the hospital, the patient to whom the right hon. Gentleman refers was kept in a medical assessment unit. The hospital states that that is a perfectly proper way of looking after her.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman knows that in-patient waiting lists have fallen by more than 100,000 since this Government came to office. Under the previous, Conservative, Government, those lists rose by 400,000. Under the Conservatives, the numbers of nurses and doctors in training and the number of beds were all cut. In the past year, this Government have been increasing the number of beds, and we have increased the number of nurses and doctors in training.

The difference between the Government and the Opposition is very clear. That was evident from the right hon. Gentleman's interview a few days ago in the *Financial Times*. He believes that we should cut back on the extra investment, that we should give the money to people in tax cuts and that they should then fund their own health care. We believe that health care is best funded out of general taxation, and provided through the national health service.

The right hon. Gentleman therefore has to run down the health service and denigrate the activities of all those dedicated nurses, doctors and consultants to make the political case that the Tory party has been after since the inception of the health service—that is, to get rid of it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: We get promises, promises, promises, but never any delivery. The Prime Minister talks about people running down the health service, but the Government have been in charge for more than four years. More illuminating is what my constituent said to me at the end of the conversation. She said that there were three generations of Labour voters in her household. They wrote to the Prime Minister to congratulate him on his election. They expected much more. Mrs. Addis's daughter also said to me:

> "If my poor mother had been a dog she would have been treated better".

[Interruption.] That is what the Labour party does: it shouts down people who have a problem in the health service. Mrs. Addis's daughter went on to say:

> "We have never been so disgusted with any Government as this one."

Does she not now speak for all those who have suffered, and continue to suffer, in the health service?

The Prime Minister: Let me repeat what I said to the right hon. Gentleman in reply to his earlier questions. Those facts are totally disputed by the hospital in question. Before coming to a judgment, it might just be as well if the right hon. Gentleman actually listened to what the hospital said, too.

In respect of the national health service, however, I can tell the right hon. Gentleman what people say. Yes, there are examples of poor treatment within the national health service. There are some 5.5 million operations a year and some 270 million doctor's appointments, but the vast majority of people who use the health service say that people get an excellent standard of care.

As a result of the extra investment going into the health service, waiting lists are coming down, there are more nurses, there are more doctors, and more hospitals are being built. The question is: is it better to carry on putting that investment into the national health service or take it back out? In the debate yesterday, the Conservative health spokesman, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), was asked that question. The Leader of the Opposition has been asked it several times in the past few days. Now let us have an answer. We are prepared to put this extra investment in, year on year on year; is he?

Hon. Members: Answer!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): What steps has my right hon. Friend taken to support the process of reconstruction in Afghanistan?

The Prime Minister: The most important element of this process is reconstruction in Afghanistan. The aid conference has pledged a very substantial sum of money to reconstruction in Afghanistan; I welcome that. The British armed forces are of course playing a vital role in helping to stabilise the security situation. I believe that we now have the same international coalition in favour of reconstruction in Afghanistan as we had in favour of removing the hated Taliban regime. That is excellent news, not least for the people in Afghanistan.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Would the Prime Minister acknowledge that there are people in all political parties who think that his current proposals for the next step in reforming the House of Lords are at best halfhearted and at worst half baked? Would he therefore, on that basis, agree to all-party talks to see whether we can find some consensus for a properly democratic House of Lords, fit for modern Britain?

The Prime Minister: I entirely accept that there are people in different parties with different views; that of course is the nature of the debate. If a consensus could be found, that would be excellent. Having read the debates in this place and in the other place, having heard of the savaging that the Leader of the Opposition got from his own peers yesterday, and remembering that the legislation must pass through both Houses of Parliament, I am afraid to say that, at the moment at any rate, we are quite a long way from that consensus.

Mr. Kennedy: Surely the Prime Minister is aware of the irony of the situation, given that if he went for an overwhelmingly elected second Chamber he would have the majority support of his own party, he would have the majority support of Liberal Democrats and—heaven forbid—he would even have the support of the leader of the Conservative party these days. That being the case, why does he not see the merit of proceeding on that basis, instead of just trying to introduce a hashed-up job of patronage, based on placepeople?

The Prime Minister: I have no intention of not listening to the consultation; indeed, we are going to listen to the consultation. If people think that we are simply going to try to railroad through proposals, they are wrong. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh".] They are. It will be for every Member in the House to reflect carefully.

I read the reports of the debates in this place the other day and in the other place. I read the speeches, for example, of several of the Members who spoke from the Conservative Back Benches. They did not agree with the proposals of the Leader of the Opposition. I spoke to many people who—*[Interruption.]* Well, it is true that there are different views in all parts of the House. If we can find a consensus on the way forward, fine, but the fact that the Leader of the Opposition agrees with those proposals does not mean to say that he can carry his party with him, as he found out yesterday.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the publication last week of the chief medical officer's report on ME, which has recognised for the first time that

> "ME is a genuine illness",

and that

> "existing controversy cannot and should not be used as an excuse for inaction or unsuitable practice"?

Will he further congratulate all national and local ME groups—such as BRAME, which is based in my constituency and run by Tanya Harrison, an ME sufferer, and her mother, Christine—on their many years of campaigning and the support that has been given to other ME sufferers?

The Prime Minister: I certainly congratulate my hon. Friend's constituents on the campaign that they have waged over a significant period, and I am pleased that the significance of ME is now properly recognised.

Q2. [27088] **Sir Peter Tapsell** (Louth and Horncastle): Has the right hon. Gentleman noted the recent report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which predicts that the euro is likely to continue to be a weak currency, and the statement by Mr. Alan Greenspan that the prime reason for the weakness of the euro is what he describes as the unrelenting flow of capital from continental Europe to the United States? Does the Prime Minister disagree with those two assessments?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that I certainly disagree with the assessment, if the hon. Gentleman is implying—I know that he is strongly opposed to the single currency—that the single currency could in no circumstances be of benefit to this country. But where he is right, in a sense, and certainly Mr. Greenspan is, is that it highlights the importance of economic reform in Europe. Now the question is: are we better placed to deliver that economic reform in Europe by constructive engagement or by the position of total isolationism favoured by the Conservative party?

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the appalling decision that was made in the Appeal Court on 13 December in the Fairchild case? The judgment effectively means that a person suffering from mesothelioma cancer, who has been exposed to asbestos and has worked for more than one employer where he has been so exposed, cannot claim compensation on the grounds that it cannot be determined where the fibre that caused the malignancy came from. In effect, the judgment has overturned the apportionment principle in the courts, and it is causing great trauma to the sufferers of mesothelioma cancer and their families. Will my right hon. Friend consider whether there is now a need, bearing in mind that the Court of Appeal declined leave to appeal to the House of Lords, for legislation to reverse that decision and to establish the principle of apportionment in all cases of multiple exposure?

The Prime Minister: I understand the concern that my hon. Friend raises. I also understand that the relevant Department is studying the implications of the judgment to which he refers.

Q3. [27089] **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): The waiting time for a hearing test at the Lymington hospital in my constituency remains pretty constant, at 33 months. It is the only specialty in which the over-85-year-olds are given priority, in the hope that some of them will get one before they die. What action will the Prime Minister take to ensure that the New Forest primary care trust is empowered to take over that problem from the Southampton trust, because it wishes to explore innovative solutions involving a partnership with the private sector?

The Prime Minister: I do not know the details of the particular circumstances that the hon. Gentleman talks about, but of course the very purpose of setting up the primary care trusts is to enable innovative solutions to be found. That is why it is so unfortunate that the Conservative party did not support their creation; but on whether such things are done by that primary care trust or elsewhere—as I say, I do not know the particular case that he alludes to—again, I say to him that if we want better treatment inside the national health service, then we have to put in the investment, because there are capacity constraints within the NHS: an insufficiency of consultants and nurses, beds—occasionally—and doctors. Of course, we want to put in that investment, and I am afraid that, a few days ago, the Leader of the Opposition tied the Conservative party to exactly the position that it was in before the last election—opposition to that investment.

Q4. [27090] **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): Does the Prime Minister recall a famous warning many years ago about private affluence and public squalor? Should not the fourth largest economy in the world be able to boast some of the best public services in the world? Will he explain to people that they will get only the services that they are prepared to pay for and that, just as it took a decade of sustained reductions in public investment by the Conservative party to get the country into its current condition, it will take a decade of sustained investment by the Labour party to get the country out of it?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that we need sustained investment. It is important that we have that sustained investment on the basis of what is now the fourth largest economy in the world. We have produced economic stability, lower interest rates, low inflation and low unemployment precisely as the result of our economic measures. Then we were able to get the investment into education, then into the national health service and it is now coming into the transport services and law and order. It is important that we recognise that we need to sustain that investment. However, I know that my hon. Friend would also want to point out that, as the recent international survey showed, this country is now in the top eight for its education system in virtually every main subject.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): How many different transport plans are the Government currently working on?

The Prime Minister: We have the one plan that was announced by the Strategic Rail Authority.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister wants to go back and check with his staff. There is the 10-year plan that the Transport Secretary pointed out never starts but is now under review again a week later; there is Lord Birt's plan; there is No. 10's plan; and today we discover that the Chancellor has got his own plan. Rail passengers know that they suffered a 75 per cent. increase in delays in December and they know that the Prime Minister's Transport Secretary has not even got a plan. One thing is sure: if no one trusts the Transport Secretary and if even the Prime Minister does not trust him, as he spent two hours telling him, why does he have him?

The Prime Minister: The plan is outlined by the Strategic Rail Authority and it is a plan for investment over a number of years. What the right hon. Gentleman referred to in relation to the Treasury are merely the normal discussions for the comprehensive spending review. Those discussions would take place whatever Government were in office.

The difference between us is again the issue of investment. I have to warn the Conservatives that when they keep raising the issue of public services, I welcome that. Let them keep raising the issue of public services because, in the end, there is a very simple choice. We believe in sustained investment in education, health, transport and law and order; they believe in taking that investment out.

What the right hon. Gentleman committed himself to a few days ago would mean that people would pay less in tax and would have more, as he said, to spend on the public services that they choose. What he means is that they will get a tax cut and will then have to go and buy their health care, buy their education and buy their security. The problem is that, although that may work for the top 10 per cent. of the population, the other 90 per cent., who rely on decent, properly funded public services, will not get them. So let the Conservatives carry on raising the issue of public services. Let that be the issue at the next election, because the result will be the same as at the last one.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Does the Prime Minister recall that, eight weeks ago, the Transport Secretary announced the construction of terminal 5 at Heathrow in my constituency and also offered a cap on flight movements? Yet today it is reported that the

Government are considering a third runway. Can the Prime Minister assure my constituents that, in any decision, their environment will be protected?

The Prime Minister: Of course I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. However, the reports in the newspapers today were complete speculation.

Q5. [27091] **Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham): Can the right hon. Gentleman tell my constituents in Beckenham whether Ken Livingstone's proposed increase of 35 per cent. in the precept for the Greater London Authority is a fair and reasonable settlement, or is it a stealth tax?

The Prime Minister: It is for the Mayor of London to propose the charges. I am afraid that the Labour candidate was not successful in the mayoral elections, as I know only too well. If the hon. Lady wishes to have a lower charge, she should take the same position as Labour Members of the Assembly. They are trying to make sure that the Mayor's plans are more responsible.

Q6. [27092] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): Does the Prime Minister share my horror at the death of Laura Touche, following the delivery of her twins in the private Portland hospital, because of a basic failure of nursing care? Can he assure the House and the country that in addition to the improvements that we are making to the national health service, about which he has spoken, he will also look at improving the quality of care in the private sector?

The Prime Minister: Of course it is important that we make sure that proper minimum standards of care are adhered to, whether in the public sector or the private sector. I do not know the position of the case to which my hon. Friend refers, and our sympathies obviously go to her constituent and her family. However, with a health care system that has 5.5 million operations and 270 million GP appointments, it is important that we do not get to a position—either in the public or the private sector—in which we use every instance of where the treatment has fallen down to say that that is typical of the whole health care system. It is important to have balance. There are, of course, cases of poor treatment, but they tend, in the public or private sector, to be the exception, not the rule.

Q7. [27093] **Matthew Green** (Ludlow): The Prime Minister will know that at 16 young people are considered old enough to marry, to have children, to pay taxes and to join the armed forces, yet they are not allowed to vote until they are 18. Does he consider that those things are a lesser responsibility than voting? Will he meet me and a group of young people from a range of youth organisations to discuss reducing the voting age to 16?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that we would always want 16-year-olds to do all the things they can do. I am afraid that I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman on the voting age. I think that it should remain as it is.

Q8. [27094] **Ms Candy Atherton** (Falmouth and Camborne): My right hon. Friend will understand the anger felt in Cornwall at Railtrack's decision to close the one rail link into the county over the Easter holiday. Will he intervene and urge it to think again?

The Prime Minister: I do know of the concern that has been raised. I am sure that it will be studied by the relevant Department, although ultimately, of course, the decision is for the private rail company.

Q9. [27095] **Hywel Williams** (Caernarfon): Is the Prime Minister satisfied with his industrial relations policy, which has led to workers who were on strike at Friction Dynamics in my constituency being sacked after eight weeks? Now, 40 weeks on, they are still waiting for a resolution of the dispute. Is it his policy to deny justice and then to delay it?

The Prime Minister: I do not know about the particular dispute in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I believe that the industrial relations settlement that we brought about in the past few years strikes the right balance. People have the minimum wage in place. They have the right to join a trade union and, in circumstances in which there is a majority who wish it, the right to trade union recognition. New provisions for consultation and information are also coming in. I do not believe that we should go back to the industrial relations days of the 70s, which is the implication of his question.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): Will the Prime Minister pay tribute to Niall Quinn, not just because he plays for the greatest team in the world, but because of his unselfish decision to donate the proceeds from his own tribute game to charity? Is not that magnificent gesture on the part of Niall a perfect example to his fellow pros and, indeed, the many thousands of youngsters who see footballers as heroes? Will the Prime Minister visit the Stadium of Light before the end of the season to thank Niall personally on behalf of all those charities that will receive the money?

The Prime Minister: I do not always praise Sunderland footballers, as my hon. Friend knows. However, Niall Quinn is a constituent of mine and I am absolutely thrilled that he has decided to donate so generously to charity. It is typical of the individual. In circumstances in which people in sport often get a lot of bad publicity, I agree that this is an example that we can hold up to everyone.

Q10. [27096] **Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): In Zimbabwe, with Mugabe imprisoning his political opponents and expelling all overseas journalists, what more needs to happen before the Prime Minister will lead the campaign to expel Mugabe's Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth?

The Prime Minister: As we made absolutely clear, we totally deplore what is happening in Zimbabwe. The actions of Mugabe are a disgrace to his own country and also badly affect the reputation of the whole of southern Africa. However, in order for a motion to succeed at the Commonwealth to expel Zimbabwe, it is necessary to get all the countries supporting it. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are working urgently and energetically with all other countries to make sure that the policies of Mr. Mugabe are reversed and that proper and democratic elections are held in Zimbabwe.

Q11. [27097] **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): My right hon. Friend is on record demanding increases in the survival of the environment and wishing to ensure that recycling is paramount in that programme. Is he aware of the problems that local authorities, which are responsible for waste collection and disposal, are experiencing with the disposal of fridges? We want to ensure that they get support from the Government. Will my right hon. Friend take it upon himself to ensure that we get that support for local government so that we can clear the backlog of fridges deposited with local authorities?

The Prime Minister: I entirely accept the problem to which my hon. Friend is drawing attention. As I understand it, it arose in part because it was not until June 2001 that the regulations were finalised. It is important that my hon. Friend recognise that we are providing a dedicated sum of money, about £6 million, to try to ease that situation. Of course, we will do whatever we can; I entirely accept that there is a problem. We have got the resources and I am sure that the relevant Department is working on the right strategy to deal with it.

Q12. [27098] **Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): Is the Prime Minister aware that many thousands of elderly people in residential care are living on pocket money of £16 a week or less, forcing them to choose between buying a present for a grandchild one week and being able to buy daily newspapers? Does he accept that that is an undignified way for anyone to spend their declining years, and will he stop it?

The Prime Minister: I do accept that it is important that we get more resources into care and to elderly people, which is why the Government have made substantial additional provision for pensioners, both in care homes and the national health service. However, there is always a limit on the amount of money that we can spend. I was talking about Conservative proposals a short time ago; I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has come across a recent interview with the leader of his party, in which he said that he would like to go into the next election favouring lower taxes.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West) *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: If *The Guardian* has misquoted the right hon. Gentleman, I understand. In the end, there is a finite amount of money, but it cannot be disputed that, if we take the additional money for care in the national health service for pensioners, we are making substantial additional provision available. But yes, it is true that we could always do more.

Army Attributable Pensions

3.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): As Minister with responsibility for veterans affairs, Mr. Speaker, I have come to the House to offer a statement, both to clarify the matter of the taxation of attributable Army invaliding pensions and to give an apology.

Service personnel retiring on ill-health grounds are eligible for a war disablement pension from the War Pensions Agency if their illnesses or injuries are attributable to service. Since 1973, personnel have also been eligible for a service attributable pension under the armed forces pension scheme. Before 1973, pensions were paid early to those invalided out of service. Those pensions should be tax free when the injury is attributable to service.

Owing to an administrative error by the Army pensions office, following, I believe, a change of legislation in the early 1950s, a number of Army pensioners have had their attributable invaliding pension mistakenly taxed. This has therefore affected such attributable pensioners over a period of some 50 years. The error is deeply regrettable, as is the time that it took to identify it. We offer our unreserved apology to those pensioners who were affected and to the relatives of those who died before we were able to make restitution.

The error was recognised in 1998 as a result of the efforts of an Army pensioner, Major John Perry. Major Perry deserves to be commended, as it was his efforts and persistence that brought the error to light. It is unfortunate that his early complaints were not dealt with satisfactorily. He appealed, and when his case was brought to the attention of the central pensions policy branch at the Ministry of Defence, the error was recognised and the points at issue conceded in 1998. Ministers were made aware of the error in September 1998, and Parliament was informed of progress on rectifying the mistake on 8 June 1999 in answer to a parliamentary question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker).

The Government are not merely reacting to today's news. The issue has not arisen in the past couple of days. I am pleased to report that, since 1998, the Ministry of Defence has taken extensive measures to identify pensioners and their widows who might be affected and to ensure a refund from the Inland Revenue. That has included the manual trawling of the records of more than 20,000 pensioners and widows. Information has been provided to ex-service and war widows associations, which have been most helpful in advertising the mistake and the mechanism for applying for a refund.

The Royal British Legion publicised the error to its 600,000 members in its magazine *Legion* in January 1999. The War Widows Association circulated information to its 55,000 members at about the same time. Importantly, we believe that we have identified the majority of those affected, but I have to say that we are keen to find any we might have missed. These people have paid tax when there was no need for them to do so and that is wrong. We have a duty to rectify the situation and to provide recompense. It is not possible to give a precise estimate of the final cost of refunds until all claimants have been identified and paid. However, our current assessment is that the total cost may be in the order of £30 million.

It is important to note that the mistake did not apply to the same category of pensioners from the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force. In the past, the administration of the different service pensions was entirely independent and there was a lack of co-ordination in addressing such matters. Policy functions are now centralised and I believe that an error of this sort is significantly less likely.

The Ministry of Defence intends further publicity to ensure that those affected have the opportunity to recover the tax they have incorrectly paid. We have so far identified 1,003 affected cases. Refunds have been made in all but 26 of those cases, in which the details are still being clarified. Any pensioner in receipt of an invaliding pension between 1952 and now who believes that they may have been affected by this error should write to the Army Pensions Office in Glasgow.

The error is deeply regretted and I look forward to informing the House when all cases have been satisfactorily settled.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I thank the Minister for his statement and associate the Opposition with the deep regret that he expressed and his apology to those who have been affected. It is as well to remember that these are vulnerable people to whom we owe a great debt—now in more senses than one.

I was surprised, though, when I discovered that a statement was to be made on this matter today. There were any number of issues on which I might have expected a statement from Defence Ministers, not least of which is Paul Bergne's view of the chaos at Bagram airport, or the A400M. Why are we being given a statement today—and especially one that has been so heavily trailed in the BBC and *The Daily Telegraph*? *[Interruption.]* It is all very well for Labour Members to moan, but I recall what the Minister said in his written answer of 7 November, which appears to have been definitive on the matter. Having given an abridged version of the statement that he has just made, he stated:

> "All those identified as being incorrectly taxed, except a small number of cases currently under investigation, have received a full refund with compensation. The Ministry of Defence has no plans to undertake further action on this matter.—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 250W.]

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): So he's surprised you.

Mr. Swayne: He has surprised me, and I should like to know what has happened between 7 November and today to prompt this statement. One would hate to think that it was another instance of news management being used to cover up some other bad news.

None the less, I think that this is a very important matter and I welcome the opportunity to ask a number of questions about the way in which the Government have conducted their inquiry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) tabled a parliamentary question as a consequence of a constituency case that had been brought to his attention. I want to ask several questions, and I ask hon. Members to bear with me because we are considering complex matters. The Army personnel centre wrote to my hon. Friend's constituent, Major Richard Leigh Perkins of the Royal Leicestershire Regiment, on 9 October 1998 to

[Mr. Swayne]

tell him that the problem might apply to him. After further correspondence, my hon. Friend wrote to the Minister on 24 September 1999, saying:

> "This concerns me greatly as many of these pensioners are already extremely elderly and indeed may not survive until the review is completed. There surely needs to be a greater sense of urgency in reviewing all these cases."

I certainly agree.

When my hon. Friend's constituent applied for compensation, he was told that his disability pension was not paid to him as result of his being disabled while in service. It took two years to get a tribunal to overturn that finding and to rule that he was entitled to the compensation. He was then told—would you believe it, Mr. Deputy Speaker?—that any payment in excess of the past two years would be taxed as a result of Treasury rules.

That is surreal. We have reached the circumlocution office. The payment has to be made because it was mistakenly taxed, but any amount in excess of the two years will have to be taxed because of Treasury rules. I know that the Minister will confirm that those rules do not apply, because we are considering a Government mistake. *[Interruption.]* It is all very well Labour Members shouting, but vulnerable people are not aware of the facts and the compensation that may be payable to them.

People such as Major Perkins have still not been paid, notwithstanding the Minister's statement. They believe that burdens are being placed on them and that the matter is "cloaked in secrecy", to use their words. The hon. Gentleman will have read the bitter words of Major Perry in *The Daily Telegraph* today. I ask him to bear in mind the fact that many of our veterans feel bitter; we must make every effort to dispel that feeling.

How many other people like Major Perkins are there? What action is the Minister taking to ascertain whether other people are waiting for compensation? What action is he taking to ascertain the number of widows who may require compensation? What is he doing to ensure that the families of those who have subsequently died and are owed compensation are identified and notified of what might be available?

The Minister has said that he estimates that the problem may cost £30 million to rectify. Will he confirm that that cannot be charged to the defence budget, but will come out of the Treasury's contingency reserve? Will he also confirm that it will not affect what may be available for the defence budget?

I ask the Minister to redouble his efforts to identify people who may be owed outstanding payments. They are among our most vulnerable and most deserving people.

Dr. Moonie *rose—*

Andrew Mackinlay: Tell him to go away.

Dr. Moonie: What temptation.

I thank the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) for his early remarks and I apologise to Conservative Front-Bench Members and to the Liberal Democrats for the tardiness in showing them a copy of the statement. I gave it to them not long after I received the final version.

When there is great public interest in an issue, it is incumbent on the Government to consider it carefully and provide amplification and clarification, especially when it is based on thin information. Many details were substantively inaccurate.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that Major Perkins's benefits were reviewed as part of the exercise, but as the War Pensions Agency had not accepted his invaliding condition as attributable to service, no corrective action was required and his pension remained taxable. Following a successful appeal by Major Perkins, the agency accepted that his condition was attributable to service, but it did not backdate the assessment to the date of his retirement. It was effective only from 25 August 1999.

The degree of Major Perkins's disability was assessed at nil per cent., and notification of this award was received. That might sound complicated, but it is done in that way so that, if there is a change in his condition, the level of the award can be raised at a future date. Arrangements have been made for Major Perkins to receive a refund of tax paid since 25 August 1999, but that was not backdated to the date of his retirement. I am looking closely at this issue at present, and I can assure him and his Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), that the matter will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

The numbers still to be found are difficult to quantify. We have looked at more than 20,000 records—about 23,000, I think—and found 1,000 people who were liable for a repayment. Of these, 182 came from the period before 1973—of whom 73 are widows—and 785 from the period since that date, of whom two are widows. Widows represent about 5 per cent. of all those whom we are considering, which leads me to wonder whether there are more widows among the records that we have not been able to access, probably owing to the people involved having died some time ago. If the hon. Gentleman had listened a bit more carefully to my statement, he would know that we have taken great care to publicise this provision through the War Widows Association. That publicity has gone to 50,000 war widows as a consequence, and I hope that they, in turn, will have talked to others about it.

With regard to whether I should take further action, that was not thought necessary in November. However, I have looked at the matter again, and I believe that, because the Government are responsible collectively for what was done in their name in the past, we should leave no stone unturned in attempting to find any further people who are liable, and ensuring that they are given payment. On the hon. Gentleman's last point, I can tell him that the costs will be borne by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I thank the Minister for making this statement. The news that we have had this week beggars belief, and it is important that we should have a statement in the House, because the public need to know how the MOD has been treating our armed forces. The Ministry should not get away with it, and I hope that the Minister will tell the House not only that we are prepared to pay back the money that we have robbed from pensioners, but that the heads of those responsible in the MOD will roll.

Dr. Moonie: I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall look at this matter very carefully. The administration of pensions in the armed forces was changed in 1996 or 1997; I am not sure of the exact date. Much of that administration was centralised at the time, and the day-to-day administration of the three pension societies was brought much closer together. As a consequence, and because we are taking a close view of what happens in our pensions department, this kind of mistake should not happen again. The original mistake took place about 50 years ago, and it would probably be a waste of Government resources to attempt to identify who was responsible at the time. Once such a mistake becomes institutionalised, it is accepted as fact. It therefore carried on from year to year without further checking.

Andrew Mackinlay: It was under a Conservative Government.

Dr. Moonie: I shall refrain from making any party political points on the subject, tempting though that might be.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I thank the Minister for giving me notice of his statement, and for coming to the House today. It was right that he should do so. Indeed, some might argue that the Government should have made a statement when this anomaly was first discovered. It appears that the Ministry of Defence is pursuing its normal procedure yet again in this case. First, it denies all knowledge; then it prevaricates and confuses for as long as possible; it admits to something only when the truth is insurmountable; and it compensates only when it is threatened by legal action or when the press finds out.

Why was the Army involved, but not the Navy or the RAF? That is an interesting point for further discussion. The Minister said that 103 cases have so far come to light and that his estimate for compensation is £30 million. How does he calculate that figure if we do not yet know the full number of cases? How many widows and orphans may be affected by the error?

Major Perry suggested that the MOD records are "horrific". If so, why has there not been more of a campaign to encourage take-up? I have enormous respect for the Royal British Legion and the War Widows Association, but we need more national publicity and a proper take-up campaign. Or are the MOD and its civil servants more protective of Treasury coffers than concerned about giving what is due to those who have served the nation so well?

We should congratulate Major Perry on his great persistence and tenacity, but this is not an isolated example. This is the Government who told me that they would not give compensation to the girlfriend of an SAS trooper but then offered her £100,000 when she threatened to sue. This is the Government who paid out £60 million to 5,000 service women who were found by an employment tribunal to have been wrongly dismissed just because they were pregnant.

I welcome the fact that the Minister is now responsible for veterans affairs, but surely we need a proper debate in the House on our veterans because we are consistently letting them down. This country owes a great debt to those who have served it so well. It is the responsibility of this Government to pay that debt in full.

Dr. Moonie: With regard to denial or prevarication, I can say that a mistake was identified as a result of Major Perry's persistence, and action was immediately instituted to try to remedy the situation. That is not something that can be done overnight. We employed four extra members of staff and a great deal of the time of others to ensure that we could go through all the records involved. That has been a very careful process, and we have made no attempt to hide it.

As I said, we gave an answer to the House in 1999 detailing our progress on the matter. We contacted veterans organisations, which, in the absence of any central register of veterans—something that I hope to remedy in future—are the appropriate bodies to deal with the matter. The War Widows Association contacts more than 50,000 widows in its newsletter, and the Royal British Legion contacts more than 600,000 veterans. Frankly, I can think of few better ways of contacting veterans than through those organisations.

However, in light of further consideration of the matter and some doubts in my mind as to whether there are more cases to be identified, I have decided to take further action, which will probably take the form of a national advertisement asking people to contact us. It will of course have to be phrased very carefully because the error affects only a minority of pensioners, and the last thing I want is to raise the expectations of the other 95 per cent. that they might be entitled to compensation—they will not.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement. He will know that when a citizen falls foul of the Inland Revenue, its usual practice is to get the money back plus interest. The MOD has fallen foul of long-standing Army personnel, so will it pay the sums due plus interest?

Dr. Moonie: The situation is that the Inland Revenue, as the responsible body, will repay all the money that was taken, in error, in taxation. In addition, a sum may be paid in compensation. That is governed by legislation, and it is a matter for the Inland Revenue, not the MOD, so I cannot comment any further.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I am grateful to the Minister for his statement. My constituent Mr. Perkins has asked me personally to thank the Minister for the interest that he has shown in this matter. However, I do not think that he will be particularly pleased by the clarification of his own case which the Minister gave at the Dispatch Box. The Minister appears to be saying that despite Mr. Perkins's successful appeal, the MOD is still not satisfied that he was invalided out of the Army in 1959. Mr. Perkins is convinced that he was, and I do not see how the appeal could have been upheld if that were not the case.

Is not the tragedy of this whole affair that people such as Mr. Perkins, who are not of great means, have for forty-two and a half years lived on less than they were entitled to from the state? I honestly implore the Minister to send some money to Mr. Perkins as quickly as he can, and to make sure that all those who are entitled to this refund get their money while they still have an opportunity to improve their quality of life.

Dr. Moonie: I certainly agree that the money should be paid as expeditiously as possible and we have managed

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that in the vast majority of cases. Mr. Perkins' case is complicated and, on grounds of brevity, I stopped reading my carefully prepared brief as I anticipated that the hon. Gentleman might ask a question. There are a couple of very complicated issues to look into and I am taking a personal interest in the case. I shall ensure that it is resolved as quickly as possible.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is not the truth of the matter that my hon. Friend has taken a decision, against the MOD chiefs and all the rest of them, that Tom King, Jonathan Aitken, Malcolm Rifkind and all those other Tory Defence Ministers failed to take? I like listening to my hon. Friend when he makes a statement at the Dispatch Box, putting right what has been wrong for many, many years. I well recall his statement on putting it right for those who were prisoners of the Japanese in the war—£10,000 apiece. Rather than being curmudgeonly and nitpicking like the Liberals and the Tories, let me say that Labour Members are glad when he stands up to make a statement and puts right the wrongs of all those Tory Ministers.

Dr. Moonie: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. The important thing is that a mistake has been identified and substantially rectified. We must ensure that we find the rest of the cases involved and that the mistake is not repeated.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I thank the Minister for his statement and congratulate him on ensuring that the money is coming out of the Treasury, not the defence budget. I am grateful to him for putting this injustice right. Like generations of service pensioners, he is aware that officials who run pensions have been assiduous in defending the defence budget and the Treasury interest when dealing with pensioners over the decades and that there is a glaring injustice that should be addressed.

Some pensioners retired at a time of high inflation and members of my family, including my father, were affected by that. In particular, those who retired in the 1970s are in an absurd position. For example, a major who retired in 1975 having given only 33 years service is on a pension of several thousand pounds a year more than a major who gave longer service to Queen and country and retired in 1977. Will the Minister undertake to consider that injustice with an open mind and to discuss the issue openly with the Royal British Legion?

Dr. Moonie: I have discussed the matter with the Royal British Legion and the Forces Pension Society and I have no doubt that I shall continue to do so. The policy of successive Governments has been very clear: it is recognised that unfortunate cases have arisen from the pensions trough of the 1970s, but that applies to anyone who retired on a public service pension at that time, not just the armed forces. Successive Governments have also recognised that to put it right now is not possible. No change has been made in that policy by this Administration.

On pensions in general, one reason for establishing a Minister for veterans affairs was to consider how we relate to our pensioners and, to use the modern word, to try to be more user-friendly. We want to make it easier for them to contact us, make them feel that they have someone to listen to them and see that injustices are remedied where possible.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I thank my hon. Friend for the speed with which he has come to the Chamber to deliver the statement, for his manner and for the apology that he offered to the veterans—in marked contrast to the bizarre ramblings of the Conservative spokesperson. I also thank my hon. Friend for his warm tribute to members of the War Widows Association for the help with which they furnished his Department.

Surely every hon. Member of Parliament can provide help to their constituents, so I have essentially two questions. First, is it possible for the Ministry of Defence to furnish Members with documentation and information which dependants of a deceased veteran may need to make their claims? Secondly, will the moneys be paid in a lump sum; will they be paid over a period of time; and will they remain tax free, even if those who now take the money that this country has owed to them are taxpayers?

Dr. Moonie: Points of tax law are always difficult for a humble Defence Minister to deal with, but I shall do my best.

My hon. Friend's first point was excellent. Clearly, right hon. and hon. Members will be approached by constituents, and I shall attempt in the very near future to give them information which will allow them to identify with constituents who go to their offices or advice surgeries exactly whether they are likely to be entitled to a refund, or at least whether one would be worth pursuing.

On my hon. Friend's last point, the moneys themselves would not be liable to taxation. After all, they were withdrawn as taxation in the first place. The only reason why I cannot give her a 100 per cent. answer is that I am not sure what happens when moneys are added to an estate that is already liable to death duties. Frankly, I do not know whether, in those circumstances, the moneys would be liable to taxation, but I shall write to my hon. Friend on that.

David Burnside (South Antrim): May I welcome the Minister's statement and his apologies to those who have lost out badly? I agree with the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), that this subject is once again at the bottom of the agenda. The subjects of widows, pensioners and war widows come up now and again as a result of pressure, but they are way down at the bottom of the agenda, and I support the call for a full debate on this subject.

May I ask the Minister two questions, one of which relates to my part of the world? First, if there are any eligible serving members among those who served full time in the Ulster Defence Regiment in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, will they receive the compensation as full members of a British Army regiment?

Secondly, will the Minister comment on Major Perry, who deserves a great deal of praise from this House? According to an article in *The Daily Telegraph* today—this is not on the original mistake—Major Perry blames this cover-up on

> "sloppy thinking and a culture within the MOD that honour goes out of the window if money can be saved and the personal careers of civil servants can be protected".

I would not question the general role of the civil service within the MOD or any Department, but it would appear that there has been a recent cover-up. Can the Minister assure the House that the cover-up and delays on this subject will be investigated and that, if heads have to roll, they will?

Dr. Moonie: With regard to the UDR, like any other serving regiment they would be liable to repayment if such cases arose. If the hon. Gentleman discovers any, I shall be happy if he will bring them to our attention. I strongly rebut any question of a cover-up in the Ministry of Defence. We started to act as soon as we became aware that our previous behaviour, based on what we thought was accurate advice, was wrong. Until recently, the pension society concerned had quite a lot of independence in carrying out its duties and was perhaps not subjected to close enough scrutiny.

As the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) said, only one of our three pension societies made this mistake—the other two did not. It beggars belief that a period of 50 years could have elapsed with one of our pensions organisations doing one thing and two doing another. Given that retired officers meet and discuss matters regularly, it also beggars belief that at some stage somebody did not discover that one of them was paying tax on his pension while another was not. Had that happened, this matter would have been brought to public notice much earlier.

I reiterate that Ministers heard about this matter in 1998. The position was clarified, and organisations outside were contacted and wrote to their members. As progress was being made, we replied to a question in the House on the subject, and we have replied to further questions since. There has been no attempt to cover this up; nor have I, through my officials, been able to establish any evidence in the distant past of an attempt to cover it up.

I believe—I shall have another look at the matter to make sure, although it will be difficult to go back 50 years—that an honest mistake was made in one of our societies in the 1950s. It was then institutionalised and brought into every action after that. It was only through the persistence of Major Perry, whom I again congratulate, that we got to the bottom of it.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement and the way in which he made it. Is it not important that these payments be made quickly, using a simple, straightforward formula? Some of these pensioners will have been in receipt of benefits at various stages. Can my hon. Friend assure us that there will not have to be an excruciatingly complex analysis of relative incomes and of the impact on benefits of the payments that these pensioners have been denied, which would result in a long delay? We may end up with the Benefits Agency being able to claim money from these pensioners.

Dr. Moonie: I think that these pensions are usually discounted when benefit entitlement is considered. I am not sure how much is discounted, or what the overall position would be, but I should be happy to establish that for my hon. Friend, and to set his mind at rest by writing to him on the subject.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am obliged to the Minister for the copy of the statement, although the notice was rather short. The hon. Gentleman warmly praised Major John Perry for his tenacity and efforts, and I am sure that it is largely due to Major Perry's campaign that this result has been achieved.

If compensation is to be paid, it will have at least to equal the amount plus the interest that would have been earned on deposit account, otherwise it is no compensation at all. I sincerely believe that the Minister will do his best in that regard. Will he consider that issue, and ensure that compensation really does mean compensation?

Dr. Moonie: I shall do my best, but compensation is paid according to a fixed formula. That is covered by statute, and I honestly do not believe that there is anything I can do to vary that. The formula is based on the amount of money taken in error plus an element of compensation to take account of the fact that the money could have been used. Let us face it, no compensation will make up for the fact that many of these pensioners have died without enjoying the benefits of the money to which they were entitled.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I also welcome the Minister's statement. It is a pity that it is 50 years too late, but that is not our fault. On the practical side, I was worried that at the end of his statement my hon. Friend said that people should write to an office in Glasgow. In reality, many of them will contact their Members of Parliament. The procedures that were put in place to compensate prisoners of war worked very well. I suggest to the Minister that we are given a parliamentary number that people can ring, so that we can put cases into the system. I do not want to be the arbiter of people's entitlement. If we do not get this procedure right, we will get more complaints about further delay.

Dr. Moonie: I fully accept my hon. Friend's point. Today, I am giving a holding answer so that anyone with immediate concerns can write to the appropriate address. People have also been phoning our hotline at the War Pensions Agency. Assuming that that continues, we shall ensure that it is capable of dealing with complaints. I shall also ensure that suitable advertisements are [illegible], and that hotlines are widely publicised, so that as many people as possible can take advantage of them.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I thank the Minister for the grace and generosity of his apology. Will he assure those members of the 3 Military Intelligence Battalion who have been called up that their pension rights, the pension rights of any widows that may result from their being called up, and their tax position are properly explained to them?

Dr. Moonie: We have improved the system of call-out of volunteers and compulsory call-out of personnel—both are involved in that battalion. We have carefully considered the call-up of members of the Territorial Army and other reserve forces. The information given is much more carefully explained to them now than it was in the past. I shall certainly ensure that they are in no doubt about their rights. In their entirety and probably throughout this deployment, they will be based in this

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country, so I hope that their lives will not be put at risk. There is a chance that some of them will be sent to Afghanistan, but it is only a chance.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I wholeheartedly welcome the Minister's resolution of one of the many injustices and anomalies in the service pensions system, but he will have the support of Members in all parts of the House if, as Minister responsible for veterans, he now addresses other service pensions issues so that we properly recognise the debt we owe to our ex-service men. In particular, will he institute an independent actuarial review of the consequences of reduced pension payments for those who served between 1949 and 1975?

Dr. Moonie: Given the complexity of the hon. Gentleman's question, and the fact that it is tangential to my statement, I shall have to write to him.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Minister agree with the thrust of what was said by the hon. Members for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) and for Hereford (Mr. Keetch)? For many years, has there not been a culture of resistance in the Ministry of Defence to questions in regard to which matters concerning pension rights become controversial? Will the Minister consider looking again at some of the outstanding issues in relation to which that controversy persists?

I am thinking particularly of a case advanced by the Forces Pension Society involving serving officers who marry after their term of service has ended, usually because of the nature of their careers, and then find that their widows—should their wives outlive them, as will probably be the case—will be entitled to nothing from the pension contributions that they have made. Might not Ministers do better to be a little more sceptical about some of the advice that they receive from their MOD officials on such matters?

Dr. Moonie: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we consider all such issues carefully when they are raised. Obviously we do not spend all our time considering them, or we would not be able to do our other jobs; but we review them periodically to see whether anything can be done.

Contrary to belief, when the MOD is clearly liable it makes no bones about paying compensation. As for the specific issue mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, it is a while since I considered it. I will have another look at it.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I thank the Minister for his statement and, indeed, for his apology. It is clearly important for what is wrong to be put right as quickly as possible, especially as I suspect that those still affected are likely to be the most elderly and vulnerable pension holders. Will the Minister therefore give two guarantees? First, will he ensure that all the necessary resources are put at his disposal in order to solve the problem? For instance, will he be able to contact all the regimental associations, which often hold much better records than the MOD? Secondly, will he undertake to write to the Treasury himself to ensure that the formula that is applied is not the one normally used when tax is being back-paid, and that a realistic interest payment is made to reflect the period during which people have lost money?

Dr. Moonie: I agree that the net should be spread as widely as possible, and I think that surviving widows probably are the most vulnerable group. I recently had discussions with representatives of pensioners, who told me that many women of that generation do not know much about the system according to which they are paid; they relied on their husbands when they were alive, and assumed that what was done was correct. We will do all that we can to encourage and help such women to come forward and claim what is due to them.

As for Treasury rules on compensation, I am prepared to consider making representations, but have no great confidence in their ultimate success.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): While praising the Minister for coming to the House and for making the apology in the manner in which he did, may I respectfully point out that it appears that the MOD has dragged its feet on this issue, as, perhaps, with other issues? Although I accept that there has not been a cover-up, will the Minister instigate an inquiry to ensure that such matters are dealt with properly in future by the MOD, and that loss and suffering are minimised for those who are very vulnerable with regard to this aspect of pensions?

Dr. Moonie: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. I shall certainly be looking at the matter to ensure that any mistakes are not repeated.

Points of Order

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may be aware that yesterday the BBC "Today" programme put into the public domain a letter from the chief executive of the south east region of the NHS indicating that the NHS would overspend in that region by some £60 million this year. That figure was accepted on the programme by the Secretary of State.

In a reply dated 14 January to a parliamentary question, the Minister indicated a projected overspend of £7.5 million, an almost tenfold difference. Both the letter and the reply are dated 14 January. Given that the Minister must by now know that there is a serious difference in the answer given to Parliament and the answer given to the region and to the public, has there been any indication from the Minister of any attempt to come to the House to explain the discrepancy between the two?

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was the hon. Member who tabled the question that received the answer to which my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) has referred. Can you investigate the discrepancies, which clearly led to incorrect information being given to me? That has added insult to injury. It took the Department of Health some six weeks to give me any sort of reply to a question that I had tabled back in November, and I have discovered that my own health authority, Buckinghamshire, was predicting a deficit on publicly available material in November and December last year that was significantly larger than the deficit for Buckinghamshire that the Minister gave me in the answer received on 14 January this year.

It seems that I had to wait a very long time for an answer for my constituents and received inaccurate information from the Department. I hope that Members can get a better service in future.

Mr. Speaker: I am governed by the rules of the House, and I am not responsible for the content of answers. The hon. Members for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) can seek further clarification through parliamentary questions, by correspondence or indeed by asking for a meeting with the Minister, but I repeat that it is not a matter for me.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On two occasions yesterday, the Secretary of State for Health made comments that were grossly insulting to hon. Members from Wales and indeed to the people of Wales. Will you take the opportunity to point out to the Secretary of State that he has responsibility in a range of areas for issues covering Wales, not least one of the issues about which he was asked yesterday? Will you also point out that comments such as

> "I do not do Wales . . . However, I occasionally like to do people from Wales"—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 770.]

are extremely unbefitting of a Cabinet Minister? Re-reading them, I was trying to work out exactly what

> "to do people from Wales"

meant. Is it sexual innuendo, or are we being invited to step outside the Chamber? It should be pointed out to the Secretary of State that such comments are way below the standard that we expect from Cabinet Ministers.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman mentioned responsibility. I am not responsible for the Secretary of State's statements. The Secretary of State is.

Identity Card

4.19 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for an identity card for British residents; and for connected purposes.

We are all aware of the gruesome fate that awaits most ten-minute rule Bills. This Bill is intended as a pilot for any potential future Government legislation.

I am seeking to promote a serious debate that goes beyond the relatively superficial matters covered in some previous discussions. However, I pay tribute to the serious discussion that has taken place. For instance, reports from the Select Committee on Home Affairs some years ago, and from the Data Protection Commissioner, are notable in that respect. The matter was also given serious consideration in a draft report from the Information Commissioner, which I have seen as a result of my membership of her informal advisory group.

I am also pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) will put the case against the Bill. That will allow us to have a full debate. With a little luck, we may also have the opportunity to discover the view of the House.

Why is the Bill needed? The main objectives are to reduce low-level crime and disorder, to help prevent inappropriate purchase—of alcohol or fireworks, for instance—and to discourage all fraud based on impersonation. Such fraud includes benefit fraud and electoral fraud.

The Bill contains four main provisions. First, it provides that all residents should be issued with a smart ID card. It would be compulsory to own such a card, but not to carry it at all times. Similar provisions apply to driving licences. So far, I have not encountered anyone who thought that the requirement that drivers own a driving licence was a great imposition. On a similar principle, it should be possible for residents of Britain to be able to identify themselves if necessary.

Secondly, the Bill would authorise the police to request identification, but only if a person were considered to be behaving suspiciously, or had entered an area temporarily or permanently designated as high-security. An example of such an area would be that immediately surrounding a military base.

The Bill would mean that an ID card would be sufficient to satisfy such a request. Therefore, any British resident carrying an ID card would be able to satisfy police inquiries by producing it. If the ID card were not available, the police would be allowed to request alternative identification. If they could not satisfy themselves about a person's identity, officers could, if necessary, accompany that person to his home and look at the card there. In addition, another person with an ID card or a driver's licence could be asked for confirmation of a person's identity, or some other means of identification might be available.

The key point is that the Bill would give police the power to ask for identification that they lack at present. The other day, a police officer in my constituency told me that he often stops people who he believes to be joy riding. They give him a name and address and say, "Sorry, officer, we haven't got our driving licence with us." The officer is forced to take at face value the name and address that he is given. When the people go off, the officer has no way to tell whether the name and address that he has been given are false.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that it would be impossible for you to be caught loitering in Beeston high street at 2 am examining shop fronts, but it is possible that I could be there. If I were, a policeman might ask what I was doing and who I was. At present, I could give some explanation and any name or address without being required to offer proof. At the end of such a conversation, I could commit a crime when the policeman moved on, secure in the knowledge that I had not been personally identified.

The police should be required to log all such requests. That would act as a deterrent. People who have been identified by the police, and know that the police have logged that identification, are less likely to commit a crime in the same vicinity soon afterwards. It would also be a security measure. Most hon. Members will recall the controversy over the sus law as it applied in Brixton. Perfectly law-abiding people used to be stopped several times a week, simply because they lived in Brixton and were black. We must ensure that such behaviour does not happen again. The Bill foresees an independent audit each year of the number of requests made by each police force, to discover whether any police force is using the power much more than others, and to give those conducting the audit the power to investigate why that should be the case, to ensure that only genuinely suspicious behaviour results in requests for identification.

All local authorities would be provided with a networked card printer, which would replace a lost or stolen card and register with the network that all previous versions of the card for that person were invalid or stolen, so that attempts to misuse identification would meet swift retribution. That provision is necessary. In Sweden, there have been many cases of identity being stolen, with fairly drastic consequences, so it is important that if one's card is stolen there is a local office where one can immediately obtain a replacement and ensure that all previous versions of that card are recognised as invalid.

Finally, I propose that the smart card have sufficient capacity—technically, that is no problem now—to cover a wide range of possible additional services for the holder. I envisage in the long run incorporating the driving licence, the asylum seeker card that is now being introduced, the card that many people have proposed for benefits recipients, and identification for other Government and local government services. It is important that we make it clear that it is not a card that we give to asylum seekers and benefits recipients only, in some way stamping them as requiring special supervision, but a card that each of us has, to register which services we are receiving from Government and local government.

In addition, the Bill foresees the possibility of other organisations and companies—local transport bodies, financial institutions or retailers—renting space on the card's memory for voluntary use by their customers. That would greatly enhance the usefulness of the card to the user and it would provide a secure and well supported ID system for vendors and help fully recover the cost of the scheme.

I have tried to strike a balance between crime reduction, usefulness to residents, protection against misuse and elimination of cost to the Exchequer. I recognise that a great deal more debate will be needed before any such Bill sees the light of day, but I ask the House's leave to introduce the Bill so that that debate may proceed.

4.28 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) has made a good case and I congratulate him on securing the debate.

Although I oppose the Bill, I do not oppose in principle the idea of introducing identity cards. Nor do I believe that the operation of a system of identity cards would present insurmountable practical difficulties or result in the generation of excessive costs, although costs arguments have been a constant feature of debate on the subject. My hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) quoted a figure of £1.8 billion as the cost of introducing the scheme, which he claims, on the basis of Home Office figures, would be equivalent to putting several thousand police officers on the street. We must be aware of those arguments about cost, but that is not the basis on which I seek to oppose the Bill.

Identity cards do work well in many European countries. There are many practical benefits, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe said, as well as imaginative ways of helping to recover the costs. I oppose the Bill because I do not believe that it would be right to try to introduce a system of identity cards in Britain at the present time. I believe that we need a much more robust and inclusive concept of citizenship before we would introduce identity cards. We must work first to change the rather unbalanced relationship that still exists between the British citizen and the British state.

The positive case for identity cards rests on the idea that they will strengthen the rights of the citizen, but in the title of his Bill, my hon. Friend refers to residents rather than citizens. Many of his arguments about the practical benefits focus on the benefits that would accrue to the holder of an identity card as a consumer. However, identity cards would be issued to individuals by virtue of their status not as consumers or residents, but as citizens. We cannot raise the issue of whether to have identity cards without at the same time raising the question of who is to qualify as a British citizen and exactly what those qualifications mean.

We must recognise that the introduction of identity cards, especially on a compulsory basis, as argued for by my hon. Friend, would fundamentally change the relationship between the citizen and the state. There is no need to rehearse—I do not have time to do so—the many objections that could be adduced on civil liberty grounds, not just in terms of costs, to the introduction of identity cards. Those objections include the effect that identity cards would have on the protection of civil and human rights, such as the rights to privacy, confidentiality and freedom from discrimination.

At the heart of those objections—indeed, the foundation on which they rest—is the notion of the state that, by its very existence, is antagonistic to the interests and freedoms of individuals; thus objectors view the identity card as one more instrument of state control. As Charter 88 has said, the entire concept of a national identity card system requires a level of trust and authority that is notably lacking in this country.

I do not share that fundamental mistrust of the state. I believe that the state is fundamental to our basic rights and liberties and to their protection. However, we have a duty to ensure that we balance the control that the state exercises over us as citizens with the democratic control and accountability that we exercise, so far as possible, over the state through our elected representatives and through the House. The problem is that that broader notion of citizenship is not very deeply entrenched in Britain today. I submit that we still think of ourselves as subjects, rather than citizens, and as relatively weak as citizens, lacking in opportunities for redress in the face of the centralised and, at times, seemingly overbearing power of the British state.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has started to make the case that we should view identity cards as a kind of passport to citizenship that will make it easier for people to prove their identities and guarantee our entitlement as citizens to certain basic services. I welcome that approach, but there is little evidence from countries that have identity cards that they are effective, for example, in managing crime. Nevertheless, the argument that a citizenship or identity card would strengthen the position of the most vulnerable groups in our society—the argument that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary seeks to make—is powerful and must be taken very seriously.

Part of the problem with that argument is that many people believe that, in practice, it will cut both ways. Many of the most marginal groups may feel even more excluded, depending on the operation of the identity card system, especially if they fail to qualify for the card for any reason. Even if vulnerable groups qualified for such a card, it would be difficult perhaps for some of them to benefit if it were used to gain access to services, especially in the digital age.

I return to the point that we need a far broader, more inclusive and rights-based approach to citizenship to underpin any suggestion of introducing an identity card. We must move strongly away from notions of citizenship based on nationality and family descent. As I have said, we need to challenge the notion that lies at the heart of the unwritten British constitutional system that we are first subjects and then citizens. We need to strengthen new concepts of citizenship from the bottom up, rather than trying to introduce a new relationship between the state and the citizen from the top down. I believe that only then will we achieve the kind of sea-change in the relationship between the citizen and the state without which the idea of a compulsory identity card for this country will never enjoy public confidence and support.

There are signs that things are moving in the right direction. Through contact with other European countries, we have seen some of the practical benefits that accrue to citizens because of the operation of identity cards. The incorporation of the European convention on human rights in British law and the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are all steps in the right direction.

There are also clear signs of a shift in our political culture. The stronger role of civil society organisations, the development even of notions of corporate citizenships and the idea of stakeholding all help to broaden the concept of citizenship and the bottom-up approach.

Not least, the Government's programme of constitutional reform is moving the agenda forward on citizenship issues. The abolition of the hereditary principle as an entitlement to sit in Parliament and the Government's commitment to devolution and subsidiarity

[Roger Casale]

all help to make notions of active citizenship—and, in particular, popular sovereignty—more deeply entrenched. One sign that such a sea-change in the relationship between the citizen and state had come about would be if the request for identity cards came from citizens or civil society groups themselves. That would enable us to approach the issue in a bottom-up, rather than top-down, manner.

If we are to have identity cards in the future, they should be just that. They should be a proof of identity and therefore of citizenship and entitlement. We should certainly not try to make the cards do the work that my hon. Friend would like them to do however convenient and attractive that might seem. In seeking to introduce the cards that he has in mind, he will find that he is in competition with Departments, which will find plenty of jobs for the cards to do. The Department of Health has already expressed an interest in using such cards for organ donors; the Home Office would like a smart card; and we will hear from the Department for Education and Skills that the cards should contain our CVs and examination results and perhaps from the Treasury that the card should be able to answer the five economic tests.

If we are to have a system of identity cards at some point in the future, it must be clear that, as well as gaining something, we would be giving something up. We will be giving up the liberty that we currently enjoy—although some might question its practical relevance in the modern world—to be able to move around Britain without documentary proof of our identity. However, if I had the time, that point might lead to a discussion of the important point about the effect that the introduction of identity cards might have on public confidence in the police and on the relationship between the public and the police.

Traditionally, internal controls have been strengthened where external border controls have been weak. There is a much greater use of identity cards, for example, in the EU countries that have signed the Schengen agreement. We should not introduce identity cards in this country without examining our border controls. Citizens should have greater freedom of movement between Britain and other European countries in return for what would inevitably become tighter control over our freedom of movement within the UK.

The time is not right for the introduction of the Bill. The public must not be coerced into accepting its provisions without there being the much more robust and broader notion of citizenship that I have described. I oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 77, Noes 106.

Division No. 141] **[4.38 pm**

AYES

Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Betts, Clive
Brennan, Kevin
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnside, David
Chaytor, David
Cummings, John
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Grayling, Chris
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lamb, Norman
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Linton, Martin
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Oaten, Mark
Organ, Diana
Ottaway, Richard
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Rapson, Syd
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tynan, Bill
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Stephen McCabe and
Dr. Nick Palmer.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Crausby, David
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
McKechin, Ann
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marris, Rob
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Munn, Ms Meg
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Öpik, Lembit
Owen, Albert
Pollard, Kerry
Redwood, Rt Hon John

Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Lilley and
Mr. Simon Thomas.

Question accordingly negatived.

ADOPTION AND CHILDREN BILL (PROGRAMME) (No. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That, pursuant to the reports [15th and 17th January] of the Special Standing Committee, the Order of 29th October 2001 (Adoption and Children Bill (Programme)) shall be varied as follows:—

Consideration and Third Reading

1.—Paragraph 4(1) of the Order shall be omitted.

2.—(1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be concluded in two allotted days.

(2) Proceedings on consideration (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at Eight o'clock on the second of those days or, if that day is a Thursday, at Five o'clock on that day.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second of those days or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(4) An allotted day is one on which the Bill is put down on the main business as first Government Order of the Day.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION BILL (PROGRAMME) (No. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That, pursuant to the report [17th January] from Standing Committee G, the Order of 4th December 2001 (Education Bill (Programme)) shall be varied as follows:—

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Order shall be omitted.

2.—(1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be concluded in two allotted days.

(2) Proceedings on consideration (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the second of those days or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second of those days or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(4) An allotted day is one on which the Bill is put down on the main business as first Government Order of the Day.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

International Development Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

RESTRICTION ON ASSISTANCE TO GOVERNMENTS INVOLVED IN GROSS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

'(1) The Secretary of State shall prepare and lay before Parliament a list of those countries whose governments he considers to engage in or tolerate gross violations of human rights, as defined in subsections (2) and (3) below, and other countries may be added to (or deleted from) the list by resolution of the House of Commons.

(2) In determining whether a country is in gross violation of human rights, as described in subsection (3) below, the Secretary of State shall give particular consideration to whether a foreign government—

(a) has engaged in gross violations of the right to freedom of religion; or

(b) has failed to undertake serious and sustained efforts to combat gross violations of the right to freedom of religion, when such efforts could have been reasonably undertaken; or

(c) has engaged in persecution of individuals or groups on the basis of their ethnic origin or membership of a particular ethnic group.

(3) In this section "gross violations of human rights" includes a consistent pattern of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, prolonged detention without charges, causing the disappearance of persons by the abduction or clandestine detention of those powers, or other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of persons.

(4) No assistance shall be provided under Part I of this Act to the government of any country for the time being included in the list in existence under subsection (1) (provided that this section does not prohibit or restrict the provision of medicine, medical equipment or supplies, food, or other humanitarian assistance).'.—*[Bob Spink.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.50 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Britain has a strong and honourable tradition and record on aid and development. I congratulate the Government on introducing the Bill, which the Opposition welcome. We believe in strengthening our international aid framework to make it more effective and more relevant and appropriate to changing world situations. We think that the Bill is right, but we also think that it can be improved. That is why I am speaking to the new clause, which would link the giving of British aid with the promotion of long-term, sustainable human rights improvements and, thereby, the promotion of long-term, sustainable development. I should make it immediately clear that the new clause does not seek to restrict direct humanitarian aid. I propose that food, medical and disaster aid should be exempt from the controls that it would introduce.

I know that the Secretary of State for International Development is currently in Tokyo, but none the less, I should like to say that I have long admired her. She has great energy and commitment, especially in this area, and a very big heart. I hope that she will take on board the ideas that I am floating in the new clause and be guided by them in future policy development. As the general thrust of my arguments is sound—some might say that they are merely simple common sense—I have no doubt that she will listen and respond positively. Even if she cannot do so today, she may do so in developing her policy in future.

The House knows well the superb work of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) on human rights and the promotion of religious freedom around the world. His sound influence will be felt in the new clause, for which he must take all the credit. He is currently unavoidably detained in Committee; otherwise, he would be here to speak to the new clause. None the less, both he and I wholeheartedly support the promotion of international development world wide and would welcome an increase in the amount of UK Government aid that is given to developing nations. However, decisions on whether such aid should be given, how much is allocated and where it is targeted should take into serious consideration the human rights records of the receiving nations. In many cases, aid can and should be used as leverage to pressure Governments into strengthening civil society and improving their human rights records.

Since the 20th century, human rights have become a universal language enshrined in international law, including the universal declaration of human rights, the Geneva conventions and the international covenants on civil and political rights. There is a strong correlation between a state's respect for human rights and its development. That underpins the thesis that I am advancing.

It is no coincidence that most economically developed nations tend to have generally good human rights records, a strong civil society and a democratic Government. Strengthening civil society and significantly improving a state's human rights record are major contributions to the long-term development of any nation. I therefore urge the Government not to give aid to states that engage in or tolerate gross violations of human rights. As I explained earlier, humanitarian assistance such as providing medicine and food is excepted.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Like the hon. Gentleman, I want to do whatever is possible to promote human rights. It would be difficult to think of a Government with a poorer human rights record than the Taliban when they governed Afghanistan, yet the United Nations argued for massive aid to that country for humanitarian purposes. Much of it required Government support. On 6 September, the UN argued for $560 million of aid. Would not the new clause put such aid at risk?

Bob Spink: It would put pressure on the new Government in Afghanistan to improve and strengthen civil society and human rights. It would apply positive pressure to try to achieve a freer, more democratic and sounder world.

Hugh Bayley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. Like him, I hope—and have confidence—that the new Administration in Afghanistan will improve human rights. It is an important, positive sign that the Government includes two women. However, my question related to the Taliban. Would he have opposed giving aid to Afghanistan before 11 September, when the Taliban were in power?

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman asks a hypothetical question. We are no longer in that position. If the new clause had formed part of Government policy many years ago, I presume that it would have been used as positive pressure to extract a better record from Governments who abuse human rights. We can apply pressure by many means, for example, diplomacy or simply talking and asking for change. We can also apply economic pressure to improve human rights. The new clause would create a link between human rights and economic pressure.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I acknowledge the importance of putting pressure on countries to improve human rights. However, the new clause goes further. Once a country is listed as a state where gross violations of human rights occur, it can receive no development assistance. The Taliban would have been on the list because they were probably the worst Government in the world for violating human rights. The new clause would have prevented any aid to Afghanistan. Would the hon. Gentleman have wanted to achieve that?

Bob Spink: If the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard*, he will realise that I excluded purely humanitarian aid from the remit of the new clause. Medicine, food and disaster aid is therefore exempt. The new clause covers budget support and development aid. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees with my constituents who do not want British money to support despotic regimes. We do not collect taxes to do that, and our constituents do not pay taxes for that.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Spink: Let me make a little progress. The hon. Gentleman may catch my eye later.

Perhaps I can define the "gross violation of human rights" that the new clause tries to control. It includes

> "violations of the right to freedom of religion"

and the

> "persecution of individuals or groups on the basis of their ethnic origin or membership of a particular ethnic group."

The new clause is about conditional, not tied aid. The basic thesis of new clause 1 is linking human rights to aid. It is an idea for the future. The Government's view on the future potential for this linkage would be appreciated, whatever their view on the new clause at this late stage of the Bill's progress.

5 pm

According to Library research paper 01/85, published on 1 November 2001, clause 1 states that the Secretary of State may provide development aid if she is satisfied that this is likely to contribute to a reduction of poverty. The paper states:

> "Development assistance is defined as assistance provided for the purpose of:
>
> Furthering sustainable development in one or more countries outside the UK or;
>
> Improving the welfare of the population of one or more such countries."

For the purpose of clause 1, sustainable development is defined as

> "any development that is, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, prudent having regard to the likelihood of its generating lasting benefits for the population of the country or countries in relation to which it is provided."

I argue that, unless aid is linked to promoting good, sustainable human rights—as new clause 1 proposes—it will not satisfy the test of whether it is likely to generate lasting benefits for the population of a country. As hon. Members have already tried to argue, a short-term case can be made for giving aid at any given time, but perhaps they will see that my proposal is a good idea for the longer term, when they look back and see how the world is developing.

Jim Knight: In Belarus, the Government under Lukashenko is one that most of us would want to put on a list, if one were to be manufactured according to the provisions of the hon. Gentleman's new clause. However, I have been part of an initiative involving a partnership between two communities—one in this country and one in Belarus—seeking to resolve a particular problem in relation to AIDS and HIV, which has also extended into other areas of civil society. In the city of Svetlogorsk, this has achieved an extension of the participation in government by a much larger number of people. If such activity is repeated across a country, it can turn that country around and start to move the political climate towards one that might overthrow a President such as Lukashenko and replace the system with a more democratic one. I would not want that sort of effort to be put at risk by blacklisting any development assistance being given to projects such as these.

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman is obviously a great expert on Belarus and on that kind of aid. I do not think that my new clause would put such aid at risk, because it would exclude humanitarian and medical aid. My proposal would bring forward the spreading of democracy and good human rights practices in countries such as Belarus.

I shall give an example of my own. The millions of pounds in aid that the British Government give to Vietnam should be conditional on the Vietnamese Government making significant progress with their human rights record. How else are we to get change? That must include Vietnam ending its persecution of Christians and the adherents of other religions, and stopping the continuing atrocities against the Montagnard people of the central highlands.

Giving aid to Governments who engage in or tolerate gross human rights violations—as Britain currently does—only supports such despotic regimes, and is more likely to hinder than to help long-term development. Making aid conditional can promote human rights. It can also give more purpose and long-term impact to our aid programmes and make them more focused, and make development sustainable, which is one of the key qualifying tests that the Government set out for their aid programme. This could be a sound way to secure change in Zimbabwe, to give another example.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Does the hon. Gentleman's entirely laudable commitment to human rights represent a policy shift within his party? I well remember, when the Conservatives were last in government, that it was their policy to encourage trade with Burma, which has one of the worst human rights records in the world. I can also remember the time when Baroness Thatcher, as she is now, dubbed sanctions against the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa

[Glenda Jackson]

minimal in their effect. I certainly do not recall any pronouncements by the then Conservative Government against the gross infringement of human rights in Chile, either while there was a fascist regime in power or even afterwards. Surely, the issue here is that—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Lady should make her point briefly.

Glenda Jackson: All the new clause would do is punish those who have already suffered the denial of their human rights.

Bob Spink: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her kind words in introducing her question. I know how seriously she takes these matters, and the House always listens when she speaks on these subjects, but I think that on this occasion she is wrong. The new clause would allow humanitarian aid to be made available and it would put pressure on regimes that are doing things wrong to plan and make improvements and to move towards democracy. In the longer run, it would achieve what she most wants—a safer world in which there is more care for people's freedoms.

The hon. Lady made some sound points about the Conservatives' record, but we are now opening our ears to what the people have to say. Our constituents do not want us to give taxpayers' money to despotic regimes that flout human rights; they want us to use that money on development aid, as we should, and they want to see us do so with a sense of purpose in order to develop good practice around the world.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), I think that the hon. Gentleman's aims appear to be laudable and I understand why he wants to link human rights, good governance and aid. However, I share the concerns that my hon. Friend expressed. It is the poorest people in the poorest countries of the world who are suffering under despotic regimes, and they are the people whom we should be helping.

The new clause refers only to humanitarian aid, but two major issues are health and education, and money for those comes from a long-term budget rather than a humanitarian aid budget. The new clause would not allow us to spend money to improve health and education through, for example, non-governmental organisations in the civil society that we are trying to help and protect, instead of giving aid to Governments. The danger of the new clause, however laudable it might seem, is that it will lead to people who are suffering now suffering even more.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind all hon. Members that interventions are meant to be brief.

Bob Spink: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He made some sound points. It seems from all the interventions so far that there is agreement between hon. Members on both sides of the House that my intentions in tabling new clause 1 are laudable and right in principle, but the detail may require more discussion and development. That is the point of the proceedings, and I am delighted that we are having the debate. We can discuss the definition of humanitarian aid, how much medical assistance and food it should include, whether education comes into it and whether the new clause should simply exclude budget support. Those are points worth debating.

I shall give an example of a purposeful use of aid so that the House will understand my aims. The United States uses legislation and the suspension of overseas aid as a means of promoting human rights abroad. We can learn from its International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which created a number of tools to promote religious freedom as a foreign policy goal and to combat religious persecution in other countries.

The law identifies a wide range of diplomatic and economic tools that the President may apply to those countries that engage in systematic and on-going violations of human rights and religious liberty. The action that the President may take against such violations of religious freedom includes suspending US Government aid to offending states. That constitutes US Government recognition of the principle that aid should not simply be handed out to overseas Governments without their human rights records being seriously considered.

The US Act is an example of creative and common-sense use of legislation, including the leverage that may be applied through overseas aid to put significant pressure on states with poor human rights records. The mere existence of the Act and the range of sanctions that may be applied against state violators of human rights puts significant, tangible pressure on them to improve their human rights records. In the longer run, it will achieve better, more sustainable development, which is what we should all seek.

We in Britain should adopt a similar approach to promoting religious freedom and other human rights across the world. The new clause would deliver smart sanctions—encouragement for and pressure on countries to open up their borders, which is a step in the right direction that Conservative Members have promoted for many years. Many Governments who grossly violate religious freedoms and other human rights are unlikely to listen to persuasion and mere expressions of concern alone, notwithstanding the extraordinary persuasiveness of the Secretary of State, who is in Tokyo.

We should call on offending Governments to stop allowing human rights abuses, and non-humanitarian assistance to those countries, such as the budgetary support that the UK gives the Pakistani Government, should be used as leverage for them to improve their human rights records as soon as possible. That could have been done with Pakistan.

The new clause would allow the Government to use economic as well as diplomatic levers on Pakistan, for example, to persuade it to move from its system of government—a military dictatorship—towards democracy and a stronger civil society, which I know the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) wants to promote.

Tony Cunningham: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but I am not sure that the US is a good example to use in an overseas aid debate. Of the 22 most developed countries, it is bottom of the league as it gives only 0.1 per cent. of gross domestic product to development and it has not signed all sorts of UN treaties, including the land mines treaty, which most developed and many underdeveloped countries have signed.

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman chooses one statistic, but in straight cash terms the United States comes out top of the pile. We are debating what our taxpayers give to the developing world, what long-term effect that money will have, whether we can change the world and whether, in 25 years, we shall be able to say, "That was a good new clause. We should have taken it on board earlier." I hope that the Government are listening to what I am saying.

Experience shows that Governments are often unwilling to improve their human rights conduct unless failure to do so inflicts a significant cost on them, especially if it can be measured in tangible economic terms. In practice, that principle is rarely applied. For example, the Indonesian Government have received significant British aid in the past year despite the fact that they totally failed to prevent an extremist Islamic group, Laskar Jihad, from sending 8,000 fighters to the Molucca islands to wage a jihad—a so-called holy war—against Christians. Those Islamic terrorists were not from the Moluccas and they included Afghans and Pakistanis, yet the Indonesian Government have made little or no attempt to remove them.

5.15 pm

Several weeks before travelling to the Moluccas, Laskar Jihad publicly announced that it would wage a jihad against the Molucca Christians, yet the Indonesian Government did absolutely nothing to prevent that. On 25 October 2001, the Prime Minister, no less, wrote to President Megawati about this extremist group, but the British aid continued. So did the human rights abuses, proving that words alone, even from such a person as the Prime Minister, are just not enough. They are not the answer and we need economic pressure to go with them.

Laskar Jihad is well armed, having received many weapons such as mortars and automatics from the Indonesian military. Moreover, Indonesian Government soldiers have joined its attacks on Christians. On 13 December, the BBC reported that authorities in Indonesia had confirmed that al-Qaeda fighters have been fighting in Sulawesi to support Laskar Jihad's war against the Christians there. The Indonesian Government's indulgence of Laskar Jihad has enabled it, if not encouraged it, to widen its area of operations and instigate horrific and brutal violence against Christians, not just in the Molucca islands, but in central Sulawesi.

There are about 28,000 internally displaced Christians in Tentena in central Sulawesi. Since June, Islamic fighters have cleared Christians from the town of Poso and the surrounding areas. Those Christians were forced to take refuge from the violence in Tentena. They are short of food, medicines and shelter and their situation is truly dire. If Laskar Jihad succeeds in Tentena, another mass slaughter of Christians in the region is likely.

This is not simply an issue of religious liberty. It involves people being displaced, brutalised, tortured and murdered because of their religious beliefs. That is a form of ethnic cleansing and it is most serious. Obviously, the Indonesian Government should remove the Islamic fighters far from the vicinity of Tentena, but they are not doing so.

The fighters' removal would minimise the chances of an anti-Christian massacre, yet no such action is being taken, notwithstanding the Prime Minister's intervention last year. Perhaps he would do more good if he postured and travelled the world a little less and spent more time in the House focusing on home policies such as the new clause, which is relevant to our constituents and British taxpayers.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Gentleman is extremely generous with his time and I thank him for giving way. He talks of appalling occurrences in Indonesia. What would be the consequences for aid to Indonesia if his new clause went on the statute book? Would it stop all aid to Indonesia?

Bob Spink: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has given me yet another opportunity to reiterate that, had the new clause been on the statute book, the Indonesian Government might have been minded to prevent Laskar Jihad from moving into the Moluccas and murdering those Christians. Perhaps he is not aware that, so far, 6,000 Christians—not 600 or 60—have been slaughtered in the Moluccas. Even if only six had been slaughtered, that would still be serious.

Glenda Jackson *rose—*

Hugh Bayley *rose—*

Bob Spink: I must make progress, as other Members want to speak and I am taking up a lot of time. The new clause would concentrate the Government's mind on those valid issues. Whether they continue to give aid to Indonesia should depend on how much the Indonesian authorities are willing to do to take firm action against Laskar Jihad and restore order in the Moluccas and Sulawesi.

As I said, thousands of Christians have already been slaughtered in the Moluccas and thousands more will perish in Sulawesi unless the Indonesian Government drastically improve their response to the situation. If the Indonesian Government continue their policy of simply trying to accommodate military Islamic groups, it will not be long before Indonesia becomes a safe haven for a variety of terrorist organisations, possibly including the al-Qaeda network.

There are a number of steers by which Britain can help to promote human rights: we can go through the European Union, through the Commonwealth or along with the United States. We can also introduce new clauses such as this, which is designed to make much more effective the British Government's attempts to improve other countries' human rights records and to prevent the scandal of British taxpayers' money being used to support Governments who grossly violate human rights.

Expressions of concern about human rights are important, and I readily thank the Government for what they do and the way in which they do it. However, we also need economic pressure, including the sanction of withholding international development assistance where appropriate, or at least making it conditional.

To accept the new clause is to acknowledge the important principle that improving a country's human rights position greatly enhances its long-term

[Bob Spink]

development process, which is the overall aim of the Bill—and a good aim. I ask the Government at least to acknowledge that fact in dealing with the new clause. Common sense tells us that the new clause reflects the view of an overwhelming number of British citizens, who do not want their money used to support regimes that fail to respect human rights and religious freedoms, therefore inhibiting rather than promoting development in the longer run.

By adopting the principle of new clause 1, the Government would not affect humanitarian aid. They could show that they really care about human rights and are prudent and sensible in distributing British taxpayers' money as aid—as they should be.

Glenda Jackson: I want to speak against the new clause. As I said to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) in my—as you pointed out, Madam Deputy Speaker—over-long intervention, if his proposal represents a change in terms of his party's commitment to human rights, that is extremely welcome. I elucidated some examples of a total lack of care and concern for human rights when the Conservative party was in government, which I believed and still believe were shameful.

What was equally shameful was the Conservative Government's inability to dispense taxpayers' money for overseas aid at a level which my constituents found acceptable—not to put too fine a point on it. The Conservative Government spoke about attempting to meet UN targets, but did nothing practical to reach them. This country's contribution, during the seemingly endless terms of Conservative government, was constantly reduced.

I take issue with the hon. Gentleman on his scandalous misrepresentation of the Government of Indonesia. It is not Indonesian Government policy to enter into the activities to which he referred. Those are criminal activities. The hon. Gentleman significantly failed to point out that Indonesia is one of the most populous and one of the poorest countries in the world. For that Government to be able actively to engage in attempting to eradicate what I understand is mainly guerrilla activity is extremely difficult. Tribute should be paid to the present Prime Minister of Indonesia. Despite huge pressure, she has managed to retain her country's commitment to, and participation in, the international community's opposition to the events of 11 September and still actively support the international community's attempts to eradicate international terrorism and its roots.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I apologise to the hon. Lady and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for not being here for earlier speeches, but I had another engagement.

May I take the hon. Lady back to what she said about the Conservative Government's contribution to overseas aid? She is factually incorrect—it is as straightforward as that. The overseas development aid given during the Parliament from 1992 to 1997 was greater, as a percentage of GDP, than that given from 1997 to 1999. It has now risen—I do not criticise the Labour Government, because their aid programme has generally been good—but Library figures show that aid went down in the first three years of the Labour Government.

5.30 pm

Glenda Jackson: If the hon. Gentleman cares to check in tomorrow's edition of *Hansard*, he will find that I referred to Conservative Governments and their endless period in power. The period to which I referred was from 1979 to 1997, during which, if memory serves me rightly, this country slipped from being third in the international league of overseas aid donors to eighth or ninth in a list of 10.

Tony Cunningham: I want to explain what the figures are, so that we can all understand. I have them before me. When Labour came into Government in 1974, ODA as a percentage of GDP was 0.36 per cent.; when we left in 1979 it had risen to 0.51 per cent. When the Conservatives left office in 1997 it had gone down to 0.26 per cent., the lowest point that it had been at in 30 years.

Glenda Jackson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving those figures, which are irrefutable.

Let me return to the central thrust of the new clause. The hon. Member for Castle Point seemed to argue in a time warp in terms not only of the Labour Government's approach to international aid and its disbursement but of the extraordinary work done by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and, it must be said, by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There has been a transformation in the world's approach to how aid should be disbursed, to whom it should be given and the purposes for which it should be given.

I do not wish to make a party political point out of this, because Labour Governments were guilty of it as undoubtedly were Conservative Governments, but in the past, aid was often linked to the economic needs of the donor country. We all know stories about tractors given to African countries being found, two years later, rusting at the side of the road because nobody had thought to fund those nations to pay for the spare parts that they needed. Nobody had considered that such countries could not afford the fuel for such vehicles. Virtually every hon. Member in the Chamber would have a story about that type of unproductive aid.

However, the world has moved on. The hon. Member for Castle Point constantly repeated that his taxpayers did not wish to see their money going to Governments whose human rights record was lamentable. Nobody wants to see that, and that is not where the money that this country gives the developing world goes. All donor nations have acknowledged that the root cause that must be tackled, if the developing world is truly to develop in a sustainable way, is poverty. Poverty expresses itself in ways that are simple to see. It means that far too many children die of preventable diseases; far too many people have absolutely no access to clean water; millions of people lack the most rudimentary basic health treatments; and massive numbers of people can only hope to be able at some point to give their children an education.

That is where the hon. Gentleman is way out of time—as I said, he is in a time warp. We all acknowledge that the best delivery of aid is via non-governmental organisations directly to people on the ground. That ensures that, in giving aid to third world countries, we help to take those millions of people out of poverty in a way that is direct, recognisable, easy to monitor and moderate.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): The hon. Lady said that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) was in a time warp. In my hon. Friend's defence, he was talking about how future legislation should be shaped. Much of her argument was predicated on the calculation of aid as a percentage of gross domestic product. Is not the percentage of GDP spent on aid a misleading measure if the size of the economy is not taken into account at the same time? When the economy is strong, the percentage of GDP may fall in absolute terms but there may be a cash increase in aid. To talk in percentage terms can be misleading, but that is what her argument is predicated on. I am sure she will accept that my hon. Friend was referring to legislation about the future.

Glenda Jackson: If the hon. Lady's description of what her hon. Friend's new clause is about is aid in the future, it is rather bizarre, because that would be a gross waste of taxpayers' money. Perhaps she has not learned the lessons of the past, when aid from Government to Government significantly failed to transform the lives of the people who needed it most. Heaven forfend that a Conservative Government should ever come back into power. Is the hon. Lady suggesting that if that were to happen, aid would go from Government to Government? That would be absurd.

I am perfectly prepared to accept what the hon. Lady said about the percentages changing from year to year, but I am not prepared to accept that the diminution in aid during the Conservative Governments' regime was anything other than shameful for this country. Her argument seems to be predicated on the assumption that there will always be a need for the developed world to fund desperately poor countries. Surely we have learned that aid should enable the people of poor countries to equip themselves so that they can develop their own countries in a sustainable way. That is why the Department for International Development is giving primacy to the eradication of poverty, and to ensuring that children are educated, that there is basic health care, and that children have clean water to drink. I pay tribute to the Department for that.

Mrs. Spelman: It is good to have an exchange of views on this point. If the hon. Lady applies the word "shameful" to a diminution in the percentage of GDP spent on aid during the last Conservative Administration, would she apply the same description to the decline in the percentage of GDP on aid during the early period of the Labour Administration?

Glenda Jackson: No, I most certainly would not. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members had better wait. The Labour Government made it abundantly clear when they first came to office that they were attempting to deal with this country's problems, which the Conservative Government had created—*[Interruption.]* It is all very well for the hon. Member for Castle Point to laugh. If I remember rightly, he was laughing on the other side of his face when he lost his seat because the Conservative Government had failed to convince the people that they could govern. People had clear evidence of the economic incompetence that had placed this country in the economic position that the Labour Government found when we first came to power in 1997.

Jim Knight: The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) raised an interesting point when she said that the percentage will vary slightly if the economy is performing well. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) will agree with me that we should look at the trend. Under the Labour Government, the percentage has risen. The percentage in the United States, which the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) referred to, has consistently been appallingly low considering the wealth of that country.

Glenda Jackson: My hon. Friend reiterates a valuable point that has already been made. However, there is something more important in the points that the hon. Member for Meriden elucidated in her interventions. There is a perception—I do not accuse the hon. Lady of this—that the developed world's responsibility towards the developing or undeveloped world is based exclusively on the percentage of gross domestic product a country feels it is capable of handing out around the world or tossing into the various receptacles that are held out. That is not my perception of the responsibility shown by the developed world.

The developed world should do a great deal more. DFID has led the way in many areas, and I give credit to those who believe that the money given is never going to be enough and that there must be a sharing of knowledge, ideas and techniques. I suppose that a brilliant accountant could tell us what that would represent in pounds, shillings and pence or dollars, but the idea that the Government have been at the forefront of developing has to do with valuing human beings. That is infinitely more powerful than a Government's commitment—although I like that commitment—to meeting United Nations targets.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the hon. Lady recognise that the issue of percentages was raised by her hon. Friends in their interventions on my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink)? It is easy to see how the Government could increase their percentage. All they have to do is to continue to wreck the economy, and as our GDP declines, the percentage will go up and more and more people will realise how wise the voters of Castle Point were when, after four years of a disastrous Labour Government, they brought back my hon. Friend.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As interesting as these points about percentages are, we should get back to the main point of new clause 1.

Glenda Jackson: I have to say to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) that if that was his attempt to cover up or half-heartedly apologise for the Conservative Government's shame, he should have stayed sitting on the green Benches. It was as lamentable an intervention as the Conservative Government's policies during their terms of office on the aid that this country should have been giving to assist the development of the third world.

[Glenda Jackson]

I come to the nub of my opposition to the hon. Gentleman's new clause. As my hon. Friends have said, if the percentage of GDP is the overriding decider of the disbursement of aid—whatever the definition of aid, and I have defined it as more than merely financial—that punishes the very people whom we should be most actively engaged in supporting. There has been a shift in the disbursement of aid. If that is the overriding policy, it negates the possibility of assisting the people who are suffering gross infringements of basic human rights to stand on their own feet and get rid of their Governments, not necessarily by violent means.

One of the reasons why there is so much conflict in the world and why there are endless factions in Africa and the terrible stand-off in Colombia at the moment is that people have not been encouraged to free themselves of the view that they are perennially and eternally victims, because the basic tools have never been put into their hands. The basic tools are health, education and sufficient food to move out of the daily prison of ensuring that they have a life the day after.

I remember going to Ethiopia in 1985. The worst of the second great famine was over, but to me it was absolutely fascinating how much time, energy and creativity people spent gaining enough in one day to ensure that they could live the second day. That was true for every member of a family. As soon as children were able to stand unaided, they had a job to do. When they became a little more capable, they would be given more demanding jobs. Babies might have to do no more than collect grass to feed animals; bigger children might have to herd animals, and once they could handle sharp implements they might cut the grass. The whole family worked all day simply to ensure that, perhaps, they could live throughout the next day. There was not even a perception of being able to live until the end of the week.

That constitutes a gross waste of human energy and human creativity, in a country in which, despite the appalling nature of what the people had suffered, social structures remained firm. There were no riots. People were not murdering each other, or stealing. It was an amazing privilege to visit that country. If the new clause is passed, however, the hon. Member for Castle Point will condemn generations to the same circumstances, in which survival is all.

Tony Cunningham: I said in Committee that perhaps the single most important issue was that of the education of girls, which would take millions of people in developing countries out of poverty. The new clause would prevent that from happening in some countries, because it does not constitute humanitarian aid.

Glenda Jackson: That is a central point. We must move away from the idea that I think the world generally has at present, and accept that aid given directly to Governments is often non-productive. Aid to repressive Governments is absolutely non-productive.

The hon. Member for Castle Point would condemn the very people whom he purports to want to help to being stuck for ever in a situation that it would be virtually impossible for them to escape—unless those who are willing to exploit the desperation of others intervened. We have touched briefly on the issue of international terrorism. I do not think anyone here would dispute the fact that it can take a hold in certain parts of the world precisely because of the desperate circumstances in which so many people find themselves.

Bob Spink: Either the hon. Lady is intellectually challenged, or she is purposely mischaracterising what I seek to do. I do not seek to condemn anyone; I seek to give people hope for the future. I want the possibility of real, sustainable, long-term development, rather than the counsel of despair that we have heard from Labour Members who propose short-termism in the extreme. How would they change the world for the better? How would they eradicate poverty, and ensure that those little girls received an education? What action do they propose, other than that suggested in the new clause?

Glenda Jackson: With the best will in the world, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that he will have to live a long time before he intellectually challenges me. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Oh yes: if you ask for it, you get it.

The hon. Gentleman has clearly lost the thread of his own argument, quite apart from not understanding ours. The new clause would deny aid to those who need it most desperately. I also consider the idea that some of the most entrenched and abusive Governments necessarily change their attitude to their people because of the threat of possible withdrawal of international aid to be a fallacy. In many instances, they exploit that very factor to make their position of power even stronger.

We all know of the most obvious example in the world today. Even as we speak, an attempt is being made to pursue that argument in Zimbabwe. It would be entirely wrong to punish people yet again for the sins of Governments whom, in nine cases out of 10, they have had no say in putting into power. That would drive international aid back from a position that I consider to be quite good at present, and would send entirely the wrong messages to those whom we want to move forward into a democratic life. It would be a recruiting sergeant for all who are only too willing to exploit human misery to secure and develop their own power bases.

I hope that the hon. Member for Castle Point will reconsider and withdraw the motion, but if there is a vote I hope that the House will reject the new clause.

5.45 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): At first I had a great deal of sympathy with what I thought the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) was trying to say, and I was prepared to listen to him. By the end of his speech, however, I was quite horrified. The amount of almost anti-Islamic rant made me extremely depressed.

Bob Spink: Pro-Christian.

Dr. Tonge: I am a Christian, and I hate the thought of preventing aid from going to a country where some sort of religious persecution is going on, whatever religion is involved. It is appalling to think that that could be deemed a reason for withholding aid.

We need only look at Northern Ireland to see what Christian can do to Christian, or at Asia to see what Sikhs can do to Hindus, Hindus can do to Muslims and

Christians can do to Muslims. It is endless. It is entirely irrational to suggest that the persecution of one religious group by another is somehow the responsibility of a Government who have adopted a certain human rights policy. I am sorry if I have offended the hon. Gentleman, but as I have said, I am a Christian, and I am thoroughly fed up with the unchristian attitude of an awful lot of Members who claim to be Christians as well.

I thought that the idea of a list of countries was rather fun. It is wonderful, is it not? Think of the countries that could be listed as violating human rights. Subsection (2)(a) of the new clause refers to countries that have

"engaged in gross violations of the right to freedom of religion".

Does that include the shaving of the heads and beards of deeply religious Muslim prisoners who have been taken to the United States? The hon. Gentleman may not think so, but if he was one of those deeply devout Muslims—we may mock them and think them a little mad, but never mind—he might consider such action a violation of his religious freedom.

Mr. Hawkins: Perhaps I have missed something. Was the hon. Lady talking about the deeply devout Muslims in Guantanamo Bay just now? If so—and that is how it seemed—she should bear in mind the fact that we are talking about some of the most dangerous terrorists in the world, who are happy to murder Christians, atheists, agnostics and anyone else with no compunction.

Dr. Tonge: We are indeed talking about some of the most dangerous terrorists in the world. I am merely saying that we must not violate their right to practise their religion: they must have that freedom. I do not question their guilt or otherwise. I simply say that what was done constituted a violation of their religious freedom.

The list would be endless if we catalogued all the countries suggested in the new clause, and the proposal by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) that the Indonesian Government should be held responsible for all that goes on in the massive number of islands that call themselves the country of Indonesia is incredible. Moreover, as we have signally failed to stop religious groups persecuting each other in Northern Ireland, I think it would be very difficult to criticise other countries.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Lady and I agree on many of these issues, but may I make a factual point about the Muslims in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba? I understand that an executive order from President Bush states that they will have freedom to pray and freedom of religion. I also understand—I am not an expert on the Koran, or indeed on Islam, but I have visited many Islamic countries—that growing hair and beards is not required by the Koran. Those who have been on a haj tend to grow long beards, but I do not think that it is compulsory.

Dr. Tonge: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. What the individual feels about his religion is the important thing. Many Sikhs are happy to shave off their beards and not wear turbans but other Sikhs want to maintain that tradition and would consider it a violation if they were not able to. We have seen examples of that in this country with policemen's helmets and motor cycle safety helmets. It is a violation of their freedom to tell them what they must do. We must respect individual human rights as well as talking generally about human rights.

Jim Knight: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr. Tonge: May I make some progress, because the debate on this single new clause is going on a bit?

I accept that the hon. Member for Castle Point proposed the new clause with the best of intentions, but we must always remember that in those countries where human rights are being abused live the people who most need aid of every kind, whether humanitarian or development aid. There is an important distinction. At times, he did not appreciate the difference between humanitarian and development aid.

I am passionate about education; many hon. Members are. I want humanitarian aid to southern Sudan—we give only humanitarian aid to Sudan—to include education. The civil war in that country, where human rights are violated daily, has meant that its people receive only humanitarian aid. Two or three generations have not received any education.

That is surely wrong. If the new clause provides only for humanitarian aid and excludes education, it will deny those people a chance to learn what their human rights should be. It is only by educating people that they will ever learn about human rights and ever know what to do about the Government who are violating them. On that count alone, the new clause should be thrown out.

The point about Afghanistan has been well made. Some hon. Members may remember that before 11 September many people, including me, were seriously worried about the famine that had developed in central Asia—in Afghanistan and all the surrounding countries—because of three years of drought. In Afghanistan, it was made worse by a terrible Government called the Taliban. I called for Afghanistan to be bombed with food and aid.

The "bomb" word was unfortunate, when I think of what followed, but if Afghanistan over the past 10 years had been flooded with food, aid and development, al-Qaeda might not have found a base there, 11 September might not have happened and we might not be having to pour reconstruction aid back into that country.

Mr. Robathan: Again, I have a lot of sympathy with what the hon. Lady says about Afghanistan. However, I do not quite understand how development aid in education can be put in place in a country without the support of the civil authorities. Is she suggesting entirely private schools that would be outwith any form of social and political structure in the country?

Dr. Tonge: That could have been channelled through the non-governmental organisations. In fact, I have spoken to a representative of one NGO that ran 150 schools for girls in Afghanistan in the run-up to 11 September. So it was happening. If we had done much more of that, perhaps the catastrophe would not have happened.

Whichever way we look at it, there is no argument to say that we must deny people aid if human rights are being abused. It is too difficult to measure what we mean by that. I think that Opposition Members have the best of intentions, but the new clause is misguided.

Hugh Bayley: I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), but I was not personally

[Hugh Bayley]

convinced and I do not think that he has carried the House with him. I am as passionate as anyone in the House about the need to defend and extend human rights. It is a perfectly right and proper objective of our aid programmes to seek to assist that process.

I draw to the House's attention several factors that illustrate why the new clause, however well intentioned, would harm the victims of human rights abuse, rather than help them. Recently, the Select Committee on International Development visited some Afghan refugee camps in north-west Pakistan. While there, we saw people living in unacceptable conditions.

One of the refugee camps we visited, Kachagarhi camp, had been there for 20 years. People were either not working and living on food aid, or working in the black economy. Only about a third of the children attended primary school. If one were trying to create a seed bed of resentment, those are the conditions one would want.

The situation was bad enough when the Russians were in Afghanistan, but after they were forced out, western interest in the Afghan refugees declined and conditions in the camps got worse. They became a seed bed for anger against the west, in which Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations were able to recruit; we created conditions that helped that to occur. By providing long-term development assistance, therefore, we create conditions that make it less, not more, likely that terrorism will develop and that human rights will be abused.

The states and regimes that consistently and horrifyingly abuse human rights tend not to be run by humanitarian democrats—by the sort of people who will look at the United Kingdom statute book and say, "We had better change our behaviour before we find that development assistance to this country has been slimmed down." I found it instructive that on the two occasions the hon. Member for Castle Point was asked whether he felt that human rights abuses should have led to a reduction or ending of aid to Afghanistan when the Taliban were in power, and to a reduction or ending of aid to Indonesia now, he wisely declined to give an answer. He would have been very unwise to say that we should have let the victims of the Taliban starve to death because of drought in central Asia, and that we should not give poor people in Indonesia opportunities to build a future.

Bob Spink: Two points—first, my new clause excludes food aid, so people would not have starved. Secondly, it would have put pressure on the Taliban to look at human rights and to change what they were doing in a sustainable way. People would have lived in a better situation.

Hugh Bayley: Again, I do not think that Mullah Omar is the sort of academic, humanitarian, liberal-minded person who could be brought round to good common sense by our passing a bit of legislation. Do not forget that the most powerful nation on earth, the United States of America, spent three years asking the Taliban regime to give up the al-Qaeda terrorists who had bombed in Tanzania and Kenya so that they could stand trial. The Taliban were not the sort of liberal humanitarians who felt that that would make sense, so if we want to affect the behaviour of brutal dictators and human rights abusers, we must do tough things that hurt them. We must stop the aid to them. But had we stopped the aid that Afghanistan received even when the Taliban were in power, we would have hit not the Taliban but the victims of their human rights abuses. I do not think that that is what the hon. Member for Castle Point intends.

6 pm

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman will know that we did stop aid. UN sanctions prevented development aid from going in. I am a trustee of a mine clearance organisation for which 400 local Afghans worked. However, it could get no funds from the UK, because the Government abided by the sanctions against development aid. I am sure that the Minister will correct me if I have got that wrong.

Hugh Bayley: We did not stop all development assistance to Afghanistan, even in those difficult times. However, the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) makes the important point that an aid regime that stops and starts is ineffective. It can yield the sort of results that he and I saw in the refugee camps in Pakistan. People get angry when the helping hand that they think is coming from the west is taken away.

Moreover, aid to Pakistan was halted after the military coup. For good human rights reasons, there was a pause. Hindsight is a great tutor, but I do not think that that pause was helpful, as it created the resentment against the west that has been so damaging.

The hon. Member for Castle Point made a distinction between humanitarian aid and development assistance. If it were possible to make that distinction easily and clearly, in practice and on the ground, there might be some sense in adopting a modified form of his proposals. However, it is impossible to make that distinction on the ground.

I shall share with the House two brief examples of that impossibility. They arose when I visited Sudan, a country that all hon. Members would say was a state that abuses human rights. I went there on behalf of a number of British NGOs to look at the human rights situation. Britain's Conservative Government of the time had a policy—rightly, in my view—not to give state-to-state aid because of the regime's human rights record. They did however provide some aid for NGOs to work with their local counterparts.

At the end of my visit, I spoke to Baroness Chalker. I felt that the then Government's approach was right at the time, but that it should not be tied down in statute, as flexibility was needed to ensure swift response to changing events. However, what I saw in one of the camps for displaced persons around Khartoum threw into sharp relief the distinction between humanitarian aid and development assistance. Such camps contain hundreds of thousands of displaced people, internal refugees from the drought in the west of the country and from the civil war in the south.

The aid agencies that we funded were able to take water to the squatter camps in the desert. Temperatures were at 120 or 130 deg F, and the agencies were able to take water in buckets on the backs of donkeys to the camps, because that was classed as humanitarian assistance. However, although the camps had existed for years, the agencies could not pipe in the water, as that would have constituted development aid.

Does it make sense to stipulate in law that water can be taken in buckets on the backs of donkeys to hundreds of thousands of people living in the most rudimentary conditions in the Sahara desert, but that a water pipe cannot be built? It does not, because the people in those camps are the victims of the Sudanese regime. We should help them. If we do not, we shall be creating another seed bed for the sort of terrorism and extremism that this House rightly opposes.

My second example is a little different, although it also comes from Sudan. A food-for-work project was being run by CARE International in north Kordofan province. Severe drought meant that many small pastoralists would have starved to death without the food and humanitarian aid that the organisation provided. The hon. Member for Castle Point says that that aid would get through to such people, whether or not the new clause was accepted.

In return for the food aid, however, the people were building water reservoirs—haffirs—that would enable their animals to drink throughout the drought, and would mean that people would not be long-term dependent on food aid. Would it have been sensible to say that we could give them food aid, but that we could not help them construct a safeguard against drought in an area stricken by drought? It would not.

Finally, the haffirs were built mainly by the sweat of local people's brows as they worked with picks and shovels. For part of the work, however, digging equipment was needed to make the reservoirs effective and workable. Bulldozers needed to be hired, and in north Kordofan province only the provincial Government had them. To create food security for the people of north Kordofan, CARE International had to hire bulldozers from the Government of a state that abused human rights. That was done not out of a desire to aid that state, but out of a desire to aid its victims.

I hope that the House will agree that both examples show how important it is to provide the food security and development infrastructure that people need. However, the new clause would render that impossible. I understand why the new clause has been proposed, and I accept that it is important to tie human rights advances in with development work, but I do not think that it would achieve that in practice.

Jim Knight: Like most hon. Members, I agree with the spirit of the new clause, which would restrict assistance to Governments guilty of gross violations of human rights. We do not want to support people who commit such violations, but like my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), I remember with revulsion the support that this country extended to Governments such as those in Burma and Chile, who had committed—and continued to commit—gross violations of human rights.

I have therefore considered the proposal with some care to determine whether I can support it, and I have listened to the debate. The central problem that needs to be resolved in connection with this new clause—and with new clause 3, which we may discuss later—is how we get countries whose Governments commit such violations to reform. Do we disengage completely from them, blacklist and cold-shoulder them so that they are left outside the international community, or do we engage with them?

Sometimes we might want to do both things, but the new clause requires that only the cold-shouldering option can be taken. It would remove the option of engagement, which I believe should be taken up much more often.

When I intervened in the speech by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), I mentioned a scheme in Belarus. It was funded by the EU, through TACIS—technical aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States. The scheme had two local government partners—Mendip district council in Britain, and the authority in the city of Svetlogorsk. New clause 1 (4) states:

> "No assistance shall be provided under Part I of this Act to the government of any country."

Local government is part of Government, so the scheme that I am about to describe to the House would not have been allowed to progress, had the new clause been passed.

The chief executive of Mendip district council, on a visit to Svetlogorsk, saw an extraordinary situation in which a city was experiencing an exponential rise in HIV/AIDS infection as a result of an epidemic of drugs in a new town created by Khrushchev in the 1950s. He populated the town with various ne'er-do-wells from throughout the Soviet Union so that they could work in a chemical factory. The indigenous population were skilled at growing their own narcotics. That was a fairly explosive combination, as one might expect, but it was kept under control by the Soviet state.

When that state collapsed, there was an explosion in drug abuse, which led to an exponential growth in HIV/AIDS infection. When the chief executive of Mendip district council visited the city, following visits from children of Chernobyl—the city is in the Chernobyl fallout area—he saw what was going on and saw that the local government there refused to acknowledge that there was any problem.

The initiative and partnership that followed, funded by the European Union through TACIS, was an exchange of expertise. Mendip organised local government officers, drugs charities and health authority officers to travel to Svetlogorsk. They gave of their own time; TACIS paid only their air fares. They shared expertise in dealing with HIV/AIDS infection. As a direct result of that initiative, the exponential growth in HIV/AIDS infection in the city of Svetlogorsk levelled off. That partnership was then expanded into waste management and all sorts of matters that certainly would not be regarded as humanitarian assistance, but which represent a development of civil society.

Part of the success of that partnership was due to the fact that the local government in Svetlogorsk was willing to acknowledge that there was a problem and was willing to publicise the problem. It was willing to train its own officers, and to tell local police officers, "When you are searching a drug addict, do not put your hands in their pockets unprotected; otherwise you too may be infected." Such basic educational messages spread through the city and turned the situation around. I use that example to illustrate how helpful local government partnerships can be.

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman speaks passionately on a subject about which he knows a lot, but he is missing the point of my new clause: it excluded medical aid.

Jim Knight: I hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I ask him to listen to what I am saying in turn. I am

[Jim Knight]

saying that what might appear to be simply medical aid developed, in this case, into many other areas, such as waste management; but more fundamentally, it changed the attitude of the mayor and the local administration. It has empowered the citizens of that city and made them engage with their government in a way that central Government would have nothing to do with. The nature of that central Government is pretty abhorrent to me, but the partnership works locally and, incidentally, it gave a great boost to the officers of Mendip district council.

Tony Cunningham: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems with the new clause is the fact that it talks about

"medicine, medical equipment or supplies"?

If we were limited to providing humanitarian aid, we could provide the drugs, but we could not build the clinics or hospitals and we could not obtain the nurses and doctors for the long-term programmes that would benefit the country. The new clause would allow us to deal with patients once they were ill, but would not allow us to prevent them from becoming ill or to provide them with decent clinics and hospitals.

Jim Knight: I do not want to take up more of the House's time. I just wanted to use that example to impress on the hon. Member for Castle Point the fact that we do need the flexibility for Governments to engage, be it at central or local government level. I ask him to withdraw the new clause so that we may move on.

There are times when the new clause probably would not work, anyway. Consider Cuba. Blacklisting by the United States has been tried and does not seem to have shifted Fidel Castro to date, unless I have missed the news. It could even be argued that we are not getting far with sanctions against Iraq. I ask the hon. Gentleman to consider withdrawing the new clause and allow us to move on.

6.15 pm

Mrs. Spelman: At the start of the debate, I grew a little bit concerned that, having had very little party political point scoring on Second Reading or in Committee, we were about to descend into it now. We are returning to the final stages of the Bill after an exceptional break. We all understand the reasons why the final stages of the Bill had to be deferred from just before Christmas to make way for the emergency legislation. The passage of time has probably allowed us more time to reflect on the conflict in Afghanistan and its aftermath and the way in which the legislation would work in the case of such a country. In a way, the passage of time has allowed us to bring some fresh thinking to the discussion.

I had the slight feeling, on hearing the exchanges that have just taken place, that it is quite difficult for the Labour party to hear fresh thinking from the Conservatives. We had quite a lot of exchanges devoted to what had happened in the past, when the Conservative party was in government. It may be proving quite difficult for the Government to hear from us the fresh thinking that we wish to inject into the debate. One of the few advantages of being in opposition is the chance to think again—the chance to do blue-skies thinking and to bring fresh arguments. I hope that, in his reply, the Minister will give us credit for the fact that we are coming fresh to the debate. Many Conservative Members, including myself, were not in this place when the Conservative party was in government, so we feel particularly free to suggest new ideas.

When I hear hon. Members say that it is simply too difficult to do something—I heard the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) say that it was too difficult effectively to tackle Governments who are shown to have tolerated or perpetrated human rights abuses—I feel that it is a challenge, and that we should be able to find a way of cracking that conundrum. I know, because I was told very early on as I tried to get to grips with my brief, that the received wisdom is that we should not make development assistance conditional on the receiving Government's having an acceptable human rights record.

Later in the debate I shall cite some case studies. The present situation is not very satisfactory in the eyes of ordinary members of the public, to whom we as a party have been listening. When I talk to ordinary members of the public about increasing development assistance, they often voice to me the major reservation that the money will only get into the hands of the wrong people. They therefore do not feel a strong desire to increase the level of assistance.

We share with the Government the United Nations target of increasing our assistance to 0.7 per cent. of GDP, but we must take the public with us. That is what it is all about. In taking the public with us, we need to try to satisfy the public disquiet over development assistance money getting into the wrong hands and being used for the wrong purposes. That is a basic motivation that underlies the new clause.

The purpose of the new clause is to raise the concern that Governments should address human rights in their relations with other states where there is evidence of human rights abuses. There is always a danger of glossing over issues of human rights where other political expedients are seen as paramount.

Tony Cunningham: I have a fairly simple question. The amendment talks about gross violations of human rights. Many people—although not everyone—would say that carrying out the death penalty, certainly for the individual, is a gross violation of human rights. Are you saying, by supporting your new clause, that any country that has the death penalty would therefore automatically be excluded from development aid and receive humanitarian aid only?

Mrs. Spelman: I am sure that Madam Deputy Speaker would immediately spring to her own defence to say that the new clause is not hers; it is that of my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Bob Spink) and for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), and I am speaking in support of the thrust of their new clause. Obviously, it would be for the Government of the day to decide what constituted a gross violation of human rights, but if the hon. Gentleman will be patient with me, I shall talk about a country that does use the death penalty in a way that I personally think constitutes a violation of human rights.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Lady has just told the House that it would be for the Government of the day to decide on a discretionary basis whether a country is a gross violator of human rights and, if that were the case, to decide whether to make aid available, but the Government already have that freedom. Legislation is not needed to give the Government the freedom to take a decision not to provide aid in the circumstances that she describes.

Mrs. Spelman: I hope that the hon. Gentleman would accept that the new clause would provide legislative underpinning to support Government action, whereas it is now less obvious to the public that we as a country are making such distinctions about what we condone and what we find offensive. What I mean will become clearer when I give some practical examples.

The rather opaque jargon for that practice is "critical engagement"—not a phrase of which the man on the street or even I would immediately understand the interpretation. I believe that the correct interpretation is that that phrase allows the Government to raise human rights issues while continuing to maintain political and commercial relations.

I should like to place on record the fact that we share Amnesty International's concern that that policy of critical engagement may be a fig leaf for business as usual. New clause 1 would require clear evidence of an improvement in a country's human rights record before it could be removed from a list of countries that the Secretary of State considered to be engaged in or to be tolerating human rights abuses. Being placed on the list would cut off the offending country's Government from assistance, with the exception—I cannot emphasise this point enough because it has been missing from some of our exchanges—of humanitarian assistance. It would certainly also not preclude providing assistance through non-governmental bodies. In the eyes of the public, it is very easy to understand that distinction, and there is no question of precluding such development assistance.

The hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) gave the hypothetical example of not allowing water to be piped in and having to bring it in by donkey, but, for example, in a country such as the Congo which needs humanitarian assistance—water and sanitation work needs to take place—obviously, the most intelligent solution is to provide water in the most efficient way possible, which, I should imagine, is not bringing it in by donkey.

Hugh Bayley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way again. It was not a hypothetical question: it was a practical, real-life example of a decision that a British NGO working in the Sudan had to make because of the Conservative Government's decision that they would support, through NGOs, humanitarian assistance such as providing water to people who were very thirsty in a displaced people's camp in the desert, but that they would not support development assistance such as building the infrastructure, a water pipe, needed to carry that water. That decision was forced on the NGO by the Government's policy—a policy that was sensible at the time. It is right that the Government should have the discretion to decide when to refuse to provide aid, but they should not be required by law always to take that decision.

Mrs. Spelman: Let us get back to the future. I am sure that the House will not want to spend an entire evening debating historical policy, and that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the purpose of proposing amendments to legislation that is not on the statute book is to address how we conduct ourselves in the future. I simply want to stress the point that the new clause specifically states that humanitarian assistance should not be precluded. I have sometimes felt that that point has been misunderstood in our exchanges.

Resistance to taking a stance against countries that have a poor human rights record has always centred on trying to avoid making the lives of innocent people more difficult, and I hope that the Opposition have made it perfectly clear that that is absolutely not our intention. Under the new clause, there would be no prohibition on the provision of medicine, medical equipment, food supplies and other humanitarian assistance. I hope that I have made it perfectly clear that the term "humanitarian assistance" would extend to the kind of infrastructure that is necessary to ensure that humanitarian assistance is effective and gets through.

Whether Amnesty International's concerns are justified can be assessed only by looking at case studies of countries that fall into that category. One of our most notable human rights dialogues—if that is a fair description of what it is—is with China, but respect for human rights is deteriorating even as the dialogue continues. According to the Foreign Office, China aspires to end the death penalty, yet capital punishment—to which the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) referred earlier—remains widespread and its use has expanded. Almost 3,000 people were sentenced to death between April and June last year. Almost 2,000 of those sentences were carried out during that period, and the crimes included bribery, fraud and theft. That is very difficult to comprehend, certainly for me as a British citizen.

The selection of China to host the Olympic games is seen by optimists as an opportunity to persuade that nation to show greater respect for human rights, but pessimists have the countervailing view that the honour of being chosen to host such a prestigious international sporting event shows an abusive country that it may continue as it pleases and still receive its reward. That sends a very mixed signal.

Another topical example is the Government's stance towards development assistance to Zimbabwe. There are plenty of examples of human rights abuses, but one of the most flagrant was President Mugabe's announcement in November that the Government would not allow aid agencies to distribute emergency food supplies to Zimbabweans affected by famine. The Information Minister, Jonathan Moyo, claimed that aid agencies would use the opportunity to smuggle in election monitors and campaign for the opposition party—the Movement for Democratic Change.

On numerous occasions, we have urged the Government to demonstrate to the Government of Zimbabwe that we do not accept a business-as-usual approach to those flagrant human rights abuses. Most recently, today, came the second of the debates in Westminster Hall that the Conservative party has requested on Zimbabwe. As the *Hansard* report of today's debates is not yet available, it is worth emphasising for the benefit of hon. Members some of the points that were made in that debate. Zimbabwe is a very good test case of what I am talking about. Because of the day-to-day

[Mrs. Spelman]

images on television, the public are generally very well informed about the human rights abuses in that country, but we continue to provide development assistance.

At the Labour party conference, the Prime Minister said that there would be

> "no tolerance of . . . the activities of Mr. Mugabe's henchmen in Zimbabwe."

Those are strong words, but what does the phrase "no tolerance" mean in relation to the human rights abuses in Zimbabwe? So far, it has meant that the Government have taken no appreciable action. I am all the more concerned, given that the MDC is calling for help. A member of the MDC said:

> "We are fighting on all fronts using the only tools we have—the truth, the written and spoken word, and the courage of our leadership".

The MDC said:

> "In this deteriorating situation where the abuse of civil and human rights has become commonplace, where fear rules and freedoms exist in word only, we urge the"

Governments of Europe

> "to remember the pledge made in Nuremberg—'Never again'."

It also said:

> "we urge the European Union to take appropriate measures".

We, too, urge the Government to take appropriate measures, and the new clause would provide a legislative underpinning for them.

Dr. Tonge: The hon. Lady must realise that Zimbabwe is a difficult example to use to illustrate her point. The problem with the Zimbabwean Government is that they see us as the wicked colonial country. Therefore, any action that we take will reinforce their view. That is why the Movement for Democratic Change is calling for Governments—not just Britain—to take action. The action should come from the Commonwealth and from the European Union, but not unilaterally from Britain.

6.30 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury) *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: I will reply to the intervention before I give way again.

The hon. Lady says that Zimbabwe is a difficult example. The chances are that countries that are shown to abuse human rights will be difficult examples. They will hardly be easy, but that does not mean that we should flinch from the issue. To hide behind a sense of embarrassment about our colonial past would be seen by many ordinary people as an excuse for inaction. Worrying about our colonial past certainly did not stop the Prime Minister making pronouncements about Kashmir. I have difficulty understanding the hon. Lady's argument.

Who is to provide thought and leadership in the Commonwealth if not Britain? Of course, we want other Governments to take action but, as the conflict in Afghanistan demonstrates, this country is not afraid of being brave and taking the lead.

Tony Baldry: I thought that I could help my hon. Friend by pointing out that, unlike the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), I took part in this morning's debate on Zimbabwe. Would it surprise my hon. Friend to learn that the Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), made a robust speech calling on the Government immediately to introduce sanctions against Zimbabwe? Is that not yet another example of the Liberal Democrats saying one thing in one place and another thing in another?

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. In this respect at least, the Liberal Democrats have proved themselves consistent in their inconsistency.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): As my hon. Friend knows, I initiated the debate in Westminster Hall. I posed the question as to whether liberal left-wing angst and the fear of being accused of neo-colonialism was a problem. It quickly became apparent that it was a substantial part of the problem, but I do not understand why such fears did not hold us back from intervening in Sierra Leone. I went to Sierra Leone and the people were only too delighted by our presence there. If there had been a poll on becoming a colony again, they would probably have voted for that. When people are in such desperate straits as the people of Zimbabwe are, the last thing that will be on their mind is the thought, "Oh, we must support the Government again, because Mr. Mugabe is able to say that Britain is being colonialist again." The fears expressed are preposterous left-wing nonsense and the sooner we see an end to them, the better.

Mrs. Spelman: I should have congratulated my hon. Friend on securing the debate in Westminster Hall. He is the second Conservative Member to have been successful in securing a debate on Zimbabwe. Labour Back Benchers were marked by their absence in contributing to the debate, and that is regrettable. However, I promised that I would not be drawn into the temptation of considering the party political aspects of this issue, so it would be a good idea to return to the main thrust of the new clause.

I do not want to detract from the importance of Zimbabwe as an example and I hope that the Minister will return to the issue when he responds. How the Government conduct themselves in relation to a country such as Zimbabwe is very much in the public eye. Like it or not, our pasts are intertwined and I am sure that there is not a Member of the House who has not received an e-mail, letter or other communication from a constituent with relatives in Zimbabwe. The subject therefore involves our national interest.

Dr. Tonge: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: I was about to move on from the case of Zimbabwe and to turn to another one, but I will give way.

Dr. Tonge: A little bit of self-defence is necessary before the hon. Lady leaves the subject of Zimbabwe. I was not in Westminster Hall for the debate on Zimbabwe because I was doing something else at the time. However, I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) spoke about taking a robust lead in the Commonwealth and the European Union so that we have multilateral action on Zimbabwe. That is the point that I wanted to make.

Mrs. Spelman: Once again, this shows the value of debates in Westminster Hall. However, I wish to give the hon. Lady a piece of advice. My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary and I were present in the debate, and the issue of Zimbabwe crosses the boundary between foreign affairs and international development. Given the subject's topicality and importance, there is a case for the spokespersons on both subjects attending such debates.

I am glad that we have tested the value of the new clause against a topical example. That is more valuable than testing it against what happened in the past, and perhaps even more valuable than discussing hypothetical impacts in the future. The situation in Zimbabwe is real and we all know that disaster looms. That is why we emphasise the need for the Government to act while there is still time.

The other example that I wish to consider is the situation in Burma. More than 340,000 Karen people have been displaced as a result of Burmese military activity, and other ethnic minorities, such as the Shan and Kavenni peoples, have suffered terrible atrocities at the hands of the military, including extra-judicial executions, forced labour, rape, torture and the destruction of their villages. I know that the Minister is aware of that. Many people are forced to live in the jungle and, if they are seen, they can be shot on sight.

Burma is one of the few countries against which a policy of isolation has been practised, but how do we get humanitarian relief to those who need it? The answer shows the practical thrust of the new clause, because the developed community faces yet another challenge in making sure that the aid reaches those who need it. That is especially true for those who live in countries where there is no dispute about the facts that gross violations of human rights have taken place and that the Governments of such countries have attempted to obstruct our efforts to get humanitarian assistance to those who need it. Again, the thrust of the new clause would be to provide the legislative underpinning that would help to ensure that assistance gets to where it is needed.

There is no suggestion that humanitarian assistance would be blocked by the new clause's incorporation in the Bill. The new clause's main purpose is to focus the attention of the Government and, as it transpires, that of the Liberal Democrats on a conundrum that should not be regarded as difficult. It should be possible for us to find a way of working that addresses the public's disquiet that taxpayers' money does not always go to those for whom it is intended and deals with the discomfort that the public feel when assistance is given to countries that flagrantly abuse human rights.

The new clause offers a refinement to the received wisdom that we cannot do anything about the problem for the fear of hurting those who are already down. Conservative Members contend that it is possible to refine policy in a way that will ensure that those who really need help will receive it while sending the clear message to those who abuse human rights that we do not accept such behaviour.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): I welcome the opportunity that the debate on the new clause has provided. I am grateful for the way in which the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) raised his concerns and endorse his comments about the interest that the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) takes in the subject and, particularly, in the problems faced by religious minorities. That issue was discussed in Committee.

As several hon. Members said, if we reflect for a moment on our history as a country, it is clear that we do not have a particularly honourable record on religious discrimination. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) rightly drew our attention to the fact that, in parts of the United Kingdom, people are tragically still being killed because of their religion. We need to think about that.

Fresh thinking is genuinely welcome. Although the debate has been wide ranging, a small party political element crept in. However, as the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said, it has not featured much in our proceedings. If the fresh thinking of the Conservative party includes coming to the conclusion that the aid budget will not be cut under a future Conservative Government, I would welcome that. It would be a sign that together we have moved on and made progress. Please can we have fresh thinking of that nature.

If we are truly to eliminate poverty, as the hon. Member for Castle Point said, we need societies that promote a sense of value in their citizens. They need to be committed to equality, non-discrimination and the promotion of human rights. All of us can agree with those aims. However, the debate has clearly demonstrated that the difficult question is how we take those aims forward in relation to particular countries at particular times and in particular circumstances. A key question is to what extent we are prepared to engage with Governments who are abusing human rights or who have a questionable human rights record, in order to persuade them to mend their ways. The answer, as we know, is that we are prepared to do so, bearing in mind that a range of responses is possible, depending on the circumstances.

Vietnam was mentioned. We are making, and continue to make, representations to the Government of Vietnam, who have made considerable progress in reducing poverty in recent years. We have raised the treatment of religious minorities with them, both in the EC-Vietnam joint commission meeting and, most recently, in September when my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised it with his opposite number from the Government of Vietnam.

We discussed Indonesia at length. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) made the case on that most forcefully. I had the opportunity to visit Indonesia in September last year. The country has a fragile and emerging democracy, having come out of a long period of dictatorship. My hon. Friend was right to say that we must be careful. The circumstances are difficult. There is a conflict in Sulawesi, to which the hon. Member for Castle Point referred. There is much conflict and movement in Aceh as people fight for independence. President Megawati recently agreed to a high degree of self-government for Aceh in an attempt to respond to the legitimate concerns about self-government while not giving way to those who are fighting.

[Hilary Benn]

When it comes to countries that have people who are linked with al-Qaeda or who have fought for that cause, we have to reflect on the fact that we are learning more and more about the countries in which those individuals find themselves. Indonesia is not the only country where supporters of al-Qaeda have been present.

On the death penalty, I have great sympathy with using that as an example of a gross abuse of human rights. Indeed, I cannot think of a clearer abuse. However, should international development aid be the only instrument that we use to pursue a case against the use of the death penalty by other countries? Should it be the only instrument of influence? I yield to no Member of the House in my detestation of the death penalty, but we have to ask whether the new clause sets out the right approach. We need to reflect carefully on the wording of the new clause, and I hope that we do not accept it.

6.45 pm

The hon. Member for Meriden mentioned Burma. She knows that the UK provides targeted humanitarian assistance for the most needy in that country, working strictly through the United Nations or international NGOs, and not with the military regime. That is a good illustration of the extent to which the Government use their judgment to decide on the nature of engagement depending on the regime or Government with whom we are dealing. Each case has to be dealt with on its merits. It is not a matter of having a policy that is black or white, yes or no, for or against; the issue has many shades of grey.

The new clause gives rise to practical difficulties because it adopts a black-and-white approach. First, drawing up a list of countries that engage in or tolerate gross violations of human rights would raise controversial, difficult and practical issues in defining what "gross" means in that context. For instance, some countries may have reasonable human rights records in general, but commit serious violations of specific rights. Any attempt to draw a line between the gross violaters and countries with less than perfect records could lead to inconsistency, controversy and judicial review of the Secretary of State in exercising that discretion.

The second practical difficulty of a black-and-white, either-or approach is that, on the one hand, countries that are not on the list might think, "Oh well, we're okay. We've somehow got a seal of approval. We don't have to worry about our performance." On the other hand, those countries that are on the list might become less willing to listen to public and international opinion. It is often in those countries where violations are most persistent that we are keenest to engage. Again, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate made a powerful case for engagement.

The House will be aware that when we can work with Government officials, we seek to do so. If that is not possible or effective, we work with NGOs and other organisations to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. A genuine dialogue on human rights is the best way to achieve lasting change. The restrictions in the new clause would limit the range of approaches that we could take, and we would run the risk of diminishing our capacity to work in the interests of the people who are suffering from human rights violations. A number of my hon. Friends made that point forcefully.

The object of the elimination of poverty must extend to people who might be discriminated against for their thoughts, their conscience or their religion. We have to be able to work with the Governments of countries where human rights are being abused if we are to improve the rights of the poorest people. Bangladesh is a good illustration of that. None of us would think of putting that on the list, but its landless have been fighting for years to win their rights for land. The law provides for that, but they are not able to access it because the existing landowners have hired heavies to make their lives difficult. In some cases, according to the landless labourers that I met, the local police had beaten them up when they tried to exercise their rights. We have a big programme in Bangladesh. Part of that relates to police sector and security reform. On the basis of my visit there last week, I believe that it is right and proper, despite those difficulties, that we should be fully engaged in supporting the Government of Bangladesh who are keen to make progress in overcoming those problems.

My final point relates to subsection (4) of the new clause. The hon. Member for Castle Point came close to acknowledging that the wording of the new clause leaves something to be desired. That was reflected in the fact that, with the best will in the world, he had some difficulty in answering the pertinent questions put to him by a number of my hon. Friends about how we would interpret the provision in relation to specific examples. To take Zimbabwe, to which the hon. Member for Meriden referred, the fact that the proposed exemption for humanitarian assistance refers specifically to

"medicine, medical equipment or supplies"

is significant, because one programme that we are supporting there is trying to deal with the scourge of HIV/AIDS devastating that country, as well as other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in part by working with Government agencies or bodies. Clearly, medicine and medical equipment would not be affected by the new clause, but what about awareness programmes? On any interpretation of the wording of the new clause, one could not describe an awareness-raising programme to get people to think about the dangers of HIV/AIDS as constituting

"medicine, medical equipment or supplies".

The way in which we respond to the terrible problems in Zimbabwe will rightly be a matter of continuing debate inside and outside the House, but the kind of activities that we are currently supporting in that country, such as developing a standard training curriculum for family carers in local languages for HIV/AIDS, and producing mass information self-help materials on managing health, for example, to prevent a cough from turning into TB or to make sure that safe sex is practised, would, I am afraid, be ruled out by the wording of the new clause. For that reason, while I freely acknowledge the importance of our debate and the fact that the hon. Member for Castle Point and the Opposition have rightly raised matters which must continue to occupy our minds and need consideration, I am afraid that the new clause is deficient and would create all the difficulties to which my hon. Friends have drawn attention. For that reason, I urge the hon. Gentleman not to press it to a vote.

Bob Spink: I listened to the Minister carefully and am grateful for his kind words, particularly about the principles behind the new clause, and the thoughtfulness with which the House has considered the proposal. I am disappointed that the Government are not yet ready to give the people of this country a more sensible and purposeful means to distribute aid, which would support sustainable improvements to human rights while protecting humanitarian aid.

My proposal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found good in principle but difficult, and so has not been tried. I tabled the new clause in a genuine effort to improve the Bill, which I generally support. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has regularly suggested to the Government that they give more aid to Iraq, but the Government rightly continue to refuse to do so for the reasons set out in the new clause. Are not the Government, when they choose, already adopting that provision as policy?

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): My hon. Friend touched on an important point. I have been struck by the fact that, in many cases in the past 10 years, we have started to deliver humanitarian aid on the back of conflict, as we have seen in Bosnia and most recently in Afghanistan; that has certainly been the case in a number of places in the middle east. Does my hon. Friend not feel that in such situations it is helpful to have the kind of guidance proposed in new clause 1?

Bob Spink: My hon. Friend is right; the new clause would provide yet another mechanism for the Government to promote both human rights improvements and democratic governance around the world.

I believe that the arguments that I have made tonight are sound, and I trust that they will shape Government policy in future. With that in mind, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 3

CONDITIONS APPLICABLE TO AID DISBURSED VIA THIRD PARTIES

'The Secretary of State shall make arrangements to ensure that no United Kingdom Government aid for a developing country or countries which is to be dispersed via a third party (including multilateral development banks, United Nations agencies, the European Development Fund, and institutions of the European Union) is made available to that third party unless he is satisfied that it is likely to contribute to the achievement of the objectives set out in section 1 above applicable to development assistance.'.—*[Mrs. Spelman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mrs. Spelman: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

On Second Reading, the common ground between Members of all parties was apparent and arose largely because the Bill puts poverty reduction at the heart of the Department's spending. New clause 3 was tabled in that spirit and seeks to ensure that any British aid disbursed via a third party is focused on poverty reduction. In its current form, the Bill allows the Secretary of State to provide funding for bodies that do not have poverty reduction as their primary aim.

Clause 1 says:

> "The Secretary of State may provide any person or body with development assistance if he is satisfied that the provision of the assistance is likely to contribute to a reduction in poverty."

That is the purpose of the Bill—to limit, or rather to clarify, which individuals or bodies are entitled to funding from the Department for International Development. In Committee, the Minister told us that the Bill's clarity and simplicity were one of its virtues. However, the clarity of clause 1 is lost in clause 4, which states that the Secretary of State may provide funding to

> "any organisation which exists (wholly or partly) for one or more relevant purposes"

or may

> "contribute to any fund that is intended to be used (wholly or partly) for one or more relevant purposes".

Our new clause would try to restore clarity to the question of which bodies can receive funding, and which cannot. It would ensure that no future Secretary of State could provide funds to bodies that do not contribute to a reduction in poverty. It does not necessarily constitute a criticism of bodies that we currently fund, but provides a safeguard, so that future spending is provided only to bodies that share our development objectives.

In almost every case, bilateral aid programmes provide better value for money than those of multilateral agencies, especially the European Union. The new clause would seek to ensure that our aid budget was not wasted on projects that did not uphold the same standards as bilaterally funded projects. There is no good reason why we should expect or accept lower standards from multilaterally funded projects. I should point out that the Conservatives recognise the value of multilateral aid, and do not think that Britain should act alone on international development. No single country can end world poverty; only by a concerted effort from all donor countries and multilateral institutions will we be able to tackle global poverty. It would therefore be wrong of the Secretary of State to provide UK funds to bodies that do not share that objective.

The new clause is important because we spend a high proportion of our development budget on multilateral aid. In 1999-2000, DFID spent £1.3 billion on multilateral aid; in the last five years, it has spent nearly half its annual budget on multilateral aid. The largest chunk of multilateral aid is provided via the European Union. Indeed, between a quarter and a third of the entire development budget is given to the European Union to disperse. Many Members have serious reservations about whether that is the most useful way in which to spend our overseas aid. It is true that a reform programme—British Commissioner Chris Patten is largely in charge of it—is under way, but its fruits have yet to appear in their full glory.

We currently provide nearly one third of all that development assistance, nearly £800 million worth of British taxpayers' money, through the European Union. When the International Development Committee

[Mrs. Spelman]

conducted an inquiry into the future of the European Community development budget, it was deeply critical. It identified

> "an unacceptable neglect of the needs of the poorest countries in the world".

On the management of development assistance, it said that

> "the excessive underspends in so many of the external programmes reveal a Community unable to manage and disburse its resources, but unwilling for political reasons to take the necessary budget action."

7 pm

The Select Committee revisited the question of European effectiveness more recently. The report that I have mentioned was published in 1999, but the Committee subsequently considered the effectiveness of the European Union's development assistance in a progress report undertaken last year. It found that while there had been significant improvements in the policy framework, they had yet to penetrate the legal, political and policy instruments governing European programmes in developing countries.

For the first time, poverty reduction has been identified as a central objective of development programmes. Improved communication between the directorates of the European Commission, the simplification of procedures and longer planning horizons are all part of the reform process that is being put in place by Commissioner Patten. One of the most radical new ideas is deconcentration—a word that, like all European jargon, needs unpacking. It is used to describe the process of delegating authority and staff to Commission offices overseas. However, it has given rise to concern among NGOs that they in turn will have to increase their numbers of staff in the field, which will present an additional administrative cost that they are reluctant to bear.

We welcome all those initiatives for reform, but we recognise the Select Committee's assertion in its progress report that it may be several years before we see significant improvement. We advocate that, during that time, we should not entrust the European Union with a greater share of our multilateral development assistance. Let the Commission demonstrate that it can do a better job with the money that we already give it. In that regard, we were surprised to learn this week of the Secretary of State's decision to allow £120 million of reconstruction aid for Afghanistan to be channelled through the EU. For someone who described the EU as the

> "worst agency in the world",

that looks like a Damascene conversion.

In answer to a written question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), the Secretary of State said only on Monday that she remained concerned that even NGOs were being kept waiting for payment for work they had completed for the European Union. She said that delays

> "cause real hardship to the organisations and individuals concerned."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 604W.]

It seems even more strange that she is willing to give the EU more money to play with.

Tony Cunningham: For clarification, are we talking about the European development fund, the European Parliament's development committee budget, which is about 2.8 billion euro, or the European Community Humanitarian Office's humanitarian aid budget?

Mrs. Spelman: I am talking about the decision taken by the Secretary of State at this week's Tokyo conference in respect of reconstruction money. Rather than being given bilaterally and directly by Britain to Afghanistan over the next five years, a significant proportion is to be channelled through the European Union's collective effort for reconstruction. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand that it is difficult to comprehend why the Secretary of State has taken that decision, given the reservations that she expressed as recently as Monday, when she said in the written answer to which I have referred that she remained concerned about the way in which the European Union treats NGOs that undertake work on its behalf, but which they must initially fund themselves. Some of them are kept waiting for their money for as long as 18 months. I am sure that British donors would be anxious to know that the money that they raise or donate directly for humanitarian purposes may yet have to be used by some of these aid agencies to pay bank loans while they are waiting to be paid by the European Union for the work that they have completed. That is an untenable situation.

Hugh Bayley: I think that the hon. Lady is mistaken on that point. What happened in Tokyo is that Britain pledged money from its DFID resources: £200 million for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The European Union has pledged additional money for that purpose from its budget, to which we contribute. It is not that our Secretary of State has decided to channel some of her money through the EU—it is an EU decision. The reason why the EU has pledged so much is that we are there saying that this is an important priority and money is then pledged by other EU member states. Surely she would support the policy.

Mrs. Spelman: The Minister may well be able to clarify the situation. As the Secretary of State has not yet returned from Tokyo, it is difficult for us to be absolutely clear about what she has and has not pledged to do. On Monday, press reports stated explicitly that £120 million of the total sum that the British Government have decided to allocate to the reconstruction of Afghanistan will be channelled through the European Union. That is what is causing disquiet among Opposition Members. We are not satisfied that the European Union makes the best fist of disbursing the money that it already receives from our Government and we are extremely uncomfortable about the prospect of more being given for the same purpose.

Hugh Bayley: I share the hon. Lady's concern about the need for the European Union to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its distribution of development assistance, but I do not believe that we should renationalise such assistance and allow all other member states to do so. In other words, I do not believe that we should take development assistance away from the EU. Is she suggesting that EU member states should stop channelling money through the EU or not?

Mrs. Spelman: For the benefit of the hon. Gentleman, who for some reason may not have been listening to what

I said about five minutes ago, I shall re-read the relevant section of my speech. I said that I should point out that the Conservatives recognise the value of multilateral aid, and that we do not think that Britain should act alone on international development. I do not think that I could be more explicit. There is no question of repatriating multilateral aid. We would like only to be satisfied that the taxpayers' money that is given in that way is used efficiently and effectively. The Select Committee report decided pretty definitely that it is not used in such a way and that substantial improvements could be made.

In good faith, we believe that Commissioner Patten is doing his best to achieve reform. However, the Select Committee progress report indicated that progress was extremely slow. My meeting with Commissioner Patten a few days before Christmas confirmed that there was no small frustration on his part about the slow progress of reform, for which there are two principal reasons. The Cresson affair and past fraud sullied the reputation of the European Commission. That led to the introduction of procedures that require no less than 22 different signatures on each individual project. I saw the files sitting on Commissioner Patten's desk. As he pointed out, with the best will in the world, getting 22 different people to sign an individual project causes a certain amount of delay. Surely, it is not beyond the wit of man to design a reform that is strong in cracking down on any possibility of fraud and financially rigorous, but does not cause disproportionate delay. The Opposition would certainly like to see such reform. We remain concerned that progress is so slow and believe that we should not be increasing the aid that we provide in such a way.

Dr. Tonge: I, too, am confused about what the hon. Lady is saying. Is she suggesting that we should suspend all our contributions via the European Union until it is more efficient at disbursing the money? If not, what is her argument? If she does not believe that, surely she is saying that we should carry on making our contributions through the European Union, despite the fact that she is worried. I do not understand what she is saying.

Mrs. Spelman: I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, understand what I am saying. For the sake of clarity—this is the third time that I have spelled out this point—let me say that we accept the giving of British aid multilaterally and the purpose of doing so. However, we think that it is responsible for both the Opposition and the Government to satisfy themselves that that aid is given efficiently and effectively. Plenty of evidence from the Select Committee report shows that that has not been done as efficiently and effectively as the Committee would like, and I add my name to that sentiment.

Earlier, I specifically stated that we accepted the need for continued multilateral aid. However, we do not support an increase in such provision through the European Union until significant progress has been made on the reforms. The Secretary of State has not yet been able to return to the House to make a statement on the precise decisions that she has made at the Tokyo conference. However, we are disquieted by press reports, which are perhaps misleading. They led those of us who have to depend on them as a source of information to believe that it has been decided to channel £120 million of British taxpayers' money for the reconstruction of Afghanistan through the EU. Perhaps the Minister can confirm whether that is the case. I am sure that I am not alone in experiencing disquiet about that.

The Bill aims to ensure that aid is spent to reduce poverty and not primarily for political reasons. Yet a proportion of UK development money to Europe is spent on pre-accession aid to enable countries in central and eastern Europe to join the EU. We support enlargement, but the requirement always to consider whether aid disbursed by the EU focuses on poverty reduction is fair.

The new clause is not intended to stop the UK providing funds to the EU aid budget. I hope that that is explicitly clear for the benefit of those who failed to understand that the first time that I said it. The Secretary of State may believe that, for all its flaws, the European aid budget has the required poverty focus. Some of the bodies that we fund heavily do not share our view of the way in which development money should be spent.

The new clause is in the spirit of the Bill. It would extend the high standards that we expect from our bilateral expenditure to multilateral expenditure. It is a reasonable amendment that contradicts nothing in the Bill. I hope that everyone who believes that our budget should be used to reduce poverty in the developing world will support it.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) is trying to achieve an aim that I wholeheartedly support. I am sure that hon. Members from all parties agree that the administration of European Union overseas development assistance should be improved. The International Development Committee has stated that in three reports. Members of the Committee returned yesterday evening from meeting Poul Nielson, the Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, and other officials to ascertain progress on the reforms. The Committee will shortly meet Chris Patten. I therefore support the hon. Lady's aim to improve the quality of EU aid.

Like the hon. Lady, I want the poverty focus of the EU to be as sharp as that of the Department for International Development in this country. The Bill rightly gives that objective statutory backing. However, the new clause will frustrate rather than facilitate that objective.

In 1997 I introduced a private Member's Bill on overseas development and co-operation. It got nowhere, but it sought to amend the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 to make the alleviation of poverty the prime focus of British aid. That measure went the way of most private Members' Bills, and I am delighted that we have a Government who introduce legislation in Government time to achieve the end that I sought in 1995.

When I promoted my Bill, I tried to achieve the aim that the hon. Lady is trying to achieve in new clause 3. I wanted to make the alleviation of poverty the primary objective of our bilateral aid and to ensure as far as possible that it also applied to agencies through which Britain channelled multilateral aid. It is the right goal for which to strive.

7.15 pm

When I tried to draft the Bill, I experienced the same difficulty as the hon. Lady. Her new clause provides that

[Hugh Bayley]

no UK aid for developing countries should be disbursed through a third party such as institutions of the EU

> "unless . . . it is likely to contribute to the achievement of the objectives set out in section 1".

It is inevitable that part of the work of multilateral agencies, including European institutions, the World Bank and others will not have a poverty focus, so the new clause would prevent Britain from being a partner in such multilateral agencies. That would be a disaster because the Department's good, progressive policies have pushed a poverty focus to prominence in many of them. For example, the World Bank has adopted a poverty focus.

In May last year, the European Union agreed to make poverty a primary aim of its development work, not least because of the Select Committee's work in the previous Parliament and pressure from the Department. If the new clause was accepted, we would be unable to contribute through the multilateral agencies. We therefore would have no voice or influence in the EU and we would not be able to ensure the positive changes that the hon. Lady seeks.

I am pleased that the hon. Lady has raised the issue with which new clause 3 deals. When I drafted my Bill, the best that I could do to make that point was to insert in the 1980 Act a provision that stated:

> "Where the Secretary of State is contributing to programmes to offer assistance to countries and territories outside the European Union in conjunction with other member states, he shall use his best endeavours to persuade the Council of Ministers to observe the principles set out in section 1(2) of this Act."

Clause 1 in my Bill established the poverty focus. The Secretary of State has been using her best endeavours in the Council of Ministers. She has argued for a greater poverty focus for the European Union and that has led to the good policy change that the hon. Lady mentioned in her speech.

If our contributions through multilateral agencies, including the EU, were proscribed, we would not only fall foul of our treaty obligations, but it would be impossible for the Secretary of State to argue for good, progressive changes to which she has been so successful in getting our bilateral aid and some multilateral agencies to subscribe.

I say "well done" to the hon. Lady for raising such an important issue, which we must continue to debate in the House and to pursue with the multilateral agencies through which we channel aid. However, I do not support the new clause. Although it is a vehicle for a good debate, it would be a disaster if it was accepted. I hope that she will withdraw it.

Dr. Tonge: I have some sympathy for the new clause. At the beginning of her remarks, the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) asked whether bilaterally funded aid was better than multilaterally funded aid. That is an important question, which we must consider. From my limited experience as international development spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, I have concluded that we need more multilateral aid and bigger, more co-ordinated projects. It is quite remarkable to see—for example, as the Select Committee did when it visited Rwanda a couple of years after the genocide—the dozens, if not hundreds, of different agencies all working in the same country, often duplicating some tasks and not covering others. There is often an air of chaos, with a Government unable to get to grips with what is going on in their own country.

My answer to the hon. Lady's proposal is, therefore, no, I do not want to see a lot more little bilateral projects going on. The world has to join together through the multilateral agencies to provide aid on a much bigger scale, with much more ambitious projects that do not duplicate one another.

As we heard from the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), the multilateral agencies are taking on the poverty focus. It is remarkable what has happened in the short time that I have been spokesman on these issues for my party. Certainly, the World Bank, under Wolfensohn, has taken on the poverty focus in a big way. A wonderful example of that is the fact that the World Bank was the first to pull out of the Ilisu dam project—about which many hon. Members were concerned—and say, "No, this is not sustainable. This is not a good project, and it must not go ahead." The World Bank led the way, followed—as it happened—by Balfour Beatty, but we shall never know what our own Government would have done about that, because it is no longer relevant.

The multilateral agencies are showing signs of adopting the poverty focus. The European Union is another case in point. I castigate the Government over the Ilisu dam because they were very slow and behaved appallingly over it, but they have certainly moved the European Union's poverty focus. I well remember sitting on a committee looking at Court of Auditors reports into how the European Union spent its money—I have told this story many times—and being horrified that a project dealing with HIV-AIDS prevention in South Africa had had its money earmarked five years earlier, yet that money was still sitting in a bank five years later; nothing had happened. It was absolutely appalling, and I asked at the time how many people had contracted HIV and AIDS and died during the delay in that project.

I do not, therefore, view the European Union development budget through rose-tinted spectacles. It has had huge deficiencies, but it has also made great progress. In fact, Chris Patten is one of my constituents, and I am very proud of him, even if he was—is—a member of the Conservative party, and of the work that he has been doing with other people in Europe. Things are moving there, and there are signs that the process will become much more efficient. We will not make the European Union more efficient by threatening to withdraw our funds, or by getting difficult when it is facing huge problems such as the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

I have massive reservations about the European Union, but we must press ahead. By being there, and by being more engaged in what Europe is doing, we shall see huge improvements over the next few years. I have to castigate the Conservative party over this. If it had not been so indifferent and uninterested in the European Union from the very beginning, perhaps the aid budget would have been better spent; perhaps there would not have been all the bureaucracy that has held up the disbursement of aid. If the Conservatives had only been there at the beginning, framing provisions in the way that they think they should have been framed, things might have been very different.

It is no good their criticising the European Union, when they failed to engage at the important time when it was being formed.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr. Tonge: No, time is short and we need to get on.

There are good points to this proposal. It has made us think, and put on record that hon. Members are seriously concerned about how the multilateral agencies operate. We must, however, go on supporting them, because the way forward is through every country in the world, not just the multilateral agencies, joining together to do something about poverty in the rest of the world.

Tony Baldry: I always enjoy listening to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) because she reminds me of why I could never be a Liberal Democrat. I shall tease her just a little by asking her who she thinks it was who led the United Kingdom into the European Union. It was the Conservative party. We were there at the beginning; I was there, and many of my hon. Friends were there. We were all involved in the Britain in Europe campaign during the referendum, so let us have fewer lectures about Conservative involvement in Europe. But I am just teasing the hon. Lady.

I entirely agree with every word that the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) said, and I do not wish to repeat any of his arguments. He and I, and the hon. Member for Clydebank and somewhere that not even Labour Ministers can pronounce—

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Milngavie.

Tony Baldry: We are all members of the Select Committee on International Development, and we have spent the last two days in Brussels questioning and listening to Commissioner Nielson. The Select Committee has published three reports in the past criticising European development aid. I would not wish to pre-empt our report, but we got the sense of the institutions of Europe, the Commissioners and everyone involved in development aid wanting to get to grips with this matter, and of their getting to grips with it. I am sure that there are points to be made at the margins, but the thrust of what is happening in the European Community is reform and the desire to get to grips with it.

I have one or two brief points that I want to make, in addition to what the hon. Member for City of York said. Hon. Members have to find ways of questioning and scrutinising Ministers more closely about what happens at Council of Ministers meetings. This is not just a development aid problem; it goes right across the institutions of Parliament. I have no doubt, from everything that we have heard, that the Secretary of State for International Development is one of the more robust Ministers in the EU Councils responsible for international development in terms of trying to ensure that as many of the EU programmes as possible are poverty focused.

Our ability to get information on those issues is, however, fairly limited and tends to be obtained from occasional written parliamentary questions, either before or after a Council of Ministers meeting. How can we ensure that we get fuller information from EU Commissioners? Members of the Select Committee are fortunate in that we go and question Commissioners from time to time. Indeed, Commissioner Patten is going to be in the House on Monday week, answering questions from the International Development Committee.

I am conscious, however, that our colleagues in the European Parliament have much greater access to what is going on—they are, of course, by definition, there in the European Parliament. In Brussels, I felt that various areas of policy had become something of a secret garden. That was not intentional; no one actually wished to keep us away from the information in question, but simply as a consequence of the rhythm of how policy develops in Europe, we do not always get the full effect of what is happening.

It would probably be helpful if those of us in the House who take an interest in international development met United Kingdom members of the European Parliament's Committee on Development and Co-operation. We were fortunate enough to meet a number of them on Monday evening, and what they had to say was extremely interesting, on a whole range of issues. They had insights into policy development that were sometimes different from ours. I think that we helped them with insights into policy development here. Part of the suspicion that we sometimes have of the European Union and its institutions would be allayed if we in this House could work out better mechanisms for interacting with the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the Commission. Notwithstanding the fact that we have now been a member of the European Union for almost a generation, we have not yet succeeded in that.

The International Development Committee will, I am sure, try to talk to Commissioners, officials and colleagues in the European Parliament at least once a year, but that is not a substitute for the rigorous, continuous involvement between this place and elsewhere in Europe which is necessary. We need to consider how we can improve that situation. As I came away from spending two days talking and listening to people in Europe, I had a clear feeling that there is a deficit, not in Europe's institutions but in the way in which the two places work together.

7.30 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Having participated in the debate on Second Reading and followed closely, through *Hansard*, the debate in Committee, I have been very impressed with the level of cross-party consensus on the Bill.

I fear, however, that on new clause 3 there is a danger of the good intentions that informed the Conservative party's support for the Bill running up against the intransigence of its general foreign and European policy. Its suggestion that Britain should be involved in multilateral aid—for example, through the European Commission—but that we should be able to exercise the threat of withdrawing that aid every time a project breaks down brings to mind that rather unsuccessful mantra about being in Europe but not run by Europe, which was repeated so many times before the last election. The Conservative party is playing the same record again and again.

Mrs. Spelman: I have said not once but three times that there is no question of withdrawing multilateral aid;

[Mrs. Spelman]

we challenge the idea of giving more aid, especially for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, until we are satisfied that the reforms have really taken effect.

Roger Casale: I rather suspected that I might become the fourth Member who has raised the issue with the hon. Lady to have my interpretation of her remarks corrected, and she has not disappointed me. She has, as she made clear, been challenged on this matter four times, and she has not yet ruled out the fact that the purpose of the new clause is to provide a lever controlling the distribution of multilateral aid whereby Britain could withdraw its participation in an individual project if we felt that there was a flaw in the management or delivery of aid.

Surely the whole point of multilateralism is that we pool our resources, and we must put our trust in the relevant institutions, which in this case includes the European Commission, to undertake proper monitoring and exercise effective control.

Just this morning, in European Standing Committee B, we had a long and very interesting debate about the way in which the European Commission monitors, through the Court of Auditors, the aid and assistance that has been given to the Palestinian Authority.

We discovered that there are many difficulties in the distribution of that aid which arise from the management structures and the effective co-ordination of the different agencies involved. Not least among those difficulties, of course, are the political situation and the deterioration of the security crisis in the middle east. Surely, however, it is the job of the Court of Auditors and the European Commission to exercise its judgment in relation to these matters. We must monitor that process, and there are mechanisms for doing so multilaterally to determine whether it is right to continue to make that aid available.

In the Committee this morning, some hon. Members felt that we should be cautious about giving further aid to the Palestinian Authority. I was not one of them; I think that we should be stepping up our aid in this instance. It would be wrong if we in the UK reduced our commitment to the European Union's strategy for stabilising the middle east through support for the Palestinian Authority simply because we had come to the view that we should be more cautious.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): I apologise to my hon. Friend because I have not been here for the whole debate, as I had another engagement. I suspect that he may have been referring to me when he spoke of some members of the European Standing Committee who take a slight hard-line view on this matter. I am sure that he will accept that the reservations of some hon. Members arise not from any lack of generosity or of a willingness to engage in the reconstruction of places such as Afghanistan and Palestine but from a desire to ensure that European taxpayers' money is well spent. We must have a rigorous monitoring system. The Court of Auditors does a good job, but it is of necessity done after the event. As the money is provided on a continuing basis, some of us feel that we need reassurance that the monitoring is taking place.

Roger Casale: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will be pleased to hear that I will not try to rerun this morning's debate in European Standing Committee B. Suffice it to say that we were debating a report from the Court of Auditors and looking at the way in which the European Union monitors the distribution of its aid. The European Commission should do that monitoring, and I have every confidence that it can do so effectively. Of course, we also need to monitor the monitoring process itself.

Sometimes we tend to think that Britain is a special case in the European Union, but the point about multilateral organisations is that the relationships between individual member countries and the multilateral agencies must always be the same. How would a body such as the EU fare if any individual member state threatened to withdraw support every time it noticed that something was going wrong?

Mr. Baron: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, the EU agencies involved might not like what happened but the poor of the world might benefit because aid would be more effectively directed by a country that views the relief of poverty, rather than the pursuit of politics, as a priority.

Roger Casale: The hon. Gentleman is simply arguing that it would be better to give aid bilaterally than multilaterally. He seems to be saying that Britain is best; that we are best placed to know where money should be spent and how it should be spent; that we can monitor that spending and that we should not bother with multilateral organisations at all. If that is his position, it is not unreasonable, but I do not agree. The points made by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, are salient. There is a big debate about multilateralism versus bilateralism, but I think that the multilateralists have won. If the hon. Gentleman wants to take us back to bilateralism, he will find it difficult to support the Bill.

Mr. Baron: I am not making a black and white case for bilateral or multilateral aid, but I suggest that if a multilateral agency is clearly failing in its objective to help the poor, a Government should have the right to consider whether to redirect that agency's aid and to do so effectively themselves to help the poor rather than play petty politics with the EU agencies.

Roger Casale: I am extremely grateful for that intervention, which supports my interpretation of what the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said from the Conservative Front Bench, although she denies that when challenged. Through the new clause, the Conservative party wants the ability to repatriate not just the aid, but the power to monitor and control its use. I submit that there is little difference between that and returning to bilateralism—a point made by many Members.

Such a situation would undermine not only British influence in the multilateral bodies—it is so important that our influence and the emphasis on poverty eradication within those bodies remain strong—but also the multilateral approach itself. Full engagement in the multilateral institutions is the way to ensure that multilateral programmes are effective. We should not isolate ourselves or threaten to withdraw from those institutions every time we spot an imperfection. That is why I hope that the Opposition will withdraw the motion.

Mr. Baron: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this important debate. Britain directs about 30 per cent. of its international aid through the EU. I support the new clause because the EU's overseas aid package is dominated by politics rather than concern for the poor, and because the little aid that is directed toward those most in need takes far too long to arrive.

I hope that reform will take root in the EU, but there is little doubt that political considerations dominate where and how it directs its aid. Why else does Poland receive twice as much aid as Latin America and Asia combined? Why else are the top 10 recipients numbered among eastern Europe, the Balkans and north Africa? In order of aid received, they are: Poland, the Czech Republic, Morocco, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Egypt, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hungary, ex-Yugoslavia and Russia. Why else do Asia and Latin America combined receive only 12 per cent. of the EU overseas aid budget when a third of the people living in absolute poverty are in India alone?

This country allows nearly 30 per cent. of its overseas aid budget, which amounts to between £750 million and £800 million, to be directed through the EU. This country should therefore be ashamed of itself. We support an EU policy that, in effect, plays petty politics with the poor of the world, although the Government are aware of the problem.

The International Development Committee's second report, published in 2000, says:

> "EC external assistance policies are clearly determined more by political priorities than poverty alleviation."

On 9 January, in response to my question, the Prime Minister could not deny that he was aware of the situation. I hope that the House will forgive me for quoting, but in answer to my written question, the Secretary of State was honest enough to say:

> "Provisional figures for 2000 show that the percentage of EC development assistance spent in low-income countries continues to fall and is now below 50 per cent. This is unsatisfactory but difficult to change because many member states and large parts of the Commission support the distribution of aid for political rather than developmental purposes."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 346W.]

I put it to this Government that we are elected to try to change things for the better. We are not here to accept matters that are unsatisfactory because they are too difficult to change.

The Government are clearly acquiescing in the shameful policy of politics over poverty. That policy is not only marked by dishonesty and hypocrisy, but is inefficient and ineffective, as the small amount of aid that reaches the genuine poor often arrives very late. According to the International Development Committee's paper entitled "The Effectiveness of EC Development Assistance", published in August 2000, the average length of project or programme implementation has continuously increased over the past few years. During the past five years, the average delay in disbursement of committed funds has increased from three to four and half years. The Committee concluded that that sort of backlog was untenable.

7.45 pm

The Committee was told of a number of examples of delays and inefficiencies in disbursement. Population Concern gave the Committee two examples of such delays. The first was a delay of 13 months in the disbursement of funds for four mini-projects in Bolivia and Peru. In the second example—a community-based distribution programme in Karachi—the funding situation became so dire that the director of a local NGO in Pakistan took out a personal loan to pay staff salaries, using her residence as collateral. As a result, partner NGOs have requested that Population Concern should seek no financing from the European Community in future.

Britain has an enviable record, built up over many years and many Governments, when it comes to international aid, and our aid agencies enjoy a similar reputation. Yet the Government seem to be attempting to sacrifice our good name on the altar of the EU overseas aid package.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Gentleman is keen to lecture this Government, but will he reflect on the position when his party was in government? Does he recall that the proportion of the aid budget going through the EU when the Conservative Government left office was not 30 per cent. but 50 per cent. and rising? The reason it was rising was the Conservative Government cuts to our bilateral aid. Why did not the Conservative Government take the sort of action that the Labour Government are taking, together with the Commission, to improve the quality of British aid, when they had the opportunity to do so?

Mr. Baron: I find Labour Members' tendency to try to cover up—

Hugh Bayley: Answer the question.

Mr. Baron: I shall answer the question in my own way. Labour Members attempt to cover up their own failure by referring back to what happened five years previously and to the Conservative Government's record. I do not know about the hon. Gentleman, but I am more interested in the future than in the past. What is clear is that this Government, who are now in a position to do something about this, have done nothing about it in the past five years.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Gentleman is generous enough to give way again. I simply make the point that these problems were manifest when his party was in government. Indeed, the problems were greater then, as a larger proportion of British aid went through the EU because the overall aid spend was lower, but the Conservative Government did nothing about it. We now have a Labour Government who, together with partners in other member states, are doing something about it. For instance, in May last year we got all the member states represented in the Council of Ministers to sign up to a declaration that poverty relief should be a prime goal of the EU aid programme. The Conservatives never did that, so we are making improvements. Will the hon. Gentleman support the Government in that?

Mr. Baron: Let me respectfully point out to the hon. Gentleman that the position with regard to the EU overseas aid package has been getting gradually worse. In 1987, for example, some 75 per cent. of the EU overseas aid package went to low-income countries. Today, that figure is 50 per cent. In reality, therefore, matters have been getting much worse in recent years. That is why it is important that the House focus its attention on the

[Mr. Baron]

future rather than the past, and on what we can do to put matters right. There is no point in harking back to what happened five years ago. If anything, the situation is now worse and there is an even greater need for this Government, who have been in power for the past four and a half years, to put things right.

The Secretary of State has called the EU overseas aid package a "disgrace", yet it appears from press reports—I look forward to clarification of this when the Secretary of State addresses the House—that she has allowed the Government to distribute our Afghanistan reconstruction aid through the EU. That can only encourage the EU.

Meanwhile, the only target that the Government have published in their White Paper to measure the effectiveness of EU aid is for 2006. We must wait another four years before we can determine whether things are getting better. That is another four years during which money will be wasted, mismanagement will persist and lives will continue to be needlessly lost.

I believe that one of the main priorities of politics should be the relief of poverty, wherever it exists. I am sure that the vast majority of Members on both sides of the House agree: it is just that we differ as to the means of achieving that objective. When dealing with one of the most powerful tools to alleviate poverty, international aid, the Government allow the EU to play petty politics with the poor of the world. That shameful policy is costing lives today. We need the Government to act now to put that right before too many more lives are needlessly lost. I hope and pray that that happens. I remind the Government that actions speak louder than words. If they refuse to support new clause 3, they will be sending out a clear message that they are not prepared to act.

Hilary Benn: We have had an interesting debate. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) did the House a great service by drawing attention to the decline in the poverty focus of EU development spending, which is a real problem. We are well aware of that. As my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) said, these problems have been going on for some time. They are a product of the priority that has been given to the foreign policy interests of EU member states—these decisions are taken collectively—instead of focusing on poverty. The Government have succeeded in persuading the EU that its development aid programme should have a poverty focus.

As the Chairman of the International Development Committee, the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), said, the process of reform has begun. We had an extremely good debate this morning in European Standing Committee B—hon. Members will be pleased to hear that I do not propose to repeat my contribution. We talked at some length about the progress that is being made, but we also recognised that there is a lot more to be done.

Norman Lamb: I recognise that the process of reform has started. However, I read in the Library research paper on the Bill that, back in November 2000, the Development Council made its declaration that the principal aim must be the reduction of poverty. It decided that there must be an action plan and constant monitoring of progress through an annual report. Today, I rang up the man in charge, Mr. Eliopoulos, to find out where these annual reports were, and I discovered that there is no annual report for 2000 or 2001. Nothing has yet been published. That does not make me very confident that progress is being made, certainly not on monitoring. Can the Minister tell us what will happen with those reports, and how much progress has been made?

Hilary Benn: My recollection is that there was a first shot at a report that went to the Development Council in November, but the Commission recognised that it was an incomplete and imperfect document. One of the practical steps we are taking is to work with officials in the Commission to find ways in which effective monitoring of the spending of EU aid can be undertaken in future and be reported to future Council meetings. There is not the experience that there might have been. We have something to offer, along with other member states that share our concern about the lack of a poverty focus, and we are interested in practical steps to make progress.

Mr. Baron: Will the Minister give way?

Hilary Benn: Yes I will, but I want to make progress.

Mr. Baron: I have taken the Minister's points on board, but why are we waiting until 2006 to get a progress report on these new policy initiatives and reforms, when we could ask for such a report in a year's time? Why do we not speed things up? Why are we waiting another four years?

Hilary Benn: We are not waiting, because the Government are actively involved in supporting the European Union and the Commission in carrying forward the reform process. I was interested by the remarks of the hon. Member for Banbury, who has been with the Select Committee in Brussels for two days. We will see what the International Development Committee report actually says. The hon. Gentleman recognised that progress is being made. I am however almost the first—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would be ahead of me in the queue—to recognise that the proof will be in the delivery of the change. We think the commitment is there, and the mechanisms have begun to be established; but all of us, in all parts of the House, want to see the change take place.

I do not know about the reports in the papers to which the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) referred, but I can confirm what my hon. Friend the Member for City of York said. The £200 million in the bilateral contribution to aid for Afghanistan will come from the DFID budget; the EC is making its own contribution from resources for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Only our contribution to the European development fund comes within the purview of the Bill. The EC development aid budget category 4 and pre-accession spending—also raised in the debate—are subject to the European Communities Act 1972.

We share, unquestioningly, the objective of a greater focus on poverty, but the new clause is both unnecessary and undesirable. It is unnecessary because any assistance provided by the Secretary of State under clause 1 and any contribution made under clause 4 are subject to the requirement that she be satisfied of the likelihood of their contributing to a reduction of poverty. That is so whether she acts herself or through third parties, under clause 4 or clause 8. The Bill therefore provides for the test sought by the hon. Lady.

As for the undesirability of the new clause, the most important point is that the Secretary of State's power to provide assistance in response to a disaster or other emergency is not constrained by the poverty requirement, and should not be so.

Mrs. Spelman: May I put to the Minister the question put to me by the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale)? If the Secretary of State was not satisfied that the criteria in clause 1 were being met, would she be prepared to withhold funds on a multilateral basis if they did not accord with the focus?

Hilary Benn: The Secretary of State could do that under the Bill as it is currently worded, although contributions to the European Union involving moneys covered by the European Communities Act 1972 are not subject to its provisions.

The real difficulty is that the new clause would impose a constraint, in that whenever the Secretary of State gave assistance to third parties in response to a disaster or other emergency—and I am afraid that "third parties" includes non-governmental organisations—she would have to be satisfied that the granting of that relief would contribute to the reduction of poverty. I cannot believe that that was the hon. Lady's intention. Such legislation would mean, for instance, that before deciding to authorise the granting of emergency relief following the volcanic eruption in Goma, the Secretary of State would have had to ask herself whether it would contribute to the reduction of poverty. Such deliberation might cause delay, which is of course wholly undesirable.

There are other examples. In 1999, there was a mudslide in Venezuela. We gave support through third parties to assist humanitarian relief. Some of the mudslide affected wealthier districts of the capital. If the new clause were adopted, it would mean, in effect, that the Secretary of State should not give such support through third parties, because it would be hard to prove that it favoured the reduction of poverty. Another instance is the help that we gave, again through third parties, following the Turkish earthquake. Turkey is not a low-income country.

Another unintended effect of the new clause is that any aid given to overseas territories by third parties would be subject to the poverty test, which we have specifically excluded from the aid that we give overseas territories under the Bill because other factors need to be taken into account. Again, I am sure that the hon. Lady would not intend the new clause to have this effect, but the overseas territories would be alarmed to hear that any aid or support that they received from third parties, multilateral institutions and international financial institutions was subject to the poverty requirement.

Finally, as other hon. Members have said, the new clause would create difficulties by constraining the Secretary of State's ability to honour our obligations to pay contributions and subscriptions to multilateral financial institutions.

8 pm

We accept the principle. The Bill seeks to give the Secretary of State the necessary power to ensure that she can carry that principle through but, with great respect, the new clause is defective because it would have all those adverse consequences. For that reason, I hope that the hon. Lady will decide not to press it.

Mrs. Spelman: It is not until we debate new clauses in this way that we are able to place on the record the principles that we are trying to defend and our good intentions in tabling them, and to dispel any myths about those intentions. I hope that we have succeeded in achieving that.

I am sure that the Minister is under no illusions. We feel strongly about acting on the warnings following the Select Committee investigations into the way in which multilateral aid is disbursed by, among other third parties, the European Union. It is perhaps worth putting on record the fact that there is no desire to fall into the trap of adversely affecting NGOs, whose work in relation to international development we support.

The unforeseen consequence exposed by the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) may lead to a myth being perpetrated that there is an intention on the part of Conservatives to repatriate our multilateral funding. I hope that that has been scotched effectively, but lest there should be any doubt left, and to make it impossible to place that interpretation on our intentions, and to avoid the unforeseen consequences that the Minister has set out and which arise from humanitarian assistance being referred to under new clause 3, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

8.2 pm

Hilary Benn: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

As has been said many times during the passage of the Bill, it is simple but profoundly important. As the House knows, the reduction of poverty has been the guiding principle of all United Kingdom development assistance since 1997. It is right, therefore, that that principle should be established in legislation.

One in five of the 6 billion people with whom each of us shares this planet still live in conditions of extreme poverty, with shortened lives, inadequate food, lack of education, health care, clean water and sanitation; 10 million children die each year from malnourishment and preventable illness; 500,000 women die during child birth for lack of simple medical help; 800 million people cannot read or write; and 113 million children of primary age can get no education because they have no classroom and no teacher.

With the abundance and knowledge that exist in the world, it should shame and disgrace us that such poverty and inequality continue. So long as we fail as a world community to deal with such division and inequality in our increasingly globalised world, we will never achieve the stability that each of us wishes to be able to pass on to the next generation.

Following the events since 11 September, there is much greater understanding of the force of that argument. As the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said on

[Hilary Benn]

Second Reading, there is a window of opportunity. I agree with that wholeheartedly. It is an opportunity that we must seize.

The Bill makes poverty reduction the test of what we do, and it ends tied aid. There is now an all-party agreement that tied aid has had its day in the UK, and will not return in any form.

The Bill ensures that we can provide effective humanitarian assistance and allows us to promote good governance, to support security sector reform, to encourage conflict resolution and prevention, and to support financial management reform. It continues to offer support to our overseas territories.

I shall be brief, as the Bill has twice been through this House and the other place over the past 12 months. I want to place on record my thanks to all the hon. Members who have contributed to our debates—on Second Reading, in Committee and again this evening. Whatever has divided us, it is clear from our discussions that there is a deep concern among hon. Members of all parties for the cause of international development. That has been reflected in the constructive spirit of our discussions at all stages.

For those reasons, and in that spirit, I commend the Bill to the House.

8.6 pm

Mrs. Spelman: I begin by reaffirming that the Opposition fully support the aims of the Bill. We have supported the Bill through all its stages and I hope that the Minister will accept that, on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report, our approach has been constructive and in the spirit of the Bill.

Certainly, I want to place on record the contribution that has been made by Sir John Vereker, permanent secretary to the Department. Today, he addressed the all-party parliamentary group on overseas development, and that was an unfortunate clash of timing. There have been almost too many goodies on offer today for those hon. Members with a passionate interest in international development. It was not possible to be in two places at once, but I am sure that the Minister will join me in placing on record our thanks for the work that Sir John has done in his career with the Department. To some extent, he played the role of midwife in bringing the Bill into being. We wish him well in retirement, and his successor well in assuming his role.

The events in Afghanistan provide an interesting backdrop for the debate on the Bill's effectiveness. We must consider what help can be given to Afghanistan, which is now defined, regrettably, as a failed state. I hate the term "failed state", but it has caught on. It does not match the spirit that I detected in the Afghan aid workers whom I met on a recent visit to Pakistan. The quality that characterises the Afghan people is their resilience. I have every confidence that, with the right assistance from countries such as ours, Afghanistan will get back on its feet. However, that will require the sort of commitment, focus and contribution that have been at the very heart of our discussions of the Bill.

Since my visit to Pakistan, I have become even more convinced that international development needs to be high on the political agenda. It is in some ways depressing that it takes a disaster to make people take notice of international development. I told the Secretary of State that one of my aims was to help her keep international development high on the agenda.

We need to tackle failed states before they fail, and we need to tackle the grinding poverty that brings them to that condition. I hope that the Bill confirms Britain's commitment to tackling global poverty.

Afghanistan is not the only example facing us. Around the world, poverty is intertwined with the absence of education, decent health care and human rights. It is right that the Department for International Development should tackle poverty. If other countries and institutions adopted similar strategies, the millennium targets for changing things would be much more firmly within our grasp.

We touched on the role of the EU in our discussion of new clause 3. The EU is the sixth-largest donor of official development assistance, and the second-largest multilateral donor, in the world. However, it has not focused its development effort on the poorest countries. It has only recently announced the need to focus on poverty. We pay tribute to the Secretary of State's role in helping to bring about a shift. The lion's share of the European Union's aid budget still goes to help countries in the Mediterranean, the Balkans, central and eastern Europe and north Africa. I accept that there are huge numbers of relatively poor people in those areas, but if we are serious about tackling global poverty there needs to be a drastic change of focus.

From Commissioner Patten I gain the impression that the will is there but that it will take a long time and much effort before there will be any major improvements in the budget. I know that the Select Committee on International Development maintains constant scrutiny of the progress of the reform of the European aid budget, but I urge the Secretary of State to keep a firm hold on the powers that the Bill will confer on her to ensure that multilateral giving is used in a way that chimes with the Bill's overall focus and objective.

In our deliberations in Committee, we did our level best to persuade the Government that more attention needed to be paid to the whole issue of reconstruction. I remember the serious reservations that the Minister expressed on that point. He said that if reconstruction were an explicit objective mentioned in the Bill, it could have the possible consequence of breaking the bank in terms of international development. However, before we leave discussion of the Bill I want to re-register with the Minister the fact that it is part of the new policy of the Conservative party that a successful refugee policy must include a commitment to reconstruction in those countries where, as a result of man-made or humanitarian disaster, the population is faced with problems of the type that are manifest in Afghanistan now. I remain concerned that the Minister's answer to me—that such an objective could not be incorporated in the Bill—left hanging in mid-air the question about the ultimate responsibility for reconstruction: with which Government Department does that rest? That remained an unanswered question, and in a way it remains unanswered today. It will be a very stern test of joined-up government in future if our fine words on the need to reconstruct Afghanistan are to have real, practical success in that country.

We have of course had reservations about the Bill. We were worried that many worthy projects—projects to build up civil society and good governance—would not be eligible for funding under the Bill or in future, and we have tried to have them explicitly mentioned in the Bill, lest those very important areas should suffer future neglect. The Secretary of State and the Minister have both said several times during the Bill's passage that their funding status is secure. I hope that officials in their Department will bear that in mind when allocating funding.

We have also tried to make the Bill reflect the need for greater accountability. The performance of the Department would inevitably improve if it constantly measured its progress against specific targets and if that performance was more open to the scrutiny of the House. Our amendments may not have been made, but I hope that the Secretary of State has taken their import on board.

Lastly, if we are truly to tackle global poverty Government as a whole need to take development seriously. The Government need to re-energise their commitment to reform of the common agricultural policy, which currently holds out considerable economic opportunities for developing nations. When the Department of Trade and Industry is giving consideration to export credit guarantees, it needs to think seriously about development issues. We were very disappointed in that respect when our amendment on sustainable development to the Export Control Bill was not accepted.

We were disappointed that the Government did not feel able to support our amendment to make the seeking of poverty reduction a focus across all Government Departments, because we believe that, using joined-up government, we could be much more effective with that focus.

To an extent, our disquiet was vindicated in the example of the Tanzanian air traffic control system which attracted attention in December, when, against the recommendations of the World Bank and others, a British system was sold to Tanzania at what the World Bank regarded as an inappropriately high cost. Most important, what happened to the good intentions to direct resources in countries that we have relieved of debt to health and education rather than defence procurement? In that Tanzanian test, the Government seem to have fallen at the first fence.

Norman Lamb: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: No. I am about to conclude my speech, and the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make his own contribution to this debate.

I reiterate that we support the Bill, despite our reservations. At the beginning of a new century, it would be a brilliant achievement if this century could be associated with great progress not just for the developed world but for the developing world. I hope that the Bill will enable Britain to play a full part.

8.15 pm

Tony Worthington: I agree with what the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who speaks for the Opposition, said earlier about Sir John Vereker. It is a remarkable achievement to have been involved with the Overseas Development Administration in the 1960s, to have been private secretary to three Overseas Development Ministers in the 1970s and then to have held the post of permanent secretary for eight or nine years. It is a fitting tribute to him that today, when he is about to leave, the Bill has made so much progress towards becoming an Act, showing that the Department for International Development has come of age. I wish Sir John well in Bermuda—hard work, but some one has to do it.

I had the opportunity to chair a meeting at which Sir John Vereker spoke, and one of the things that he pointed out, which is very important to this debate, was the importance of a Department having a single, uncluttered focus. The Bill is about having such a focus—the reduction of poverty. Of course, the Opposition have sought to clutter, and that is very tempting, but the lack of a single, uncluttered purpose was the reason why aid got into so many difficulties in the past—it was why we got into difficulties, and it was why the European Union got into difficulties as well.

People kept on trying to add their own focus—all very worthy, but it produced the inequities of tied aid. People said, "Here's something good to export. Let us find something that is reasonable to use it for in a developing country," whereas the interests of the developing countries and the poorest people in them should have been the driving force.

The biggest tribute to the Department, the Secretary of State, the Minister and all those of us in this country associated with development is the power of the idea [illegible] reducing poverty—it is now taking over everywhere [illegible] development. One sees that poverty focus at the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and throughout Europe; it is the driving force to reforming the European approach to development.

In wishing the Bill good speed, I want to mention the Select Committee's latest visit to Europe, which was referred to earlier. Let us not forget that the Select Committee on International Development now exists, and it is not on the margins as it was under those newly wise Conservative Members. Let us also remember that, whereas the department was an aid agency, it is now a development ministry. That is crucial. Whom did we see on that visit to Europe? We saw the Commissioners or senior representatives of three Directorates-General. We saw the foreign affairs people, the development people and the trade people, and they knew where we were coming from. They spoke the same language as us. We saw the representatives of a French Trade Commissioner and it was remarkable that they spoke about a poverty focus and—let us whisper it—about reducing the subsidies made under the common agricultural policy. They were already responsible for the everything but arms initiative.

Because of this Department and this Secretary of State, we get a single, uncluttered focus on the reduction of poverty everywhere we go. I wish the Bill well.

8.20 pm

Dr. Tonge: I congratulate Sir John Vereker on his retirement, but I particularly wish to thank him for being very patient with me when I was a member of the Select Committee. I used to regard him as the senior tutor of the set-up who would always take a little bit longer to explain to a rather difficult Liberal Democrat what she had not understood. He is a great man and I thank him and all the civil servants in the Department for International Development.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), the Chairman of the Select Committee, is not a member of the Liberal Democrats. However,

[Dr. Tonge]

I remind him that he has the best job in the House of Commons and I wish him luck. I hope that he enjoys his work.

The Bill is all about sustainable development. The phrase has come to haunt me; I dream about sustainable development. The phrase sums up everything that we want and need. As many Members will know, my obsession when we started to consider the Bill was tied aid. I could not believe that the Bill was dealing with the subject. I was tutored by civil servants and other Members and we gradually established that the phrase "sustainable development" would eliminate tied aid for ever. I welcome that, and I am beginning to believe it.

However, sustainable development and what the Bill can achieve depend on other Departments. Let them—and especially the Department of Trade and Industry and the Export Credits Guarantee Department—not forget about sustainable development. Their activities often conflict with those of the Department for International Development. I shall not cite the famous examples, because I am sure that other Members will.

On humanitarian aid, I am constantly worried—I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure me—about DFID having to spend its budget on clearing up messes. It had to spend a certain amount of money on humanitarian aid and reconstruction after the Kosovo action. I remember having many battles about that and receiving reassurances from the Secretary of State that much of that money came out of the Treasury's contingency funds.

I object when the budget that is meant for the poorest people in the world has to clear up messes that we have often created. Therefore, although I appreciate that the humanitarian aid for Afghanistan has come out of DFID's budget, will the money for reconstruction come from its budget or can we twist the Treasury's arm to make it come from its contingency reserves? It is important that we do not always fall back on DFID's budget to fund reconstruction, particularly after military action.

My other plea is that humanitarian aid should also go towards basic primary education. I gave the example of southern Sudan, which has had 40 years of civil war, with just one short break. Two, coming up to three, generations have not had the opportunity of receiving primary education. A very low percentage of boys, let alone girls, are in education. It is important in chronic civil war situations that we do not just deliver humanitarian aid. We have to look a little more to the future.

Primary education is a simple thing to deliver. It does not need massive infrastructure. Southern Sudan does not even need schools and classrooms. I saw classes taking place under trees. The children need teachers, slates, chalk and a few books that can be carried off with the people of the village if the war and the raiders suddenly return. The Department should reconsider its policy and include education in humanitarian aid.

We have heard some fine speeches over the past few weeks, especially since 11 September. We have even been subjected to the Chancellor of the Exchequer doing the most tremendous things on the debt front and saying remarkable things about a global health fund and how we must all pull together. We heard a magnificent speech from the Prime Minister when he was teaching the world to sing at his party conference. I am being genuine. I honestly believe that he is sincere in his attempts to bring the world together and to do something about poverty. I was also subjected to an equally marvellous speech by ex-President Clinton in the Elizabeth II centre across the road.

Everyone is talking about doing something to tackle the huge poverty gap in the world, but what we are putting into action is a bit lamentable. I congratulate the Government on bringing the proportion of gross national product that is spent on aid up to, I think, 0.33 per cent., but at that rate it will be 50 years before we achieve the UN target of 0.7 per cent. I urge them to move a little faster.

I think that I heard the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) question whether percentage of GNP, or whatever it is called nowadays, is the appropriate way to measure the aid that is given to developing countries. That has been agreed by the UN and I thought that we all accepted it. I know that the United States of America is beginning to quibble and that it is saying that it is the amount of cash that matters, not the proportion of GNP. I should like the hon. Lady to clarify her position on that.

Mrs. Spelman: It is simply that percentages can be misleading. When an economy is growing, it is possible in cash terms to put more money in and at the same time to have a lower percentage of gross domestic product because of the growth in the economy. The trouble with all statistics is that they are used in favour or disfavour of the argument that one is promoting. For that reason, I urge a word of caution. The percentage of GDP has to be considered in conjunction with the underlying trend in the growth of the economy if one is to understand properly what the size of the contribution really means.

Dr. Tonge: Yes, I thought that that was what the hon. Lady said, so I did not misunderstand her, and I thank her for re-emphasising it. However, that moves us away from the age-old principle, which for me is the 11th commandment, of "from each according to his means, to each according to their need". The hon. Lady's approach means that it is possible not to bother about the rest of the world; that when an economy is performing badly, we can forget about aid because it does not matter. The percentage of GNP is a basic principle and I am amazed that the Conservatives are abandoning it.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I share the hon. Lady's amazement given recent debates in the Chamber about the amount of money that was put into Railtrack as a percentage of GDP and the Conservative party's claims about how well it did compared with the Labour party. Does she agree that although the outstanding commitment dates back to about 1974, it was last reiterated at the Rio conference in 1992 when the Conservatives were in government? What was good enough for that Conservative Government is surely good enough for the Conservative Front Bench now.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful intervention. Tonight, we have witnessed, if not the earth moving, certainly a huge shift in Conservative policy on the delivery of aid and, indeed, their concept of raising taxes, which seems to be changing.

I shall conclude, briefly, with the United States of America. If any country is guilty of not giving a proper proportion of its income, sadly it is the USA. The country currently contributes 0.1 per cent of its income, and is grizzling about it.

Mr. Hawkins: The point that the hon. Lady has just made demonstrates her shaky grasp of elementary mathematics and statistics. One cannot measure things simply by percentages because the United States of America, the greatest free democracy in the world, gives a vast amount in cash terms. Saying that that is 0.1 per cent. is a silly argument.

Dr. Tonge: I shall not respond to that ludicrous intervention. The hon. Gentleman obviously does not understand the concept of progressive taxation—I think that that is what it is called—or percentages, which I learned about in primary school, as I am sure many hon. Members did.

In recent months, the Americans have shown a lack of concern for the rest of the world. They have withdrawn from the Kyoto agreement, have not signed up to the land mines treaty or the International Criminal Court, and are withdrawing from the anti-ballistic missile treaty. We understand that they are unhappy about the target of 0.7 per cent. which has been set by the United Nations. In the two months in which they prosecuted the bombing of Afghanistan, they spent about a quarter of their annual aid budget. It appears to me—I hope that I am wrong—that the USA does not give a pretzel for the poor of this planet.

Mrs. Spelman: Since the record will be read tomorrow, may I make a factual point? Is the hon. Lady aware that the United States was the largest donor of aid to Afghanistan prior to 11 September?

Dr. Tonge: Yes, I was, but that contribution does not prove anything; we go back to the argument about each giving according to his means. The Americans are not giving in proportion to their country's income; through their policies, they give the appearance—that is how it seems to my constituents and me—of not pulling their weight.

We must put all the fine words that we have heard in recent months into action. For the sake of future generations, we must address the poverty gap world wide and give every child the chance of education and a better life, not just those children who are lucky enough to be born in the west. If we do not do so as a matter of urgency, we shall condemn our children and grandchildren to many more wars, terrorist activity and poverty.

8.33 pm

Roger Casale: The Bill is excellent and will come to be seen as a landmark Bill, underpinning the new approach to the delivery of aid and development assistance; it may not be necessary to sing its praises, but we must certainly embrace it at the start of the 21st century. It is not idle to speculate that the ambition of eradicating poverty will come to have the same symbolic and practical significance in this century as the drive to eradicate slavery did in the 19th century, and the drive to eradicate disease did in the last century. We must always remember that the great battles of the past are never won for good; even today, there are worrying signs of the re-emergence of slavery in certain parts of the world. Many murderous diseases that plagued the developing world in the early and mid-20th century are returning as well.

Each generation sets its sights on a new international agenda. Each tries to set its sights higher. The Bill represents the determination of our generation to act decisively and effectively to eradicate poverty. I believe that that aspiration will form the foundation of our development efforts for many generations to come. It is an aspiration that has grown not only out of the world of politics, although politics will be very important in advancing the cause. The determination to eradicate poverty is an expression of a deeply felt desire for a greater measure of social justice throughout the world. I believe that that desire is felt by the vast majority of decent, thinking people in our country.

I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to the work of Sir John Vereker, who, rather like William Wilberforce in the 19th century, decided to live in Wimbledon when he had work to do in London and at Westminster, although he has been there for a little longer than Wilberforce decided to stay. We should also pay tribute to the work of church and other faith groups, non-governmental organisations and the growing body of academic work on international development, which has helped to establish the paramount nature of the principle of eradicating poverty, not least through the work of the international philosopher and holder of the Nobel prize for economics, Amartya Sen.

The Bill will put the United Kingdom in a leading position in relation to international development issues. We will have a much stronger voice in the world on how we need to respond internationally to globalisation and on how globalisation should be made to work for the world's poor.

Of course, there is still a great deal of work to be done on refining and making more exact the definition of sustainable development. Although an important feature of the Bill is the fact that we are breaking the link between aid and trade—there will no longer be tied aid in that sense—many of us would like to tie across other Departments the concept of sustainable development as we find it in the Bill and in the work of the Department. It could then be a leitmotiv that would help to give substance to our aspiration of ensuring a co-ordinated approach across Departments to trade and development issues, while never losing sight of the importance of tackling social justice as a means of securing stability and peace in areas of conflict around the world.

One thing has become much clearer as a result of the passage of the Bill: the central importance of a multilateral approach. I hope that, with the confidence that the Bill provides, the Government will continue to build on their work and strengthen our efforts to transform international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

All of us can take pride in the introduction of the Bill and the new direction that it will give to our efforts to eradicate poverty around the world. I commend the further passage of the Bill to the House.

8.38 pm

Tony Baldry: One of the very few benefits of the last general election was that it meant that the Bill had to be brought before the House for a second time. That provided the opportunity for a number of further speeches, commitments and contributions to be made on international development, which, in the usual course of parliamentary business, is an area of policy that is all too rarely debated on the Floor of the House.

We all agree that we need a clear poverty focus in international development. The statistics on those who live in poverty are sometimes so large that they are almost impossible to comprehend and the numbers of people involved are almost unimaginable. The United Nations says that 600 million children—almost one in four of the world's children—now live in absolute poverty. Nearly 200 million children under five weigh less than they should, and more than 130 million children of primary school age are not in school. It is difficult to grasp such statistics.

The wider picture is similarly bleak, with 1.2 billion people living on one US dollar a day. The same number of people lack access to safe drinking water, and 2.4 billion have inadequate access to sanitation.

Recent events have provided an opportunity. I do not want to make partisan points because those of us who are concerned about international development must try to explain to and impress upon many others that unless we bear down on poverty in the world, many other problems will not be overcome. To reduce poverty, we need clear objectives that everyone can easily understand. I shall therefore bang on for a few minutes about the need to try to meet the 0.7 per cent. target.

I shall read *Hansard* carefully tomorrow because I was not entirely sure what my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) was saying. Of course, I understand the arguments about cash and that if we have an economy that is growing in cash terms, the aid budget can increase. To be fair, I took such lines at the Dispatch Box when I was a junior Minister in the Foreign Office. I was not convinced by them then and I am not convinced now. However, their great weakness is that they constitute a political shorthand that hon. Members understand but does not grab our constituents and make them more willing and determined to support international development.

There is a danger that our constituents perceive international development in only two ways. First, when a major disaster occurs, such as events in Afghanistan and the recent volcanic eruption, they understand the need for humanitarian relief. Secondly, they hear about international development when stories appear about corruption in development aid budgets. We must try to grab people's attention and engage them so that they understand the need for a sustained campaign to ensure that the whole world gives more to development aid.

If developing countries fail to reach the 2015 targets, it is largely because developed countries do not give enough. That is not a criticism of the UK, which recently increased its aid budget. We are now the third largest donor according to the Development Assistance Committee statistics. We were fourth. However, with an aid budget of 0.33 per cent. of GDP, we have some way to go.

The Select Committee visited the institutions of the European Union yesterday. We learned that the Community had had to raid almost every cupboard, nook and cranny to pay for the commitments to Afghanistan that were made in Tokyo. If a similar crisis occurs, the cupboard is bare. If Somalia, Sudan or any other countries that are in difficulty need significant help and support, the money is not available from one of the wealthiest multilateral organisations in the world. We must therefore make a commitment to meet the 0.7 per cent. target.

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have recently made speeches about international development. The Prime Minister has spoken about Africa, and he made a speech in India at the new year. The Chancellor of the Exchequer spoke at the Federal Reserve Bank. Hon. Members will have read most if not all those speeches. They are all welcome speeches that seek to establish a new partnership in Africa. In fairness, however, they will be but words if they are not matched by an increase in the financial commitment to international development. Those of us who are concerned about international development need to make as much noise as we can, in this Chamber and elsewhere, to ensure that the needs of the developing world are not forgotten when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and others take into account the various pressures that they have to consider, and divvy up resources.

We now have an ideal opportunity to persuade colleagues and friends in other wealthy countries that they can afford to make a greater contribution to development aid. I shall read with care in *Hansard* tomorrow what my hon. Friends have said about the United States. Yes, the United States gives a considerable amount of development aid, in total cash terms. That is not surprising; it is a huge economy, and the wealthiest nation in the world. It is also, however, a fairly parsimonious provider, giving only 0.1 per cent. Now is the time for us collectively to engage with colleagues and friends in Congress, and to persuade them that this is an ideal opportunity for the wealthier nations of the world to engage with developing nations and substantially to increase their funding for international development assistance.

I am not sure what phrase one could find, other than "failing states", to describe certain countries. I appreciate that it is not a reflection on the individuals in those countries, who often have to deal with the consequences of daily grinding poverty. Indeed, huge numbers of people do that with a nobility of spirit that humbles many of us. However, the fact is that in far too many parts of the world, civil society has almost entirely collapsed. It was interesting to ask leading members of the European institutions to name countries in Africa, for example, that could be held up as illustrations of success. There are all too few success stories in Africa at the moment, and all too many tragedies. Many of us have almost completely lost track of the tragedies occurring in countries such as Somalia and Sudan, because they are so horrific, they seem to have been going on for so long, and they are just so grim.

Recent events have provided us with the opportunity not only to put international development far higher up the international agenda but to say to those who elect us, our fellow citizens, that it is in all our interests that we should invest more in the developing world. We all deal with political shorthand. The target of 0.7 per cent. that was set some 30 years ago is a piece of political shorthand that we can all understand. It is not the most elegant figure—0.7 per cent.—but it must be possible for hon. Members to find consensus on a line to take on when we could hope, collectively, to meet that target.

Norman Lamb: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: No, I want to want to finish this point.

I am not expecting the Chancellor of the Exchequer to say that he can meet the target in the next spending round, but I would have thought that we could establish consensus that we should aim to meet the target of 0.7 per cent. by a particular date. I hope that we are in agreement that our development policies need to be poverty focused. Well, we have willed the policy. Can we not now, between us, collectively will the means to ensure that it can be achieved?

8.49 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas: The second book in the "Dark Materials" trilogy which has just won Philip Pullman the Whitbread prize is "The Subtle Knife", and we have just seen the subtle knife exercised by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on the arguments of his own Front-Bench colleagues. I hope that his subtle admonition was effective.

I rise to give the Bill my strong support and that of my colleagues in Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party. I am pleased that the Bill is proceeding through its stages in the House. As hon. Members have said, all parties have supported the Bill, worked to improve it and have tabled amendments to tease out arguments from the Government. On the whole, that has been a beneficial process, twice over.

I am a little disappointed by the only flaw that I see in the Bill, which is that it does not contain a better definition of sustainable development. During its first passage through the House, I moved an amendment to use the Brundtland definition. At that time, the Government said that there are too many definitions, it is hard to keep track of them all and each one has its failings as well as its advantages, so we should stick with what we have got.

Labour Members and the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) have talked about the importance of sustainable development as a tool for reducing poverty. However, I am still concerned that we do not have a fuller definition of sustainable development. There is talk of the goal of sustainable development being rolled out to all Departments, and I am worried that we will have too many different definitions working in too many different ways.

I predict that sustainable development will be included in future Bills, not only those on international development but those relating to work within the United Kingdom. I predict that several different definitions will be used, and we will have to return to the matter in a few years and draft a composite definition for the Government to use. Apart from that the Bill is excellent and it will provide a framework for the Secretary of State and her Ministers to achieve poverty reduction targets.

I agree with the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) that amendments tabled by Conservative Members had one particular failing. They were good amendments in the sense that they addressed issues of the day. Those are issues that should be addressed and on which the Executive should be challenged. However, they should not be included in the Bill because it sets up a framework for robust work towards poverty reduction over 10 or 15 years. Lumbering ourselves with issues specifically to do with Burma, Zimbabwe or anywhere else would have proved somewhat restrictive.

It is the task of all hon. Members, particularly those on the Opposition Benches, to hold the Government to account. They have said that they will achieve poverty reduction through sustainable development, that the Bill will get rid of tied aid and that they will work towards good governance. It is our job to hold the Government to account on the aims that they have set themselves in debates on the Bill.

We must now move on to the next stage of international development, which, as the hon. Member for Banbury said, is to achieve cross-party consensus on reaching a contribution target of 0.7 per cent. of GDP. I was hoping that we would achieve that consensus, although there may be a question mark hanging over those on the Conservative Front Bench. Certainly when I questioned the Secretary of State at the last International Development Question Time, she seemed to be open to the idea that there should be a timetable and that it is no longer good enough to have an open-ended commitment to an international treaty obligation that we have never fulfilled.

Of course, I accept the argument that richer countries pay more even if they pay a smaller proportion of their GDP. One of the countries that I am aware has reached its target of 0.7 per cent. is Luxembourg, and I am sure that it gives less than we do in our 0.33 per cent. of GDP. Nevertheless, the people of Luxembourg understand that they, as part of the rich west, are sharing a proportion of their wealth with developing countries. We have to aspire to be like Luxembourg. It is an interesting task for us to aspire to be like the smallest country in the European Union. I hope, in good time, that Wales will join Luxembourg as one of the smaller members of the EU. We must move forward to fulfil that obligation and reach that target. That is the only blot on the Government's copy book in this regard and they have done excellent work on debt reduction, which is another issue altogether.

The Bill represents the first genuine assessment of international development aid for about 20 years and it may provide a robust framework that lasts another 20, although I hope that the fact that this is our second attempt to legislate does not mean that it must last 40.

I leave the Minister with this thought: the proposal on annual reports was rejected, but we have a better framework for international development aid debates and that should enable us to achieve a better understanding of the progress that the Government are making towards the international poverty reduction targets.

Let there be instituted in the House of Commons an annual debate so that we can hold the Government to account, feed in our ideas and study practice elsewhere. As much as possible, we must work on the basis of cross-party consensus.

8.55 pm

Hugh Bayley: In order to be brief, I shall not repeat any arguments made by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) about the figure of 0.7 per cent. I simply

[Hugh Bayley]

say that Labour Members share his view that it would be helpful to have a timetable against which to measure the Government's aspiration to reach the target. They are moving in the right direction, but we need more clarity as to the time scale. That view was expressed by the Select Committee, of which I am a member, and we eagerly await the Secretary of State's response. We wish her good luck in her discussions with other Ministers, who obviously need to be consulted about the matter.

It is music to my ears to hear such a clear cross-party consensus on the importance of a poverty focus in aid. Of course, that consensus did not always exist. When I introduced a Bill to amend the Conservatives' Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 and put a poverty focus in our aid programme for the first time, I did not receive the wholehearted support of all Members.

It was the father of my hon. Friend the Minister who said that when new proposals are made they are usually ignored—they were in my case—and then derided. However, if the proposals are good, the mood changes over time. Eventually, everybody says they agreed all along and that they are a good idea.

I simply say "well done" to the Secretary of State, her Department and her Government colleagues. It is terrific that the legislation is before the House and I hope that it reaches the statute book shortly. Of course, legislation is simply a means to an end, not an end in itself. It will provide a clearer focus on the need for our Government to support global efforts to work to, and reach, the vital anti-poverty international development targets by 2015.

I wish the Government good luck in their endeavours to ensure that those crucial goals are attained and good luck in their negotiations with our allies and friends in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Union. They, too, must make substantial contributions if the targets are to be met.

8.58 pm

Norman Lamb: Like other Members, I begin by making clear my strong support for the Bill. As a new Member of the House, I was delighted to debate it while serving on my first Standing Committee. Its objectives are laudable and it rightly has at its heart the concept of poverty reduction and the need for sustainable development. However, I must direct my brief comments to three areas in which, if we are not careful, its objectives could be undermined. I very much hope that they will not be, but we must be alert to such matters.

First, I want to deal with the adequacy of the total spend. I absolutely endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry). He made a somewhat diplomatic criticism of his Front Benchers and stressed the need to focus on the 0.7 per cent. target, which was set by the United Nations Assembly back in 1970. It was that we would achieve a 0.7 per cent. of GNP rate of spend on aid by the middle of that decade. International progress since then has been lamentable, and in this country the percentage—I agree that we must focus on the percentage—of GNP that the Conservative Government spent on development assistance between 1979 and 1997 halved.

Since then, there has been an improvement, but even at the rate of improvement that we have seen, it would take us 30 to 40 years to achieve the 0.7 per cent. target. I would like the Minister to give some indication of the timescale that he envisages; I would suggest 10 years to achieve that target. I would also like to hear Conservative Front-Bench Members make a recommitment to the target because, listening to them tonight, I was concerned that they might have abandoned any drive towards a 0.7 per cent. target and that the total cash spend by a particular country was more important.

It seems self-evident that 0.7 per cent. for Luxembourg or the UK is less than 0.7 per cent. for the United States, which is the world's largest economy. We are talking about the same size slice of cake, irrespective of the size of the cake.

Thus the first issue is the adequacy of the spend. It is essential that the international community achieve a more equitable sharing out of the world's resources, not solely because it is a moral imperative but because it is in our collective interest to do so. The hon. Member for Banbury was again correct in saying that it is incumbent on us all to convince others that other objectives depend on our eradicating poverty. We live in a highly interdependent world, and we cannot have peace and security in our own land in a world full of trouble. We must build peace and security across the globe, and we cannot achieve that if extremists can prey on desperation caused by poverty.

The second issue that I wanted to deal with was that of consistency of Government policy. I refer in particular to the case of the Tanzanian air traffic control system. That country spent £28 million on a system which the World Bank says is redundant and inappropriate. The World Bank reckons that Tanzania could buy an appropriate system for about £7 million. Tanzania has eight military aircraft—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman may see the link between what he is saying and the Bill, but it is not yet evident to the House. On Third Reading of a Bill, his remarks must be within the context of that Bill.

Norman Lamb: I appreciate that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point that I am making is that there must be consistency across Departments. At the time of the sale to Tanzania, there was talk of the possibility of amending the export control legislation to achieve the same test of sustainable development and reduction of poverty that is at the core of this Bill. Will the Minister confirm that that will happen so that we have consistency across Departments, driving at the same objective of poverty reduction?

The third issue concerns the fact that 25 per cent. of the Department's aid expenditure is channelled through the EU. There is genuine concern that the EU is not yet performing as it should in channelling its aid into the reduction of poverty. All the trends have been in the wrong direction. A Library research paper says that in 1970–74 30 of the top recipients of EU aid were Africa-Caribbean-Pacific region countries, but by 1996–97 only two of them were in the top 15. That is a move entirely in the wrong direction. In 1970–74, two of the top 15 recipients were the Asian countries India and Bangladesh, but their position slipped, and by 1997–98 there were no Asian recipient countries in the top 15.

It is incumbent on the Government to ensure that their total spend on development assistance goes into the reduction of poverty and sustainable development. In an earlier intervention, I expressed concern that monitoring of the EU's aid budget had not started particularly auspiciously. The annual reports that were promised in 2000 have not yet appeared. The Government must demand change in the EU so as to ensure that the money spent on aid through the EU satisfies the same test as the Bill lays down for the rest of our aid.

The Bill is an excellent start in directing our spending in the right direction, but it is not enough on its own. There must also be an increase of resources going to the developing world. We must aim to achieve the 0.7 per cent. target within 10 years. There must be consistency across Departments, and we must ensure that all our aid meets that test.

9.7 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I shall not detain the House for too long, as we have covered an enormous amount today and in previous stages of the Bill. It has been an education for me, as a new Member of Parliament. The Standing Committee was the first on which I have served, and it has been impressive to observe the passage of the Bill through Parliament. The consensus that we have reached in the House is a rarity.

The issue of overseas development and poverty reduction should unite all hon. Members, from whatever side of the House, because in this country we are privileged to be in a society in which poverty does not affect too many people. Of course we have poverty in some areas, but deprivation exists in countries across the world, where people are in genuine need and do not have the advantages that we take for granted. All hon. Members should work together to ensure that we get the best results for poor people in the third world who need help from countries such as the United Kingdom.

The administration of overseas aid must be efficient. We must be sure that the money we spend in this area is used to best effect. We must ensure that it is monitored. It is disappointing that the proposal of an annual report has not been accepted. It is also disappointing that once again we are using the European Union as a method of distributing overseas aid. The EU's record in that area is not particularly proud. I shall not give further examples, as some have already been given, and the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) referred to the problem a few moments ago.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said, there is nothing wrong with the idea of third party organisations distributing money, but we want to see that it is being used properly and not going to the wrong areas, and we do not want to see the huge delays caused by its being administered from Brussels.

A small point which, as the Minister knows, I have raised at earlier stages relates to the inclusion of the British overseas territories. I believe that, being British, they should be included in other legislation; they should not be lumped together and treated as if they were foreign territories in relation to international aid.

I am delighted to note that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) agrees with me. Sadly, as she will know, that is one of only a few matters on which we agree. The views that she expressed earlier on the United States concerned me greatly. The United States does a phenomenal amount of work in defending freedom, helping impoverished countries and assisting countries that lack democracy and are threatened by various interests. It is always the first nation to help bring about democracy, freedom and the alleviation of poverty, and we must stand by it.

I do not think that the debate is assisted by attacks on our ally, the United States. I believe that we need to work with the United States, and with all countries that want to contribute to the eradication of global poverty. Sidelining and criticising the United States does not help us to achieve our ultimate objective.

9.12 pm

Mr. Hawkins: With one exception, contributions to the debate have been of high quality. There has been a good deal of common ground between the parties. The Under-Secretary of State spoke briefly but skilfully, as always, about the overall concept of the Bill. He also stressed a fact that concerns hon. Members throughout the House: at the beginning of a new century and a new millennium, some 800 million people still cannot read or write, and 113 million children can obtain no education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) expressed our reservations about the Bill, and listed the ways in which we feel that it could have been improved. She rightly paid tribute to the retiring permanent secretary Sir John Vereker, and described what she had seen of the resilience of Afghan aid workers during her recent visit to Pakistan. She spoke of the need to go on tackling global poverty, and emphasised that Conservative Members had wanted specific provision for funds for good-governance projects in the Bill.

My hon. Friend also pointed out that we felt the Government had fallen at the first hurdle recently, a point picked up by the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington), speaking with great experience of the subject, echoed the tributes to Sir John Vereker. I was slightly concerned when at one stage he appeared to praise without reservation the so-called "everything but arms" initiative. I attended a number of meetings just before the end of the last Parliament where many other Labour Members—led by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and the former Chairman of the Select Committee, Bowen Wells, to whose work I pay tribute—were worried about some of the adverse effects of that initiative, especially its impact in the Caribbean and knock-on results in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) spoke about his strong commitment to the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), from his great experience as the current Chairman of the Select Committee, spoke of his worries about the collapse of civil society and the grim parts of the world, and expressed his views on the vexed question of percentages.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) spoke about his support for the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, and praised the underlying spirit of some of the Conservative amendments that my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden moved in Committee, and some of the new clauses that were tabled for tonight's debate.

The hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) claimed credit for the focus on poverty concept, and said that he was delighted that it had moved from something

[Mr. Hawkins]

that he put forward as a Back Bencher in his first Parliament to being part of the Bill. The hon. Member for North Norfolk went back to the question of percentages. Although he said that the percentage was moving in the right direction, he will not have forgotten that for the first three years under the present Government, it went down. He talked about the export guarantee amendment. He may have forgotten that that was a Conservative amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) rightly defended the United States' role in protecting freedom and democracy, not least in aid. He expressed his concerns, which I share, about the delivery of aid, and about the way in which British overseas territories such as Gibraltar, on which he and I have great concerns, particularly at the moment, should be included properly in future legislation.

It has been a good-natured Third Reading debate, with one exception, as I said. I cannot finish without drawing attention to the fact that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who contradicted the Liberal Democrat spokesman on foreign affairs in the debate on Zimbabwe, was comprehensively demolished by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury.

The hon. Lady said a couple of things with which I agreed. She described herself as a difficult Liberal Democrat who needed a lot of tutoring. She said that she dreams about sustainable development, and that she needed a lot of education from the retiring permanent secretary and his civil servants about humanitarian issues. She wished my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury well in his difficult work chairing the Select Committee, but venting her anti-American spleen and prejudice was not worthy of her, her party or this debate.

9.17 pm

Hilary Benn: With the leave of the House, I would like to respond to the debate.

I thank all hon. Members for their contributions on Report, on Third Reading, in Committee and on Second Reading, and Members who were in the House when the Bill was considered last year for their involvement. I take this opportunity to thank officials from the Department for International Development and other Government Departments, without whom we would not be sitting here debating this Bill.

Hon. Members have kindly made favourable comments about the reputation of the Department. That is simply a reflection of the quality of the people who work in it. We are extremely fortunate. As a still relatively new Minister, I have been universally impressed by the quality, commitment and passion of the staff whom I have met during my time at the Department.

I have one regret about this evening's debate: my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is not able to be with us because of her presence in Tokyo for the Afghanistan reconstruction conference. No one has done more to bring the Bill about than her. No one is better qualified by her record, commitment and passion to take forward its principles. I am sure that the whole House wishes her well in that task.

I shall respond briefly to some of the specific points raised in the debate. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) has made that task a lot easier with his usual brilliant and succinct summing up of the contributions that we heard.

The question of EU aid was covered in the very good discussion on new clause 3. I shall not repeat what was said, but we reached a measure of consensus about what the Government are trying to achieve.

The question of the 0.7 per cent. target was raised by the hon. Members for Banbury (Tony Baldry), for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), among others. As I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have said, the question is good and pertinent, and the House will not be entirely surprised that, on this happy occasion, I am fortunately not able to give an answer about the timetable. However, that is a debate that we need to have, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will listen with interest to the points that have been made.

The hon. Members for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), for Ceredigion and for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) spoke about export control. Sustainable development is now an equal criterion among others, and the fact that we even have a debate about how to interpret that in relation to particular decisions shows how far we have moved. Twenty-five years ago, it would not have occurred to Members of Parliament to debate the merits of sustainable development—as opposed to Britain's interests—as a consideration in deciding such matters. The fact that the House is united in opposition to the concept of tied aid is a recognition of the shift that has take place over a generation.

On reconstruction, Afghanistan is the test of the moment, and the hon. Member for Meriden was right to draw attention to it. The money that we have committed this week is an expression of our commitment to that country's reconstruction, and shows clearly that the international community meant the promise that it made to the people of Afghanistan that it would not walk away from them, given all the pain and suffering that they had experienced. That point was ably supported by the contributions from my hon. Friend the Members for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington), for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) and for City of York (Hugh Bayley). The latter told the House about his previous efforts to get some of the principles contained in the Bill on the statute book.

The House united on four matters on Third Reading. It united in sending its best wishes to Sir John Vereker, in expressing its commitment to the reduction of poverty, in recognising the influence that events in Afghanistan have had on our awareness of why it is more necessary now than ever to act to reduce poverty, and in supporting the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of York said that, in the end, the Bill was just a means to an end, and he was right. It is what we do with the Bill that matters. We now have a rare and real opportunity to make a difference. It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to make sure that we take it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with an amendment.

National Heritage Bill *[Lords] [Money]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

9.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the National Heritage Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown or government department under or by virtue of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.

The motion concerns the private Member's Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman). The Government have been content to support the Bill, as its provisions closely mirror the relevant provisions of the my Department's Culture and Recreation Bill, which was lost with the announcement of the general election. This support was ably expressed during the Bill's Second Reading on 18 January, when the House was content for the Bill to move into Committee. The Bill has already been considered thoroughly in another place.

The purpose of the Bill is to broaden the powers of English Heritage in two ways. It will allow English Heritage to trade in overseas countries, and to become involved in underwater archaeology in territorial waters adjacent to England.

The governing legislation for English Heritage at present precludes both activities, but it is widely expected that they would be beneficial. The Bill would also allow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to direct English Heritage to carry out certain administrative functions in relation to underwater archaeology, which at present that Department has to carry out itself. The Bill therefore gives new powers to English Heritage, which of course have financial implications—hence the money resolution.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that this is a useful piece of legislation. I commend it to the House.

9.24 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I thank the Minister and the Government for bringing forward the money resolution. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), who so agreeably and successfully moved the Bill's Second Reading on Friday 18 January. I also pay tribute to Baroness Anelay of St. Johns, who revived the Bill and, I am sure that the Minister would agree, put it into an even friendlier form than that which was lost at the time of the general election.

I entirely support the Bill's objectives, personally and on behalf of the official Opposition. The Minister refrained from using the expression that it extends English Heritage's responsibilities to wrecks, and perhaps at this time of the evening I should also avoid any reference to wrecks, but I welcome English Heritage's new powers and the streamlining and extension of its activities.

I have one or two questions for the Minister, relating to the financial implications of the Bill. First, what expenditure will be incurred as a result of the financial provisions? Secondly, can the hon. Gentleman assure the House tonight that, as the Bill simply reflects to a large extent administrative changes that have already taken place, the level of expenditure will be very small? I do not know whether he can share a figure with the House tonight, but if so that would be most welcome.

Dr. Howells: We are proposing to transfer the full current budget of £340,000 for these activities to English Heritage.

Miss McIntosh: That answer is extremely helpful. May any potential savings be envisaged in future resulting from the Bill's provisions? Can the hon. Gentleman explain what the day-to-day running costs will be, and whether there will be any additional running costs under the new arrangements envisaged by the Bill? I await the hon. Gentleman's reply with great anticipation.

I thank the Government once again for bringing the money resolution before the House, enabling us to ensure a safe passage for the Bill.

9.28 pm

Dr. Howells: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall respond.

The transfer of the Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites secretariat function and the management of the archaeological diving contract—which is, I am told, currently held by the archaeological diving unit at St. Andrews university—to English Heritage are agreed recommendations arising from the departmental spending review. It was a key plank of the spending review findings that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport should not be involved in such executive functions. We are proposing to transfer the full current budget of £340,000 for those activities to English Heritage.

English Heritage considers that those functions should cost £450,000 to carry out. We disagree. When DCMS last let the diving services contract, it made efficiency savings by transferring the cost of the vehicles and vessels to the contractor, in line with current best practice, and English Heritage should also be able to benefit from those efficiency savings. We cannot predict how much the contract will cost when it is re-tendered, and there may indeed, as the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) said, be scope for more efficiency savings, but what those are exactly I certainly would not be able to tell her now.

Question put and agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on motions 6 and 7.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Postal Services

That the draft Postal Services Act 2000 (Determination of Turnover for Penalties) (Amendment) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 19th July 2001, be approved.

That the draft Postal Services Act 2000 (Modification of Section 7) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 19th December 2001, be approved.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

MINISTERS OF THE CROWN

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the draft Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dissolution) Order 2002 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 8th January.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Mersey Tunnel

9.30 pm

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the readers of the *Liverpool Echo* and the *Wirral News*, members of the Wirral chamber of commerce and many residents of Merseyside.

The petition declares that

The Mersey Tunnels Bill will break the commitment to the people of Merseyside that surplus revenue will be used to accelerate the repayment of debt and will allow Merseytravel to increase tolls in line with inflation; that this could lead to unacceptable increases in toll charges, damaging the Merseyside economy and that 415 readers of the Liverpool Echo and 523 readers of the Wirral News have signed statements stating that they oppose the Mersey Tunnels Bill.

The residents of Merseyside declare also that Merseytravel have undertaken to use the operational surpluses from the Mersey Tunnels to reduce the levels of debt, leading to subsequent reductions in Tunnel tolls; but that Merseytravel currently propose to use surplus toll revenue to subsidise other forms of transport, while automatically increasing tolls annually in line with inflation.

The residents therefore request that the House of Commons reject the Mersey Tunnels Bill.

To lie upon the Table.

Bed Blocking (Bedfordshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

9.31 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am grateful to the House for the chance to raise the issue of bed blocking, which affects my constituents—indeed, it affects the whole county of Bedfordshire. I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), is to reply to the debate.

Bed blocking is not a new issue, nor is it in any way localised to my constituents. However, it is particularly acute in North-East Bedfordshire, for a combination of reasons. Bedfordshire county council suffers, as do all local authorities at the moment, from inadequate funding for its social services, which limits its capacity to provide support to patients on leaving hospital. That is compounded by severe problems in the care home sector, where homes are closing and beds are being lost.

Bedfordshire health authority is one of the poorest in the country, and the current pressures are therefore exaggerated in their effect, as no reserves are left to cover the problem. To cap it all, Bedfordshire is a growing county, with more people coming to live in new developments, as requested by the Government in their targets for homes. If services are inadequate now, what will they be like in a decade's time, when our population of over-75-year-olds is 20 per cent. higher? That is the synopsis of the problem.

Bedford hospital's delayed discharge figures for the past year tell the story. In the third quarter of 2000, there were 53 delayed discharges. That figure rose steadily through the year—188 in the next quarter, 232 the next and 223 the next—until by the third quarter of 2001 the figure was 304, a sixfold increase. The average length of stay of a bed-blocking patient is between four and 14 days. Unsurprisingly, the impact of bed blocking produces a shortage of beds, or no beds. No beds results in cancelled operations and delays in treatment for those who are long suffering and those with chronic illnesses. I was first alerted to that problem by the constituents' cases about which I heard in my advice centres during the autumn. When I queried the local NHS trust about the reason why operations were cancelled, the issue of bed blocking seemed all too often to loom as an answer.

In the third quarter of 2000, there were 107 same-day cancelled operations in Bedford hospital, of which 64 were the result of there being no beds. By the third quarter of 2001, that figure had risen to 285, of which 199 were the result of there being no beds. Waiting time targets at the hospital climbed inexorably. Patients were placed in inappropriate wards—medical cases in surgical wards, for example. They stayed in the accident and emergency department for the first time and 12-hour trolley waits began to be recorded.

Just before Christmas the decision was taken to close a theatre as there was no point in the hospital's keeping it open. In one week, none of the non-emergency elective surgery could take place in the other theatres. In plain commonsense terms, bed blocking means that, on any one day, between one and two wards are full of people who should not be there.

All that takes place to the great distress of staff and management, who work very hard in difficult conditions and under considerable public scrutiny. Bedford hospital has not had an easy year and criticism is keenly felt by all levels of staff, as I found out when I dropped in at Christmas to speak to the people there. No one wants to address the difficulties of the hospital more than all those who work there, and they deserve praise for the mountain of excellent work that they do. I shall come to the hospital's and the trust's funding shortly, but I wish the new chief executive, Andrew Reed, and the new NHS trust chair, Helen Nellis, very well in their new roles.

The causes of bed blocking are varied. Some delays are inevitable as patients and families have good reason for a short delay as their loved ones re-adjust to coming out of hospital. Perhaps not all such cases should be designated as delays. An illness may mean that a family has to make new domestic arrangements for someone and, if they cannot be made overnight, some leeway is sensible. Perhaps a redesignation of the term "delayed discharge" might be sensible in such cases. However, when patients and families are unreasonable—I am told that there is evidence that some are—they should understand the impact of their actions in keeping a bed blocked.

Delays that may be put down to purely resource-based reasons—such as delay in assessment, delay in funding a package, delay in awaiting a domiciliary placement, delay in awaiting a nursing or residential care package—show a significant increase, from 24 in the third quarter of 2000 to 116 in the third quarter of 2001. The figure is more than four times greater.

Other categories listed as "other reasons" or "family reasons", which are both growing, also include cases where awaiting medical or social services or other public service support is a factor. They include waiting for an occupational therapist's assessment, or for a physiotherapist, or for adaptations to property.

However, disentangling actual figures and deciding which categories relate to which public service or to other reasons is not the main point of my debate. I wish to illustrate beyond question the significant increase in the bed blocking to which, following discussion with the NHS trust and social services, increased support and resources would be an answer. Both the NHS trust and social services in Bedfordshire county council speak warmly of their relationship with each other, and their shared responsibility for such matters is plainly one that they each welcome.

Social services funding in Bedfordshire was the subject of a debate in the House just before the Christmas recess opened by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). The deficiency in social services funding nationally has been the subject of surveys of directors of social services throughout the country in the past year. We are all aware that it appears to be a major problem for all of them. This year Bedfordshire will spend nearly 15 per cent. above its standard spending assessment. Next year's package hardly changes the overall picture, and there is a projected shortfall of £7 million. Without repeating everything that my hon. Friend said in the debate to which I have referred, I have to say that the shortfall is placing a dagger at the heart of services in the county and giving the county council, so well led by Philip Hendrie and his colleagues, an impossible job with its budget.

The problem of social services funding in Bedfordshire is compounded by pressures in the care home sector, a destination for 76 of the 304 who, in the last quarter of 2001, were waiting unnecessarily in hospital beds. Inadequate funding over a number of years meant that Bedfordshire county council could afford no increase in fees paid to care homes in the independent sector. A recent district auditors' report confirms the pressures on the sector. Five homes have closed in the past year. The independent care home owners in the county—I am grateful for the assistance that I have received from Gordon Ward and Michael Glynn in providing figures for me—tell me that 10 more are under severe pressure this year, so perhaps a further 300 beds will go.

Care home owners' costs are conditioned by the market, but they are also coping with new Government pressures, from minimum wage legislation and health and safety regulations to the Care Standards Act 2000, for which they must pay—more cost and more regulation, but no more money. Their negotiations with the county council are blighted by those constraints on finance. Where would our county be without the very best quality of care that independent care homes can provide?

The national health service in the area was also the subject of a debate shortly before Christmas, opened by the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall), whom I am delighted to see in the Chamber. Its poor budget means that it cannot afford to apply more of its resources to its share in dealing with the problem, which it recognises is a joint responsibility. For example, the Bedford Hospital NHS trust funds 30 places in care homes because the local authority cannot afford to pick up the Bill.

To further demonstrate the parlous state of local NHS trust finance, a recent parliamentary answer revealed a 438 per cent. increase in the percentage of patients waiting more than 12 months for treatment since 1997. I say that to illustrate that I am discussing not a mid-winter local crisis, but a sustained deficiency now working corrosively right through the system. Bedfordshire health authority began 2001-02 some £17 million below target. Next year, despite what seems a generous settlement—the highest in the region—it will remain resolutely at the bottom of the funding scale. By comparison with our target share of the NHS budget, Bedfordshire's 2002-03 allocation is some 4 per cent. less than we ought to receive, equivalent to an £18.5 million gap.

Those figures will not be unfamiliar to the Minister, coming as they do from a letter to Lord Hunt of Kings Heath from Lesley Watts, the acting chair of Bedfordshire health authority. She points out that this small county, despite all the odds, has worked very hard to provide good-quality services, but that for the first time serious deficits are being reported by trusts that have always achieved their financial duties. Trusts in Bedfordshire are some of the lowest-cost providers in the country. Lesley Watts also points out that although the allocations announced for 2001–02 included broad percentages for increased figures for the subsequent two years, the recent allocations announced for 2002–03 make no mention of growth in future years.

What is to be done? As far as local authority social services are concerned, the additional funds announced late last year are a recognition by Government of both the problem and the solution. An extra £447,000 was announced until April 2002, and I believe that there is a figure double that for the whole of next year. The money

[Alistair Burt]

is being well spent on buying in extra services for making assessments, on extra places in residential and nursing homes and on some limited recruiting, but the problem is that the money is time limited for 18 months.

As I hope I have illustrated to the Minister, the problem is not short term. If there is no guarantee of continued funding to meet the needs, few long-term commitments can be made, because the council dare not take on more cost if it is going to lead to increased budgetary pressure. That is bound to make it more cautious, and solutions to the problems will not be implemented. Future local government settlements must address that social services differential. It is now too serious, both in Bedfordshire and nationwide, to be left alone.

The NHS must have an uplift in funding commensurate with its needs in Bedfordshire. There is definitely an answer to that. According to the Chancellor's pre-Budget report, some £700 million of NHS money was unspent last year. This is the Minister's moment. This is the time when she can, with her natural compassion and the force of argument, seize the Dispatch Box and say, "I've got some money for you." That unspent NHS money can come to a place where it will be well used; the underfunding of Bedford hospital historically and all the pressures exerted on it will be a thing of the past when the hon. Lady makes that declaration—if not now, then in two or three minutes' time in her reply. I am making a serious point: it is difficult to defend tight budgeting if £700 million is unspent.

A plea coming from the NHS and Roger Gwynne Jones, the executive member of the council responsible for the social services portfolio, is, "No more initiatives." They want extra uplift in core funding, instead of so much new money being tied into new initiatives that always have to be bidden for, tying up money, entailing bureaucracy and demonstrating lack of trust in local discretion which, I am afraid, is becoming the Government's hallmark. Will the Government try to give an uplift in funding, as opposed to depending on the public sector bidding for new initiatives, which does not allow it discretion and means travelling along the Government's tramlines?

Finally, I shall set the issue in the context of a growing Bedfordshire population, the major point that I want to drive home to the Minister. I have outlined the issues facing hospitals, and could do so for every public service in Bedfordshire, a small, historically prosperous and independent county which has tended not to come top of the pile when looking for support. It has not wished to do so because its independence is matched by its people's pride and their ability to cope and support one another.

Bedfordshire is no longer in charge of its own growth and development; in future, it will march to the beat of the Whitehall drum, as plans for new building on greenfield and brownfield sites alike have an impact. What does that mean for population growth? I have some illustrative figures from the county. In 1996, Bedfordshire's population was 367,300; the over-65 population was 49,700; and the over-75 population, 21,800. In 2001, the population was 385,800; the over-65 population was 53,400; and the over-75 population, 24,400. In less than a decade, in 2011, the total population will be 419,000; the over-65 population will be 64,200; and the over-75 population will be 28,800. According to my calculations, that is roughly a 10 per cent. increase in the general population now, but a 20 per cent. increase in the over-75 population.

Judging from the attitude and words of all the county's Members of Parliament, it is not content to play catch-up any longer. We are putting down a marker, and I should be grateful if the Minister, in the comprehensive spending review, takes into account the pressures of population growth in a county such as ours. I do not mean taking account of them in the figures, which look good and will no doubt look good when the hon. Lady repeats them tonight, but in meaningful changes on the ground in public services. It is already difficult to work in those services in Bedfordshire but, with the population growth that I have suggested, it will be more difficult in a decade. Given both bed blocking, the subject of tonight's debate, and the over-75 population increase, how will those services cope?

I am grateful for the time and the attention that the House and the hon. Lady have given me. The hon. Lady understands the problems well; I should be grateful if she would explain her understanding of the symptomatic problems of a growing county and reassure my constituents and me that she will apply my suggestions to other public services so that the problems that my county faces will not be experienced in future, and so that hope can be given to the hard-pressed and hard-working people in the public services and those whom they serve.

9.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) on securing a debate on this important matter. I welcome his concern to see high-quality social and health care being provided for his constituents. That is clearly what the Government seek and we are investing in and modernising the services in order to provide it. I shall try to respond to all his concerns.

The hon. Gentleman raised particular concerns about delayed discharges in Bedfordshire. I am advised that the percentage rate of delayed discharges in Bedfordshire has, in general, compared relatively favourably with those of other health authorities in the region. For example, in September, the rate fell below 3 per cent. However, there have been rising rates more recently, with figures closer to 6 or 7 per cent. Since the beginning of the new year, the position on delayed discharges throughout Bedfordshire and at Bedford hospital has improved considerably, thanks to the efforts of health and social services. I am informed that the latest figures show a total of 41 blocked beds, which is down from 65 in the first week of January and leaves Bedfordshire on track to reduce delayed discharges to its target of 23 beds by the end of March.

The hon. Gentleman made a series of points about the NHS, social services, local capacity and local funding. In trying to address them, I shall begin with some of the issues about resources. Of course, he will be aware that tackling bed blocking is not merely about resources, but about having the right systems in place to ensure that the resources that are available are best spent. As he will know, Bedfordshire health authority, like health authorities throughout the country, has benefited from substantial real increases in investment in the past few years. Last year, it received a real increase of 7.1 per cent. and this year, it received a real increase of 6.3 per cent. Next year it will receive a real increase of 7.8 per cent.—a cash increase of 10.5 per cent. and the fourth largest in the country. He will also be aware that, nationally, increases are currently averaging more than 6 per cent. in real terms, compared with an historic average of about 3 per cent. Those increases put Bedfordshire in a much better position to respond to winter pressures.

I recognise the points that the hon. Gentleman made about the increasing population in Bedfordshire. The matter has been discussed in response to concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall), who is sitting behind me. These factors are already taken into account in the NHS formula. It is true that Bedfordshire remains below target. The formula is currently being reviewed and all the factors will be taken into account. It is worth pointing out that, while population has grown by 2 per cent. in the past three years, funding in Bedfordshire has increased by 33 per cent. during the same period. Other areas have also received large increases which are greater than the corresponding rise in their populations. The problem for Bedfordshire, however, is that its increased funding has not been sufficient to meet its population's needs.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, in December, we announced next year's £53.4 billion NHS budget and explained how it would be distributed among health authorities. For Bedfordshire, the cash increase means a total budget of £414.9 million. In addition, an extra £425 million of earmarked NHS funding is available for 2002–03 to enable capacity to be built up across the health and social care system. Together with the additional £200 million being allocated to councils next year for tackling delayed transfers of care, the funding means that a total of £625 million will be available to health and social service communities for tackling these capacity issues. In Bedfordshire, as in other parts of the country, the NHS is therefore better placed than ever before to respond to winter pressures.

The hon. Gentleman is right that the matter is about not only the NHS, but social services, where investment has also been growing substantially in real terms under this Government. Bedfordshire has benefited from that investment. This year, it has received an increase of more than 9 per cent. in its total personal social services resources. It will receive substantial extra funds for personal social services next year. Overall next year, personal social services will continue to increase by a further £680 million, or 6.5 per cent. in real terms. Resources for personal social services have increased between 1996-97 and 2002-03 by an average real-terms rate of 3.2 per cent. a year. That compares with average annual real terms growth of 0.1 per cent. per annum between 1992-93 and 1996-97 under the previous Government. Bedfordshire's personal social services standard spending assessment will increase by a further 6 per cent., the carers' grant by a further 22 per cent. and its children's grant by a further 14 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman said that Bedfordshire social services face difficulties this year through financial pressures. I acknowledge that the council has experienced budgetary problems. I understand that the county council expects an overspend this year of more than £3 million and that the council's financial problems primarily relate to children's services and services for adults with learning difficulties. The council has had to fund external placements, which have proved expensive. However, I am pleased to learn that, following staff changes and recruitment, the council is developing a five-year children's strategy, in which the voluntary sector, including NCH, is expected to play a key role. The strategy aims to reduce the council's external spending and make a bigger shift to family support. There has also been a review of financial systems to ensure clear accountability for budgets.

Bedfordshire has also benefited from additional money specifically to reduce bed blocking. In October, the Government announced a further £300 million of new funding for social care over two years. An agreement, entitled "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care" was published on 9 October. We expect local social services and health authorities to adopt it. It will lead to genuine improvements in planning and commissioning services, and ensure continuing good quality care for those who currently use them.

We all agree that we need to solve the problems that lead to people waiting in acute hospital beds when they could be better cared for elsewhere. That problem is not new; the proportion of older people who have had to wait while their discharge is arranged has fallen steadily in the past four years. However, we need to continue to improve the overall quality and range of care to older people so that they receive the right care at the right time.

Alistair Burt: I do not intend to pick up on every point that the Minister has made, but will she deal more fully with the last point that she mentioned? Like the county and the NHS trust, I welcomed and was grateful for the amount of money to help with bed blocking. However, I made the point that the money was time limited and could not therefore be included in future budgets. That is worrying. The solutions cannot contribute to long-term changes unless there is some certainty about the future. The Minister may not be able to make a commitment about that now, but I should be grateful if she appreciated the point and said something about the longer-term availability of such funding. As she observed from the figures, we are not considering a short-term problem that will easily go away.

Yvette Cooper: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point about the need to increase the amount of forward planning that local areas are able to make. That is why we have moved towards giving local health authorities greater certainty about the sort of allocations that they can expect in future. It is also why we specified the funding out of the £300 million not only for this year but for next year. Clearly, we need to continue to provide greater long-term certainty. However, it is also important to allocate additional money without being too hidebound by the need to plan every single extra penny for the future and end up not allocating the money that we have in the short term.

Of the £200 million that is available next year, Bedfordshire's allocation is £943,000, as the hon. Gentleman said. Those are significant sums, and I understand that the council plans to use the extra funds for more long-term, residential and nursing home care, to increase home care and intermediate care capacity and to increase rehabilitation outside hospital. The council is also

[Yvette Cooper]

funding a recruitment drive for residential care staff, and I believe that those initiatives will make a genuine difference to local people who receive services.

Throughout the country, councils are using the money to invest in a wide range of new services to extend the range of services available to maintain the independence of people leaving hospital. They are setting up innovative schemes to provide additional care in sheltered housing, buying additional places in care homes for those who need such care, investing in specialist equipment and extra support for informal carers to enable people to return to their homes. Many councils have also extended their rapid response teams.

Nationally, we have already seen about a 6 per cent. drop since September in the number of delays, and most councils are on target to deliver their contribution to the national reduction of more than 1,000 beds blocked by March 2002.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of care home capacity. Residential care and nursing home capacity cross the country is roughly the same today as it was four years ago. It is important to look beyond the headline figures on closures of homes, and to consider the number of beds and the capacity provided as well. The position in Bedfordshire shows that, although the number of residential homes has fallen slightly from 130 in 1998 to 129 in 2001, this has resulted in only four fewer beds.

The position in the nursing care sector is even better. There were 40 nursing homes in 2001, compared with 38 in 1998, and the number of available beds increased from 1,146 in 1998 to 1,520 in 2001. All this, together with increases in the amount of home care provided—from 460,000 hours to 600,000 hours in the last year—and in the development of additional intermediate care services increases the capacity to help to deal with the problem of needing to move people out of the acute sector in Bedfordshire.

The issue is not simply one of resources. It is also a question of how the money is used. I understand that one of the factors involved in the rising number of blocked beds in Bedford hospital was weakness in the planning and operational processes at the trust, which did not come to light while there were fewer winter pressures. I am informed that the new chief executive is assembling a new management team, with the emphasis on improving operational management planning and involving clinical staff. The trust's modernisation team is also busy redesigning services to streamline them and to increase capacity.

There has also been considerable support for local areas across the country to help them to modernise and reform, and to reduce delayed discharges. The NHS's performance management at national, regional and local level has a key role to play in managing the reduction of the numbers of delayed transfers of care. The 2001–02 planning and priorities guidance made specific reference to what the NHS is required to do, and by when, to reduce delayed transfers of care.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I support the point that my hon. Friend was making about the new management team at Bedford hospital trust wishing to improve management systems to make maximum use of the capacity at the hospital. None the less, will she accept that there is a need for additional capacity, both in the hospital and out in the community—for example, in relation to the John Bunyan ward in the former north wing site and to intermediate care outside?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there is a need for increased capacity right across the NHS, as well as in the community. That is why we have been investing ever greater resources in expanding the NHS and social care provision; we clearly need to go on doing so.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire was right to say that there was an increase in bed blocking in Bedfordshire at the beginning of this month. Action has been taken to bring the number of delayed discharges down. Bedfordshire is now better placed, as a result of the additional resources and the support that it has received, to plan to cope with the winter pressures. Clearly social services and health will need to go further, and I welcome the plans that they have put in place to progress that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford has also said, they will also need the new investment that will be forthcoming next year, but that new investment must be used for modernisation as well, so that they can best deal with delayed discharges this year and improve the situation further for next year, to ensure that every patient in Bedfordshire gets the best possible treatment in the NHS and in social care.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 24 January 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Monday 28 January at 7 o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Mr. Speaker: I am sure the House will understand why the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not here today. I know that Members will want me, on behalf of the House, to send him and his wife Sarah our sympathy and best wishes.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Euro

1. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest. West): When he last met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss the exchange rate against the euro. [27551]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The Chancellor meets the Governor regularly, and they discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr. Swayne: That is a matter of great comfort. Ministers have previously said that they have no intention of entering an exchange rate mechanism between sterling and the euro. Will the Chief Secretary now rule out absolutely the question of an exchange rate mechanism prior to any arrangement for joining the euro?

Mr. Smith: We have made it clear that we have no intention of rejoining the exchange rate mechanism. I am happy to confirm that that is indeed the policy.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Following the letter in *The Guardian* this week from numerous Labour colleagues urging the Government to ignore the costly distraction of the euro, will the Chief Secretary discourage his more zealous Cabinet colleagues from trying to pre-empt the debate on this issue, especially given the fact that the five economic tests are increasingly as obscure and ambiguous as tests set by Edexcel?

Mr. Smith: There is no inconsistency between investment in high-quality public services and a policy on the euro that is in Britain's economic interests. The truth is that we are delivering on both, whereas the Conservative party could do neither.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Will the Chief Secretary clarify an issue that seems to be dividing the Government? Does the Treasury maintain the view that the five tests can be answered clearly and unambiguously in economic terms, or is it a political test, as the chairman of the Labour party has suggested?

Mr. Smith: The five economic tests are clearly set out, and, as we have said time and again, it is our policy that it must be clearly and unambiguously in Britain's economic interests before we would recommend entry to Cabinet, to Parliament and in a referendum. When that recommendation is made, the issue will of course enter the political process and be the subject of political debate, but the economic tests must clearly and unambiguously be satisfied in the country's interest before we recommend entry.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does the Chief Secretary agree with me that we cannot have everything in this world, but that we do not want high interest rates, high unemployment and instability in finances, to which the shadow Chancellor is inextricably linked? We want low inflation, low unemployment rates and stability in public finances. Does my right hon. Friend agree that fiscal autonomy for individual member states is important? Will he and the Chancellor resist every attempt at harmonisation of taxes in Europe, ensure tax competition and that our policy delivers our economic stability and social justice objectives?

Mr. Smith: As I made clear in the Economic and Finance Council this week, the Government's priority is economic reform. As my hon. Friend says, we believe in tax competition, not tax harmonisation.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): It is meaningless for Ministers to go on saying that they will never join the exchange rate mechanism but that they hope to join the single currency in certain circumstances. If we were unwisely to join the single currency, we would, in effect, automatically be members of the exchange rate mechanism with no opportunity to get out of it, as we were able to do in 1992. Will the Chief Secretary take on board the fact that the concept that there might one day be a right rate of exchange at which sterling could join the euro is nonsense? The right rate of exchange for Britain changes from day to day, and from hour to hour. Would he accept that the economic crises that overtook Thailand and now Argentina stemmed primarily from the fact that their currencies were on a fixed rate to the dollar?

Mr. Smith: I thought that the leader of the Conservative party had urged his colleagues not to be monomaniacs on this issue, but it seems that they are not listening to him. As the Commission confirmed last week, flexibility on the ERM condition has been shown to other entrants to the euro in the past. I repeat that we have no intention of rejoining the ERM. The sustainability of exchange rates will be factored into the economic tests on the sustainability of convergence.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Is the present exchange rate with the euro, which has been sustained for about four years, consistent with the Government's longer-term policies for growth and rising employment?

Mr. Smith: As we have made clear, we do not maintain a running commentary on satisfying the five tests. That assessment will be undertaken rigorously, and only if it is in Britain's economic interests, unambiguously and clearly, will we join.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Has the Chief Secretary read the report of the Ernst and Young Item club of economic forecasters, published this week? It argues that there has never been a better time for the Government to adopt an active exchange rate policy to bring about a more competitive exchange rate.

It is surely no coincidence that there has been virtually no growth in output and manufacturing since the pound appreciated five years ago. As the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has said,

> "there is something fundamentally wrong in the current euro-pound exchange rate".

Will the Government do something to make it right? Will they bring down the level of the pound by intervening in the exchange markets?

Mr. Smith: No, I have not read the report that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. As for what he says about the exchange rate, I have already made it clear that sustainability of convergence, one of the economic tests, would cover that.

Let me tell the hon. Gentleman, and others who share his view, that attempts by this country in the past to steer the economy by means of exchange rates were an unmitigated disaster.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Yesterday the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said:

> "there is something fundamentally wrong in the current euro-pound exchange rate".

Last week the Economic Secretary to the Treasury said:

> "The Government should not try artificially to massage down the level of the exchange rate, which is properly the outcome of sound economic fundamentals."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 15 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 24WH.]

Which of them is right?

Mr. Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was rightly identifying the fact that manufacturers exporting to the eurozone are having to cope with the weakness of the euro. That is why we are taking steps to help manufacturing industry with the research and development tax credit and the cuts in business taxation. What is most important to manufacturing industry, as to other businesses, is that we continue to deliver a platform of economic stability. What manufacturers certainly do not need is a return to the 15 per cent. interest rates—for a whole year—and the 10 per cent. inflation that they experienced when the shadow Chancellor's party was in government.

National Health Service

3. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): What changes he plans to NHS spending commitments. [27553]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): As the Chancellor has previously announced, NHS resources in the UK are planned to reach £69.5 million by 2003–04. That represents an annual average increase of 5.7 per cent. in real terms over the period 2001–02 to 2003–04. Plans for future years will be set out in the 2002 spending review.

Laura Moffatt: Towns such as mine are having to cope with unprecedented spending on their public services, especially those provided by the national health service. Rightly, they—and I—want to hear from the Treasury team that the commitments are real and sustained, and will produce the public services that we so richly deserve. Is it not good to hear that spending is sustainable, and will benefit our communities?

Mr. Smith: I know how actively, energetically and effectively my hon. Friend has campaigned for health services on behalf of her constituents. She is entirely right. It is because the Government made the tough decisions required to establish the monetary and fiscal framework that the country needs, because we reduced the millstone of debt that we inherited from the Conservatives, because we placed the public finances on a sound basis and made the economic fundamentals strong, and because we are maintaining a platform of economic stability that we can and will sustain investment in our front-line services, which would be at risk if the Conservatives ever came near them.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Is the Chief Secretary concerned that the savings ratio has fallen by a third in the past year?

Mr. Smith: In fact, the savings ratio has been higher than the low point it reached under the—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The savings ratio has nothing to do with this question.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Rightly, constituents compare the state of the NHS in this country with other parts of Europe. However, NHS funding here is much lower than elsewhere. Last year, the Chief Secretary confirmed to me in a parliamentary answer that Britain remains one of the lowest tax countries in Europe; it is third from bottom. When will we bring in the resources required from those most able to pay—higher rate taxpayers—to ensure that we have financial security for the NHS not just in the short term but in the long term?

Mr. Smith: The share of GDP invested in the NHS was 6.2 per cent. under the Conservatives. It has risen from 6.9 per cent. to 7.4 per cent. this year. It will be 7.6 per cent. next year and reach 7.7 per cent. in 2003-04 as we move towards achieving the European average. On my hon. Friend's comments on taxation, we will keep each and every promise on taxation in our manifesto, on which both of us fought the general election.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I am afraid that if the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) wants an extra £200,000 for her hospital, she will have to ask rather more biting questions than she did a moment ago.

Whose fault is it that the NHS underspent by £700 million last year?

Mr. Smith: The figure to which the shadow Chancellor refers is just 1.5 per cent. of the NHS budget. Last year's health underspend was lower than in just about any other Department. With end-year flexibility—this did not happen under the Conservative Government—Departments and agencies can carry forward money from one year to the next. A third of that money was specifically earmarked for expenditure which was known to be coming forward. The NHS plans to spend all the money that it has been allocated for this year.

Mr. Howard: In view of last year's history, how can the Chief Secretary possibly explain the letter from the chief executive of the south east region of the NHS, in which she asks trusts in the region, including in my constituency, to reduce spending in the current year by £60 million? Is it not clear that, from top to bottom, despite the heroic efforts of the doctors and nurses who work in it, the NHS is in a state of crisis?

Mr. Smith: I understand that the pressures to which the shadow Chancellor refers arise from extra prescribing costs during the year. There is no doubt that his trust, along with every other trust, is getting a very substantial increase in resources under this Government: a real increase on average of 5.7 per cent. year on year, more than twice the level that was provided by the Conservatives. When the Leader of the Opposition accuses NHS staff of treating patients no better than dogs, that is a grotesque slur on NHS staff dedicated to the principles of a caring service.

Pensioners

4. **Dr. Ashok Kumar** (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): If he will make a statement on Government policy on tackling pensioner poverty.

[27554]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Government are committed to tackling pensioner poverty and helping those in greatest need. The Government introduced the minimum income guarantee and are committed to raising that in line with earnings throughout this Parliament. From 2003, the pension credit will ensure that those with a modest amount of savings stand to gain on average just over £400 a year.

Dr. Kumar: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Last week, I met the Cleveland pensioners convention forum. Pensioners told me that they support the Government strongly for all they are doing to tackle poverty among pensioners, but that they are concerned about one issue: nursing and personal care for the elderly. Given the recent decision by the Scottish Parliament to provide services free for the elderly, will my hon. Friend look at that issue again, so that my constituents can enjoy the same privileges as pensioners in Scotland?

Dawn Primarolo: I share, as I am sure do all hon. Members, the concern felt by my hon. Friend about the care of elderly people in our society. In England, the Government's key priority is to improve services for older people by promoting independence and minimising the need for institutional care. Overall, the Government will be making available an extra £1.4 billion a year for older people's services. That will emphasise the importance of maintaining the health and independence of older people, preventing unnecessary ill health, ensuring that health and social services are working in partnership and that older people have fair access to services, and making the funding fairer. The Government have decided that that is the best and quickest way to restore to older people the independence and the care that they say they so desperately want to be re-established.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Is the Minister proud of the dramatic increase in the number of pensioners forced on to means-tested benefits since the Government came to power?

Dawn Primarolo: I am proud that the Government have introduced the minimum income guarantee, raised pensions and established the £200 fuel allowance for pensioners. We are now spending around £6 billion a year extra on pensioners, which includes £2.5 billion more being spent on the poorest third of pensioners in our society. As I said, the pension credit to be introduced in 2003 will further increase the resources going to the very poorest. That is the way to tackle the poverty among pensioners that we inherited from the Conservative Government.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Government's strategy to tackle pensioner poverty rests on the minimum income guarantee, which is a means-tested benefit. The widening use of such benefits is dubious enough anyway, but their use in relation to pensioners is especially doubtful. Successive Governments have found that, however much is spent on the take-up campaign, there will always be a substantial proportion of pensioners who are too proud to claim means-tested benefits. Does my hon. Friend agree that a strategy to counter pensioner poverty that rests on means-tested benefits always risks leaving a substantial number of pensioners in poverty?

Dawn Primarolo: As my hon. Friend will know, the Government are doing far more for pensioners in addition to the minimum income guarantee. The full state pension for a single pensioner will rise by £3 in April. That is on top of last year's increase of £5, £4.55 more than the normal inflation rise, and £2.10 more than the earnings link would have produced over those two years. In 2003, the annual basic state pension will rise by £100 for single pensioners. In the future, it will always increase by at least 2.5 per cent., even if the retail prices index is lower. I think that my hon. Friend would agree that, alongside the minimum income guarantee, the increase in the basic state pension that underpins our commitment to pensioners, and the annual £200 allowance to pensioners comprises the most effective, speedy and productive approach to ensuring that we tackle pensioner poverty.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The Minister's final statistics will not wash with pensioners because the Government are busy increasing pensioner poverty by pushing up council tax by three times the rate of inflation. Does the Minister realise that more than 1 million pensioners now have to pay more than 10 per cent. of their disposable income in council tax? I hope that the Minister believes that fuel poverty is unacceptable, so why are the Government creating council tax poverty?

Dawn Primarolo: That is truly breathtaking from a member of a party that introduced the poll tax, forcing millions of pensioners into long-term poverty to pay it, put VAT on fuel for pensioners and denied decent rises in the basic state pension to every pensioner in the country. Pensioners are better off under the policies that the Government are pursuing and it is about time that the hon. Gentleman recognised that.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): The Minister will be aware that my constituency has one of the highest concentrations of people over 60 not only in the United Kingdom but in Europe. Nearly a third of the electorate is over the age of 60. Although we have the minimum income guarantee, pensions are going up and we are helping small pension holders, a great many elderly people in Glasgow, Anniesland do not have any pension other than the state pension. Is it not time for the Government to look forward and put in place a 21st century plan for pensioners?

Dawn Primarolo: I assure my hon. Friend that the Government have exactly that plan. In addition to the state pension, the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit, the introduction of the stakeholder pension will ensure that future pensioners have an income that will protect them. The Government are also supporting pensioners in a number of other ways.

It is a reproach to us all that there are pensioners living in poverty, inherited from the previous Government. It is our duty to put that right, and we will.

Manufacturing

5. **John Barrett** (Edinburgh, West): If he will make a statement on the impact of the level of the pound on the manufacturing industry in Scotland. [27555]

7. **Mr. Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster): What assessment he has made of the impact of UK interest rates over the past three years on the UK manufacturing sector. [27557]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Government's latest assessment of developments in the manufacturing sector, based on all relevant factors, was published in November's pre-Budget report. The world economy slowed significantly last year, and this has clearly affected manufacturing in all parts of the United Kingdom and throughout the rest of the G7. Nevertheless, the UK is now in a better position than on previous occasions to cope with the turbulence in the world economy.

John Barrett: Yesterday, Scottish manufacturers reported that they had suffered the sharpest drop in exports for three years, with output and employment falling. What more can the Chancellor do to help Scottish manufacturers? How long will we have to wait for action, especially when further falls in output, productivity and employment are predicted?

Mr. Boateng: Scotland, of course, cannot be insulated from the global downturn. Scottish manufacturers—and I was up in Scotland last Friday talking to one section of industry there—appreciate that not only have they been assisted by the sound public finances that now benefit the United Kingdom, the action that has been taken in terms of the Scottish Executive and the RDA but, importantly, the cuts in corporation tax and capital gains tax as well as research and development tax credits. All those measures contribute to a sound basis for manufacturing industry. That, rather than anything else, is likely to bring benefits in the medium term.

Mr. Mark Field: In view of the relatively rosy picture of the UK economy that the right hon. Gentleman has painted, will he go into some detail as to why he believes that the manufacturing sector, compared with others, is doing so badly?

Mr. Boateng: I do not think that there is any question of painting a rosy picture or of any complacency. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the words yesterday of Mr. Martin Temple, the director general of the Engineering Employers Federation. He referred specifically to the incredibly powerful base of our manufacturing industry. What he also called for—something that the Government are providing—is joint action to encourage investment in research and development and in plant and to ensure that we have the skills available in our economy to promote manufacturing. All those things have been addressed by the Government. They are judged in the pre-Budget report to be important and they are being delivered.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his recent visit to Scotland. Does he agree that the measures introduced in the pre-Budget report will be of specific relevance and importance to small businesses in Scotland, creating more productivity and competitiveness and increasing investment in enterprise, which will, in the long term, mean more jobs in the Scottish economy?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend takes a particular interest in small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland. His analysis is absolutely right. It is significant that there has been a greater number of business start-ups in Scotland and that those businesses are more likely to succeed and endure as a result of this Government's policies and actions than ever was the case under the last Government.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Notwithstanding those points, does the Minister accept that the level of the pound is higher than is good for manufacturing industry and that, indeed, if we are ever to consider joining the euro, the present exchange rate is unsustainable and Britain would require a devaluation?

Mr. Boateng: No, I do not agree with my hon. Friend, although I respect his views. The issue is not the strength of the pound, but the weakness of the euro. The Government's objective is to make sure that exchange rates remain stable and that we have a competitive pound in the medium term. The best contribution that the Government can make is to ensure that we maintain sound public finances and low inflation. This Government, unlike our predecessors, have delivered and will continue to deliver that.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Does the Minister think it right for the Government unilaterally to seek to redefine national statistics classifications in order artificially to boost manufacturing output figures?

Mr. Boateng: We have done no such thing. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has rightly pointed out the contribution that the services sector makes to industrial output. That is a perfectly proper reflection for her to make and one that the hon. Gentleman would do well to consider himself.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): My right hon. Friend will know that many of my constituents work in the steel industry. Does he agree that while a more favourable exchange rate would be important, equally important is the stability that the Government are delivering in the economy, which enables the steel industry to plan for the future?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend takes a particular interest in the steel industry for understandable reasons. I am grateful to her for the representations she makes on its behalf. Her analysis is absolutely right and the steel sector recognises that.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that manufacturing output has slumped by 5.5 per cent. in the past 12 months, that the Engineering Employers Federation, to which the Financial Secretary has just referred, says that the climate change levy punishes competitiveness and initiative by world-class manufacturing companies and that the Director General of the CBI says, "I have members in south Wales and the midlands who are laying off people in order to write cheques to the Government to pay the energy tax", is it not time that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister for Europe stopped blaming the exchange rate for the problems of British manufacturing industry and started to do something to arrest and reverse the tide of regulation that is drowning British businesses the length and breadth of the land?

Mr. Boateng: The reality is far from that. Under this Government we have taken steps to make sure that manufacturing is put on a sound basis. Under this Government when we have taken steps to deliver on our Kyoto obligations we have involved industry, including the manufacturing sector, in order to help us design the effective tools to do that. That is why we invited Lord Marshall, whose leadership of the CBI was without parallel, to help us devise a climate change levy. That is what is delivering our Kyoto obligations and it is our sound management of the economy that is delivering to manufacturing industry. The sooner the hon. Gentleman learns that, the better. He should stop giving lectures to this House and continue to give lectures to his constituency party and his party because they have need of them.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Is it not the case that the long-term interests of manufacturing industry in Scotland, Wales and rest of the United Kingdom are served by an economic policy that pursues low inflation, high growth and productivity, and that those things have been achieved by the present Government's economic policy? The only manufacturing that we get from Conservative Members is manufactured synthetic anger. Is it not the case that a policy of devaluation would fail because it is short-termist and short-sighted?

Mr. Boateng: I could not have put it better myself.

Agriculture

6. **Mr. Mark Simmonds** (Boston and Skegness): What discussions he has had with those in agriculture in advance of his forthcoming Budget. [27556]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Treasury Ministers have regular contact with a wide range of interest groups and individuals, including those with an interest in agriculture.

Mr. Simmonds: I thank the Minister for that answer. Considering that the Government have overseen a crisis in agriculture and in rural Britain since May 1997, crops grown for biodiesel would provide an excellent additional agricultural income and substantial environmental benefits. In the Chancellor's 2001 Budget, he announced that biofuels would qualify for a 20 per cent. tax rebate in fuel duty. The Minister should tell the House why the environmentally superior biofuels have not been given the same duty rebate as the gas fuels, currently 40p per litre, and that that anomaly will be addressed to the benefit of agricultural incomes throughout the United Kingdom.

Ruth Kelly: I am absolutely delighted that the hon. Gentleman recognises the sense of the Chancellor's proposal in the previous Budget to introduce a specific rebate for biodiesel in the next Budget. We have been listening to representations on that subject. I believe that there will be significant environmental improvements as a result of that rebate and I am sure that the Chancellor will listen very carefully to the representations that have been made today.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): When my hon. Friend meets representatives of the farming industry before the Budget, will she discuss the increased resources that the Government have put into organic conversion, and the support that they have given to agri-environmental schemes such as Tir Gofal in Wales, which has been remarkably successful and was commended by those organic producers from my constituency whom I saw yesterday? Does she agree that the future for agriculture must be to support those family farmers who farm in an environmentally sustainable way, instead of giving disproportionate subsidies to large-scale producers in the east of England?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I certainly agree that the organic sector of our farming industry has an important role to play in the development of that industry. At the moment, I believe, about 2.5 per cent. of agricultural land is devoted to organic farming. There have been calls from the organic sector to increase that to about 30 per cent., which, at first glance, strikes me as rather ambitious.

However, I completely agree with my hon. Friend that we need to take the development of the sector seriously. We need to continue our strategy of moving resources away from production support and into measures that will contribute to environmental development. In future, we want a market-oriented agricultural sector that provides for sustainable development and meets consumer demand.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I shall meet members of Macclesfield and district National Farmers Union on Saturday morning, and I should like to take them a message of hope from the Government. Does the Minister accept that if we are to maintain the countryside and to produce from land within the United Kingdom that food which we can economically and properly produce, the Budget must include some assistance, incentive and encouragement for our farmers? Will the Minister give me that assurance, to take to my farmers on Saturday morning?

Ruth Kelly: I certainly ask the hon. Gentleman to pass on my warmest regards to members of his local NFU when he meets them. He can of course tell them that it is the present Government who have commissioned the Food and Farming Commission, led by Don Curry, to look at the development of the sector to ensure that it can be developed in a sustainable way. The commission includes stakeholder representatives from all parts of the industry, and we look forward very much to considering their representations.

I would also ask the hon. Gentleman to point out that it is the present Government who have led reform of the common agricultural policy within Europe. It is by forming alliances that the Government have been in the vanguard of reform and able to put forward the real changes that will matter in future to the agricultural sector.

Global Downturn

8. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What assessment he has made of the impact of the global downturn on the future performance of the UK economy. [27558]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): No country can fully insulate itself from developments in the world economy, but the UK is now in a better position than on previous occasions to cope with turbulence in it. As a result, leading external forecasters expect UK economic growth to be the fastest in the G7 this year.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank the Economic Secretary for that reply, and I believe that the very challenging global circumstances—this is the first time for 30 years that every region of the world is facing a downturn—are only matched by the fact that this is the first time in the same period that Britain is the best-placed country in the world to face them. Does she agree that this is a very difficult time to consider increasing taxation to improve our public services because of that challenging global situation?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments and for pointing out that Britain is indeed in a very positive economic situation and better placed than any of the other 29 member countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to weather the very serious global economic downturn that has taken place since 11 September and as a result of the unwinding of the high-technology boom, as she rightly appreciates. Of course, we in this country must have a debate about the funding of our public services; it is important that people realise that, to correct 30 years of underinvestment, we need to put public services on a sustainable footing. What the Opposition consistently refuse to tell us—it became apparent just this week in the debate on public services—is whether they would match our funding plans, or whether they would slash public services.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): May I ask the Economic Secretary to turn her attention to one of our key international trading partners and markets—Germany? What assessment has the Treasury made of the degree to which the problems in Germany are either caused by the current international situation or, as increasingly frequent independent analysis argues, are long-term, structural and caused by the fact that it joined the euro at the wrong rate? Is that latter analysis the accurate answer?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman refers to the problems that the Germans are currently experiencing. In fact, growth in the euro area has turned out to be weaker than most independent forecasters were predicting only a few months ago. However, the European Council confirmed at the December ECOFIN meeting that the economic fundamentals are sound in the EU and that it expected a gradual recovery during 2002. What is important is that we have sound fundamentals and that we take the measures on economic reform to improve labour market flexibility and product-market competition and to ensure that it is as easy as possible for the EU to recover from the slowdown in global demand.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend agree that, at this time of global downturn, it remains an absolute Government priority to allow industry to invest, especially in research and development and in high-value, high-skill products, so that we are best advantaged when the markets start to pick up?

Ruth Kelly: I completely agree with the points made by my hon. Friend, and it is incredibly important that we improve the manufacturing base and increase productivity in our manufacturing sector, so that we can take full advantage of the upturn in global demand when it comes. That is why the Government have introduced tax credits for small and medium sized enterprises and are consulting on how to extend those measures to larger firms. It is why we set up regional development agencies to drive forward economic growth in each of the regions. It is why we set up venture capital funds to ensure that small and medium sized enterprises have the access to capital that they so desperately need to grow, and it is also why we are working in partnership with the CBI and the TUC to look at ways of raising skills in the workplace, so that we have people who are fully trained and able to take advantage of those opportunities as they arise.

Agriculture

9. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What plans he has to review the provision of roll-over relief on capital gains tax on the sale of agricultural land for development; and if he will make a statement. [27559]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): We currently have no plans to review this relief, which supports trading including farming.

Mr. Mullin: May I put it to my hon. Friend that the windfall profits arising from planning permission for agricultural land are already sufficiently enormous without it being necessary to award the landowner tax relief as well, especially since one of the effects is artificially to inflate the price of agricultural land? Whose idea was this? How can it possibly be in the public interest? Is it really not about time that a stop was put to it?

Dawn Primarolo: I have discussed this matter with my hon. Friend before and I know that he follows the subject very closely. The proceeds of the sale have to be reinvested in trade assets for the roll-over relief to be available in the first place. Roll-over reliefs are designed to allow traders to modernise and expand without an immediate charge to tax being made on the money of the business.

I continue to have an open mind on the subject and I have considered closely the factors that interrelate with the sale of land, particularly farming land, for greenfield development. I am not convinced that roll-over relief is the problem, but I understand that the subject is dear to my hon. Friend's heart. I look forward to continuing to discuss the issue with him. If he has any further information, I shall be more than happy for him to send it to me and for me to reconsider it.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): When the hon. Lady is examining submissions about tax relief and other initiatives for the Budget, will she take into consideration a recent European Commission survey that showed that, contrary to the beliefs of some Labour Members, Britain provided the lowest state aid to agriculture of any country in the European Community, whether that was measured as a percentage of GDP or in terms of the number of people employed?

When the hon. Lady thinks about initiatives for the future, will she bear in mind the difficulties that agriculture has faced and will she therefore consider favourably tax changes that will help farmers? Will she particularly consider the initiatives suggested by people in that hard-pressed sector, because she is very unlikely to receive any suggestions from the Ministers with responsibility for agriculture?

Dawn Primarolo: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that a vast array of tax reliefs and supports are available for the farming community. He went on to make an important point about the diversification of rural communities and about considering ways in which we could assist that. I assure him that the issue is a high priority for the Government. I take his contribution to be a Budget representation and I will draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): May I welcome my hon. Friend's comments? The last thing in the world that we should be doing is putting up more barriers to farmers diversifying from agricultural overproduction and into new rural industries. I shall meet members of the Glamorgan branch of the NFU in Cowbridge tomorrow, and I would be delighted to be able to tell them that the Government plan to do even more to help them with diversification.

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend can take my best wishes and those of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the group that he will meet. I am sure that he will be able to reassure its members that the Government continue to take the views of the rural community very seriously. Not least, I point to the substantial help that Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue were able to give members of the rural community during the difficult period that they all experienced during the foot and mouth crisis.

I would like my hon. Friend to echo the comments that I have made to him and to the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) about the fact that diversification of rural communities is of great importance to the Government. We will continue to take forward that programme as best we can and, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor would expect me to say, as resources allow.

Services Sector

10. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): What recent assessment he has made of the state of the services sector. [27560]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The Government's latest assessment of the United Kingdom economy, including the service sector of course, is contained in annexe A of the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Hoban: In the last quarter, we saw the end of employment growth in the service sector. It is now clear that it cannot absorb job losses elsewhere in the economy. When will the Government realise that their policies on red tape and taxes are damaging all sectors of the economy, not just manufacturing?

Mr. Smith: The capacity of Opposition Members to talk down important and successful sectors of the British economy never ceases to stagger me. The truth is that the service sector, notwithstanding the difficulties arising from foot and mouth disease and the events of 11 September, has continued to perform strongly, with outputs up 3.7 per cent. on the previous year and employment in September 229,000 higher than a year before. As the figures that came out yesterday show, the sector made a trade surplus contribution to the economy of more than £12 billion in the first 11 months of last year, although there are, of course, difficulties in some sectors.

As for regulation, this Government introduced regulatory impact assessments, mandatory on audits and registration. We are raising the audit level for firms, simplifying the VAT procedures and doing everything that we can to cut down unnecessary regulation.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): May I take the Chief Secretary back to the answer given a few minutes ago to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey)? Is he aware that the Government proposal to redefine services to boost manufacturing output has been roundly condemned by, among others, the director of the highly respected National Institute of Economic and Social Research, because to do that unilaterally would be against Britain's international treaties and bring the statistical service into serious disrepute? Will he agree to approach the issue with a little more humility than the Financial Secretary and to take a fresh look at it?

Mr. Smith: The derivation and basis of official statistics is independent and the statistical service will form its own judgment. When my right hon. Friend answered that question he said that what is at issue is the very important contribution that services make to manufacturing success. Genuine issues, however, arise as a result of the fact that there is less vertical integration within industry than there was in the past.

Public Service Agreements

11. **Mr. Nigel Beard** (Bexleyheath and Crayford): If he will make a statement on the progress in capital investment made by Government Departments toward their public service agreement targets. [27561]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The projections contained in the pre-Budget report show that we are on course to meet our ambitious targets on public sector net investment over the three years to 2003-04. This substantial increase in investment, matched with reform, will help Departments in achieving their public service agreement targets.

Mr. Beard: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the progress that has been made. It stands in marked contrast to the days of successive Conservative Governments who borrowed for day-to-day spending and fecklessly neglected investment in schools, hospitals and railways. What are the possible impediments to maintaining the momentum of the capital investment programme? Such as they are, can they be overcome quickly? What steps are being taken to ensure that investment projects continue to be made on time and achieve their timetable as set out in public sector agreements, and that they are completed to best effect?

Mr. Smith: As for the record of the previous Administration, the last time they were in office public sector net investment fell by an average of 15 per cent. a year whereas in this spending period it is increasing by 40 per cent. a year. On bringing capital investment on-stream, my hon. Friend mentions impediments. It is the case, of course, that projects must be planned, implementation teams put in place, planning permission secured and so on.

Some of the procurement practices, as well as the institutions, that we inherited from the Conservatives were greatly in need of reform. That is why we set up the Office of Government Commerce, which is revolutionising public sector procurement. It is also why our commitment to investment is matched with reform. We have devolved more power to the front line, given local managers a greater ability to manage and formed a close partnership with the private sector where appropriate so that we get the investment that we need. I assure my hon. Friend that that investment will be sustained.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Was not the legacy of the Tory Government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not be worrying about the last Conservative Government. The Minister is responsible for his Department and his Government.

Roger Casale *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should leave it.

Roger Casale *indicated assent.*

Manufacturing

12. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): When he last met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss prospects for manufacturing industry. [27562]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Chancellor and the Governor meet regularly to discuss a wide range of issues. As I made clear in my earlier answer to the hon. Members for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), the Government have introduced a wide range of policies that benefit the manufacturing sector. The economic stability that our macro-economic frameworks are delivering offers the best foundation for manufacturing to thrive once global prospects strengthen.

Mr. Prisk: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Since the latest discussions to which he referred, employment in manufacturing is now at its lowest level since records began. Manufacturers in my constituency and elsewhere tell me that they are struggling under a burden of regulation; small firms, in particular, are struggling with payroll regulations. Given that the Government have had the answer to payroll regulations since September, in the form of the Carter review, can the Minister tell the House why they are dithering over that report? How many more people have to lose their jobs in manufacturing before the Government act?

Mr. Boateng: We are of course doing no such thing. The document to which the hon. Gentleman refers is a consultative document, aimed at finding out from business what it wants by way of Government action. We listen to business and we involve business. Interestingly enough, Mr. Martin Temple was good enough to acknowledge that fact yesterday in his observations about manufacturing. We are not prepared to accept any suggestion from Conservative Members that red tape is the minimum wage, that red tape is health and safety at work and that red tape is combating poverty through tax credits. We are proud to do all those things while removing burdensome regulation, much of which accumulated while the Conservatives were in charge of government.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Does the Governor of the Bank of England show any concern for matters beyond overall fiscal policy when he is involved in these discussions? Is he concerned about the fact that manufacturing in certain areas faces considerable problems, such as those in north Derbyshire, where several firms have closed? At the moment, Chesterfield Cylinders is downsizing because it faces problems, yet it has Ministry of Defence contracts and it is important that those are maintained. What ideas does the Governor offer the Government to try to solve those problems?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend understands that the Governor will speak for himself. He will also realise that the Governor has the benefit of the Bank's regional network, and that all relevant factors, including those that he mentioned, are taken into account by the Monetary Policy Committee.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Does the Minister remember Labour's promise in opposition to implement an industrial policy to enable our manufacturing industries to grow again? Given that manufacturing output fell by over 5 per cent. in the last year alone, when will Labour deliver on its promises to our manufacturers?

Mr. Boateng: Not only do I remember that promise, but I am part of a team that is delivering it. The hon. Gentleman needs to understand that in 2000 manufacturing output grew at its fastest rate since 1994. That is a tribute to this Government and an indictment of his.

Working Families Tax Credit

13. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What his estimate is of the impact of working families tax credit in reducing child poverty in *(a)* Mitcham and Morden and *(b)* the UK. [27563]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The introduction of the working families tax credit, along with other changes to the personal tax and benefit system since 1997, means that there are 1.2 million fewer children in relative poverty in the United Kingdom than there would otherwise have been. In Mitcham and Morden, 1,600 families are currently benefiting from the working families tax credit.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she look at the categories of child care that are eligible for the child care tax credit? As she knows, a number of us are concerned that although registered child minder costs are covered, those of resident Nursery Nurses Education Board nannies are not, even though the training for that child care qualification is significant. That restricts the ability to work of people who work shifts, particularly NHS nurses.

Dawn Primarolo: I can tell my right hon. Friend—my hon. Friend; I nearly promoted her—that the question of care for children in their homes, whether they are disabled or their parents work unsociable hours, is of great importance. I am currently discussing with Ministers in the Department for Education and Skills how to ensure that regulation is in place so that the child care element of the working families tax credit could be paid. My hon. Friend will understand that it is not for the Treasury to regulate the standard and quality of care; that is the responsibility of the Department for Education and Skills. I hope that we can resolve that problem soon.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please let us have the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 28 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Civil Defence (Grant) Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business, namely the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill, for consideration at 7 o'clock.

TUESDAY 29 JANUARY—Opposition Day [9th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate entitled "The Government's Mismanagement of the Post Office"—*[Interruption.]* I have grown accustomed to a cheer at this point in the proceedings, but it is really not necessary.

WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY—Motion on the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2002–3.

Motion on Local Government (Finance) Report 2002–3.

THURSDAY 31 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas) (England) Regulations 2001.

Motion to approve the Administration Committee Report on the reopening of the Line of Route.

FRIDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Debate on implementing the Learning Disability White Paper on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day [10th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

TUESDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Education Bill (1st Day).

WEDNESDAY 6 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Education Bill (2nd Day).

THURSDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Tax Credits Bill.

FRIDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Debate on Government measures to regenerate disadvantaged areas on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House may wish to know that subject to the progress of business the House will rise for the Easter recess at the end of business on Tuesday 26 March, returning on Tuesday 9 April.

In last week's business questions, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) drew attention to the confusion over the precise date of Whit this year; some Members anticipated that, as normal, it would fall in the last week of May. I reflected on the matter and I can inform the House that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise for the Whitsun recess at the end of business on Friday 24 May, returning on Tuesday 11 June.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing not just the business for next week but the recess dates. Is he in a position yet to tell us when Budget day will be this year? We are now perilously close to February and we usually expect to have notice of the Budget at this stage.

May I ask the Leader of the House about proposals floating about in the Modernisation Committee on the House sitting in September? I have been approached, as, no doubt, has the right hon. Gentleman himself, by many Members asking for clarification of the matter. It would be helpful if he could give some indication at this stage of whether the House will be, or may be, sitting in September this year. We are anxious that the House should sit in September, as you know, Mr. Speaker, so that we can harry the Government and hold them to account even more frequently, and would be grateful if the Leader of the House could give us some indication. If for any reason we were unable to sit, I am sure that he would be able to give us a very good reason why not.

The Leader of the House announced a debate next week on mismanagement of the Post Office. It is to be held in our time, on an Opposition day, but it gives rise in my mind to the question why, given the uncertainty surrounding the Post Office, the National Audit Office report and the unease among employees—and, indeed, among all of us as users of the Post Office's excellent services—we have had to force the Government to come to the House and give an explanation by using an Opposition day. They have used their time to tell us about volcanoes in Africa and all sorts of other things recently. Why must we drag them here to tell us about what is going on in the Post Office? I am sad to say that that is an indication of the rather odd priorities that they seem to have these days. I can only hope that we will get some far more convincing answers in our debate next Tuesday than we have received hitherto.

Mr. Cook: First, in response to the question about the Budget date, I say to the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues that we will ensure that they are advised of the date as soon as it is confirmed. At the present time, I have no reason to suppose that it will be significantly different from those in previous years: either in mid to late March or very early in April.

I welcome what the right hon. Gentleman said about the importance of returning in September. We on the Labour Benches look forward to returning in September as well, although possibly for different reasons from his. We want to do so in order to put before the nation the way in which we are carrying through our programme to improve public services—*[Interruption.]* I am very glad that I can take the rest as read. None the less, we will want to talk about the record investment in education and health that we are carrying through. I regret to say that there are several good reasons why it will not be possible to introduce that innovation this year. A number of hon. Members have made their arrangements in good faith—I am impressed by the number of Members who are thinking so far ahead—and Mr. Speaker has arrangements to visit Canada and also to represent Britain on 11 September in New York. I am also advised that there will be roadworks outside the Palace. *[Laughter.]* While I believe that it would be entirely right for us to meet in September, people have taken it in good faith that we will not be sitting and I want the innovation to be introduced in an orderly, satisfactory and successful way. Therefore, I think that it is right to give adequate notice, which means that I would hope that we would introduce this change for next year.

On the issue of Consignia—

Mr. Forth: The Post Office.

Mr. Cook: It is technically and legally constituted as Consignia, but I have no problem with the right hon. Gentleman using phrases that he understands from previous years. With regard to Consignia, the House introduced a Bill only two years ago on this Government's initiative—it was broadly supported by the Opposition during its passage—that created commercial freedom for Consignia. It is absolutely right that we should let the management of Consignia, in consultation with its work force, take forward its plans for the company without constant micromanagement by Government, this House or any external political influence.

I am rather surprised that the right hon. Gentleman should take exception to our coming to the House with a statement on our response to the emergency situation caused by a volcano erupting in the Great Lakes area. I welcome the fact that a statement was made to the House on the matter. Many people outside in Britain would expect their Government to respond sympathetically and humanely to that emergency.

Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on the issues arising from the use of personal cases to illustrate what is happening in the national health service? Is he aware that the shadow Health Minister, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), said in his maiden speech that

> "dredging up personal cases of misery to try to find the one case that has gone badly in the national health service and overlooking all the reforms and successes that we have had"

was the

> "lowest form of political debate"?

He went on to say:

> "To try to say that every case that has gone wrong is typical is loathsome."—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1992; Vol. 207, c. 541.]

Does my right hon. Friend agree that such a debate would give the hon. Gentleman the opportunity to explain why he now thinks that it is acceptable for the Leader of the Opposition not only to raise such a case, but to do so without the common courtesy that we would all observe of contacting the hospital first?

Mr. Cook: It is regrettable that the good sense of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) has declined since his maiden speech. Every hon. Member would echo some of the sentiments that he expressed in it. From time to time, I have raised personal cases in the House; they probably live in the memory of some hon. Members who were present at the time. However, my hon. Friends and I did that with the full support of the relevant staff, who were appalled at the poor resources with which they had to work. I cannot recall an occasion when I or any Labour Member took up a personal case to attack NHS staff. Yesterday, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) attacked not simply the health service but those public servants who work in it. That will not be forgotten.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I thank the Leader of the House for clearing up the confusion about the Whit recess. It will enable my Liberal Democrat colleagues to stop juggling their constituency commitments during those two weeks. It may also enable them to fix their matrimonial arrangements.

When can we expect a Government response to yesterday's statement from the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the confusion about what is being investigated in relation to foot and mouth disease cannot continue? Several inquiries are in progress, but they are leaving unresolved and unexamined important matters such as the effects of the disease on rural Britain and the way in which the Government tackled it. A Select Committee, which has a Labour majority, has called for an overarching, comprehensive inquiry. I hope that the Government will take that more seriously than previous requests from us and hon. Members from other parties.

In the past, Mr. Speaker, you have deprecated Ministers' habits of making statements to the media before they make them to the House. It appears that, in an interview on "Today" this morning, the Foreign Secretary signalled a change of policy on the internees at the Cuban base. He suggested that he expects any British citizen there to be brought back here to face justice. Is that now the Government's policy? Is it also their policy that other nationals should return to their home states to face justice rather than facing the perhaps peculiar justice of the United States? What is the Government's position on the use of the death penalty? The Minister of State has signalled a different conclusion on that. Are we trying to insist that our American allies respect the Geneva convention?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman began on a happy note, and I welcome his welcome for the Whit recess. If that enables the leader of the Liberal Democrats to achieve his marriage in good order with a good honeymoon, I am all the happier that I have been able to give the dates to hon. Members. For once, perhaps all hon. Members can agree to ask the hon. Gentleman to convey our congratulations to his leader.

Mr. Forth: Can we have a vote?

Mr. Cook: No. I take it as a foregone conclusion.

The report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee was published only yesterday, and it is premature to expect a Government response. We have established three separate inquiries; one may report soon and the others will do so in the longer term. That panoply of inquiries gives us a good basis for examining what happened and, more important, looking ahead to what we shall do with the countryside and the rural economy. At an appropriate time, the House will have an opportunity to examine that. Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions will take place next week.

As I have said previously about the detainees at Guantanamo Bay, whether the Geneva convention applies is not the most important consideration. Even if it does not apply, international humanitarian law does. I believe that it is accepted here and in the United States that it is important to ensure that our humanitarian standards apply to the detainees, and that we thus show our superiority and that of our system to the ruthless terrorist values that they pursued.

On the issue of the death penalty, the Foreign Office and the Government have repeatedly expressed the view to all countries that they should abolish the death penalty,

[Mr. Cook]

as we have done. We shall continue to campaign for that. Should there be a case for charging the three British citizens, we would expect them to face those charges in Britain if they have broken British law. That is not a new position; it is the position that we have always held.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House reflect further on the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Jean Corston) for a debate on the national health service, to enable Members of the House to express their full support for all staff, black and white, at the Whittington hospital in my constituency for the very caring way in which they look after all their patients, and for their dedication to the principles of a national health service that is free at the point of use? If allegations are made concerning inadequate care or support for any patient, it is incumbent on us all to listen to both the family and the hospital concerned first, and at all times to try to prevent a public debate about the care of an individual patient. Surely all of us deserve the right to privacy in matters of medical care.

Mr. Cook: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of supporting the principles of the NHS and the staff who work hard to try to deliver on those principles. It is important that the national health service should, as it goes about its business, be a model employer that is blind to any racial discrimination or division, and that it should provide for fair opportunity and an excellent quality of care. I would remind the House that the hospital in my hon. Friend's constituency was only recently praised for the quality of its care for patients.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I agree with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) about the importance of having regular debates on the state of the health service. Has the Leader of the House had a chance to see the very worrying reports in the press in the last week that, despite increased expenditure on the health service, the amount of NHS activity in the last quarter has declined? Does he understand why our constituents are enormously concerned about the state of the public services, and the health service in particular, under this Government's stewardship? Will he, therefore, accept the need for regular debates, with the Prime Minister in attendance, so that we can monitor the extent to which the Prime Minister is delivering on his solemn pledge to the British people at the last election that the NHS would improve under his stewardship?

Mr. Cook: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the report of the NHS modernisation board, which, only the other week, confirmed that we now have more nurses, more doctors and more beds in the NHS than ever before. Indeed, last year was the first year for 30 years in which the number of beds in the health service actually increased. As to activity rates, 500,000 more operations are now performed every year than during the Conservative years, which is a 10 per cent. increase. I welcome that increase in activity, and we will continue to put in the investment to ensure that it continues. I would ask the hon. Gentleman, and any other Opposition Member inclined to raise the issue of the NHS, whether they will give a commitment to match our level of investment. If they are committed, as their leader has said, to introducing tax cuts, will they please explain how they will do so without bringing in public spending cuts?

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Given the statement by the Secretary of State for Health last week that we should privatise the management of the national health service, and the statement by Lord Haskins this morning that corporate business should run the NHS, may we have an urgent debate on the failed privatisations—such as the privatisation of the railways, and of care for the elderly—brought in by the last Conservative Government, so that we can expose once and for all this neanderthal thinking, and the myth that the private sector can run our public services better than the public sector? All the evidence points to the fact that it simply cannot do so.

Mr. Cook: We have debated the failed privatisation of Railtrack on a number of occasions recently. The net effect of the many attempts by the Opposition to attack us on that matter has been to produce a poll for ITN which showed that more people blame the Conservative Government than the Labour Government for the difficulties on the railways. I welcome the fact that we have now taken Railtrack out of an environment in which it had to struggle between its priority to the travelling public and its priority to its private shareholders.

On the question of the management of the NHS, I say to my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has proposed that we should devolve management within the NHS and provide more discretion for local hospitals to take the initiative, run their affairs and respond to local circumstances. We must strike the right balance between a national health service with national standards and values and local initiative at management level.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Has it not been the House's practice regularly to debate in Government time key issues such as taxation, public expenditure and the performance of the economy? When in this Parliament have the Government provided time for such a debate, and when does the right hon. Gentleman plan to hold one?

Mr. Cook: The whole House understands that the Chancellor is unable to play a full part in our proceedings at present, but, as the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said, there will be a Budget debate shortly and plenty of opportunities to examine the economy in that context.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Did my right hon. Friend see this week's *Sunday Herald* report of the allegation made by a former corporate lawyer with Arthur Andersen in the UK that the firm's auditors in this country were bullied by Enron in Europe into signing off audited accounts that inflated earnings? Will my right hon. Friend ask his colleagues to investigate that claim and arrange a debate, perhaps in Westminster Hall, on the relationship between external auditors and the businesses they audit?

Mr. Cook: If the US law enforcement agencies carrying out the investigation approach the UK authorities, they will receive full co-operation from all our people if we can assist with the investigation into the affairs of Enron. My hon. Friend refers to an issue that is a concern to a number of Members. The importance of safeguarding the independence of auditors and finding ways in which to ensure that the commercial world and our constituents are confident that audits are independent, not the result of pressure or bullying, has been raised in a number of areas and there is no excuse under any circumstances for bullying people into signing fraudulent accounts.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): Will the Leader of the House arrange an early debate on the growing problem of antisocial behaviour, such as vandalism, graffiti and loutish behaviour, which affect all our constituencies and make the lives of so many people, especially the elderly, a misery? Often, they live in constant fear. He is aware that in many of our constituencies the police simply do not have the resources to tackle those issues because they are so overstretched elsewhere. May we have an urgent debate in Government time so that the Home Secretary can tell the House what he plans to do about those matters?

Mr. Cook: First, on a point of fact, police numbers are increasing and there is a record increase in the number of those being trained for the police force. Quite properly, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is considering ways to ensure that uniformed police maximise the time spent on patrol and in the community and minimise the time that they have to spend on paperwork at the station.

Every Member of the House has constituency experience of the grave impact on the quality of life that can arise from antisocial behaviour. We have already introduced orders to try to deal with that and we are considering ways in which they might be improved by further legislation.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): This month, the worst outbreak of salmonella poisoning in Bolton in more than 50 years occurred in my constituency. Dozens of people have suffered and seven were admitted to hospital, including 80-year-old Ted Ivers, who was in intensive care, his wife Edith and their son-in-law. Will my right hon. Friend join me in sending best wishes to all those who have suffered? A few days ago, the Government published "Getting Ahead of the Curve", which is a strategy compiled by the chief medical officer for combating infectious disease. Will the Government give time to debate that important document?

Mr. Cook: I have no hesitation in joining my hon. Friend in wishing a speedy recovery to those who have—

Mr. Forth: An individual case.

Mr. Cook: All of them. I presume that my hon. Friend has contacted those affected and has their authority to speak. I send all those affected our best wishes for a speedy recovery. I am sure that the report makes a number of interesting points and recommendations and I have full faith in the Government's plans for coping with infectious diseases. This may be an excellent case for a debate in Westminster Hall on which he might wish to reflect.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Is the Minister aware that bed blocking at Birmingham Heartlands hospital by clients of Birmingham social services department is delaying operations for Solihull patients who also use that hospital? May we have a debate on bed blocking?

Mr. Cook: In fairness to the House, this issue has been ventilated on several occasions and we have had a number of opportunities to examine policy in the NHS. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that those exchanges have shown that both sides of the House recognise that this is a serious issue. That is precisely why the Government have made significant sums of new money available to local authorities, to assist them to move patients into more appropriate care.

This is a problem not just for patients with an acute need for an acute bed, but for the people in those beds who have nowhere more suitable to move to. It is important for both groups that we find a way forward. We are seeking to do that through better management and by providing more money.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will my right hon. Friend make a definitive statement on the Government's attitude to the opposed private business on Monday, the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill?

Mr. Cook: It would be improper of me, on behalf of the Government, to express a view on that private Bill one way or the other. I am aware that my hon. Friend and some of his colleagues have expressed vigorous views on the Bill. As the Leader of the House, I am content for it to be a matter for the House to decide, and I am sure that my hon. Friend and his colleagues will continue to express their vigorous views.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the vexed question of the proposed Bill to ban tobacco advertising? He will be aware of the growing frustration in Scotland about the Government's inaction on this issue. The Health and Community Care Committee of the Scottish Parliament is considering asking the right hon. Gentleman to give evidence to it and to explain the lack of Government action. What is the status of the proposed Bill, and will the right hon. Gentleman attend that Committee if asked?

Mr. Cook: I read with great interest the press release from the hon. Gentleman's colleague in the Scottish Parliament. Should any such decision be approved by that Committee as a whole, I will reflect on how I can be helpful without straying across the clear boundaries that we set up under the principle of devolution. I am fully seized of the importance of the tobacco Bill, and should an opportunity arise to address that measure during this Session, I will take it.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend and the House to a candlelight vigil that will take place outside St. Stephen's entrance this evening in memory of the 44 people who have died from deep vein thrombosis related to air travel? I welcome the Government's statement in a written answer this week that they are unequivocally committed to an investigation into the incidence, extent and causation of deep vein thrombosis related to air travel.

[Mr. John Smith]

It is more than four months since the Civil Aviation Authority placed before Ministers research that it had carried out on aircraft seat spacing, but the House has not had a response. It is important that we get a response, because one of the recommendations of that independent research was that seat spacing in United Kingdom aircraft should be increased immediately.

Mr. Cook: I commend the diligence with which my hon. Friend raises this important matter in the House. I was saying only this morning, when I heard about the vigil, that I was sure that he would raise the matter during business questions. We are seized of the importance of this issue, which is why on 30 November we issued new guidance to passengers and the public on how to minimise the risk of deep vein thrombosis. We remain willing to consider other ways in which we can be of assistance. I will draw my hon. Friend's remarks on seat spacing to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health—with perhaps the rider that, as a frequent air traveller, I would welcome more seat space.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): The Leader of the House will recall that yesterday there was a significant debate on Zimbabwe in Westminster Hall, and Opposition Members also questioned the Prime Minister and expressed grave concern about the deteriorating situation in that country. Can the right hon. Gentleman give us an absolute assurance that in the coming weeks, in the run-up to the March presidential elections and probably thereafter, when the Mugabe regime will almost certainly behave despicably, Ministers will regularly be available to update the House and to take questions from us?

Mr. Cook: I have no doubt that the House will wish to be kept informed on the issue, and I fully appreciate and share the deep concern in the House about the entirely improper way in which the Mugabe regime is seeking to rig the presidential election. There will be two important meetings next year, a European Union meeting to discuss the EU's approach to Zimbabwe and a meeting of Commonwealth Ministers to discuss the country's place in the Commonwealth. Whether a statement is appropriate is a matter that we will keep under advisement, but I assure Members that we will keep them fully informed of our views and of the action we are taking.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the chief medical officer's report on myalgic encephalomyelitis—ME—which was published last week, and is he aware of the effects that it will have for ME sufferers? May we have an early debate on the report on the Floor of the House, and on all the problems that sufferers throughout the country have experienced for far too long? The report in itself—produced by a working group—gives them hope and encouragement, but I think it should mark the beginning rather than the end of a campaign.

Mr. Cook: I am sure that all ME sufferers will be pleased that my hon. Friend has drawn attention to their case, and to the need for more recognition of, and a better response to, their requirements. I have no plans to arrange a debate on the report, but I am sure that my hon. Friend and others will look for ways of ventilating its conclusions.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I was going to ask for a debate on early-day motion 700, which states:

[That this House is dismayed by the report in the Evening Standard of 21st January that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has blocked the appointment of the career civil servant Ian Jones as head of media in his Department; notes that his preferred choice, Ms Ann Wallis, is an outsider who is a friend and former colleague of Jo Moore; urges him to abandon this further attempt at politicisation; and fears that if successful, this will bury the impartiality of the Civil Service.]

In other words, it concerns the Transport Secretary's attempt to impose a crony of Jo Moore as head of media in his Department.

As that question has been blocked, may I instead ask why the right hon. Gentleman thinks that the roadworks scheduled for September will hinder us from sitting then? We have been informed by the office of the Serjeant at Arms that both the Black Rod's Garden entrance and the Carriage Gates will be open, and that access will be unimpeded. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that such minor roadworks will be an obstacle, what does he think will happen in 2003 and 2004, when massive roadworks are planned for Parliament square as a result of one of the crazy schemes of his former parliamentary colleague, Ken Livingstone?

Mr. Cook: The post of head of media has been filled according to civil service rules and with a civil service commissioner involved in the appointment.

The main reason for our proposal not to proceed with the change in sittings this year is that it will be convenient for Members who, in good faith, have already made arrangements for September. That includes Mr. Speaker, who has undertaken to fulfil a commitment in Canada. We want him to fulfil that commitment, and also to represent Britain in New York on 11 September.

I personally am strongly committed to ensuring that we make changes in the long recess. After all, I proposed them. I think that they will be convenient to the House, and that the public will be pleased to see us sitting in September. From next year, we shall do so.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Many of us have campaigned for a shorter recess over the years, and I am glad that at long last the House is to sit in September, even if it does not do so this year. Oddly enough, such a proposal—despite the delay by a year—has been criticised by Opposition Members, and was opposed by past Governments, who always resisted any proposal for the House to return in less than 10 or 12 weeks. The 1992 summer recess lasted at least three months.

Mr. Cook: I thank my hon. Friend for his observation. I welcome the Opposition's impatience for us to act on my modernisation proposal, and I hope that it will extend to the other recommendations.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): As the Leader of the House will know, the Department for

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has existed for more than seven months. It has probably the worst record in Government for replying to Members' letters, and responding to the concerns of our constituents. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the Secretary of State makes a statement next week about how she will improve the Department's responses?

Mr. Cook: The Secretary of State will be answering questions next week. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and others will seek to raise that point, but as I have said before, the reason for the delay in replies from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is that the volume of its correspondence has gone up threefold, which is why the Secretary of State has written to every Member setting out the steps that she is taking to increase the staff in the correspondence unit and to improve the turnover to MPs. The delay is a result of the increased work load, not of any reorganisation of the Department.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): The Leader of the House has rightly acquired a reputation as someone who is willing to think radically about the reform of the Houses of Parliament in order to make sure that we are relevant to the 21st century, rather than redundant. It is in that context that I ask him to consider an urgent debate on the future of the NHS. The reason is that at the very least there are some discrepancies that need explaining between repeated assurances from Ministers that the NHS will never be transferred out of public hands and into private hands, and this morning's statement by Labour peer Lord Haskins suggesting that the NHS's future is to be found in transferring it lock, stock and barrel into the hands of a private corporation.

Given the number of hon. Members on both sides of the House who have asked questions about the NHS today, will the Leader of the House at least reflect on the urgent need for such a debate, before another of the luminaries in the other House, who increasingly represent the voices of the new corporate aristocracy, suggests that democracy itself would be best served if Parliament were also transferred to a private corporation?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to say that, as Leader of the House, I have no plans to transfer Parliament to a private corporation.

Lord Haskins, who is not a Minister, was speaking at the launch of the report by the King's Fund, which is not a subsidiary of the Government. It has made a number of recommendations about the decentralisation of NHS management, with which we are comfortable, but it is an independent body and it must speak for itself. I cannot speak for it, but I assure my hon. Friend and the House that we will not privatise the NHS, which will remain a public service, accountable through Ministers to the House and based on national values that reflect its importance as a service to meet need, not a service to chase money.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Can the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made at the earliest opportunity on the Trident refit complex at Devonport? He may be aware that, with only a few weeks to go, it is reported that the complex is not complete. More important, it has yet to receive its nuclear installations certificate. That is causing my constituents, and, I think, others in the Plymouth area, some concern.

Mr. Cook: The issue is of concern to the hon. Gentleman's constituents but it is of wider concern because it raises larger issues. In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, he has always been vigilant in making statements to the House on procurement or the management of his Department. I welcome the fact that only this week there was a statement from his Department on the treatment of Army pensions. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State, who will no doubt wish to write to him direct.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 714?

[*That this House expresses its deep concern at the conduct of KPMG as receiver for UPF-Thomson who are effectively holding Land Rover to ransom and placing over 10,000 manufacturing jobs at risk; believes that this will endanger well established business arrangements that could lead to increased sourcing of components overseas; and calls upon the Government to review all it's department contracts with KPMG in light of their actions.*]

KPMG's demand for over £40 million for resupplying Land Rover with chassis is nothing short of blackmail and threatens the whole manufacturer/supplier relationship in Britain. It will put tens of thousands of jobs at risk, many of them in Wales. Will he agree to an early debate on that crucial subject, and will the Government look at what contracts they have with KPMG?

Mr. Cook: I hesitate to be drawn into the commercial character of the argument to which my hon. Friend refers. I welcome the fact that the business statement has given him an opportunity to ventilate the matter in the House, and I have no doubt that he will look for other ways to do so, but it is unlikely that the Government will wish to intervene in what is a commercial dispute.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): When last week I asked the Leader of the House to be kind enough to hold an urgent debate on Sir Donald Curry's report on the future of food and farming, to be published next week, he urged me to curb my enthusiasm until the other two reports on the foot and mouth disease outbreak were published. Now that the Leader of the House will have had a chance to read the report by the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, he will realise that those two reports will not see the light of day at least for six months and most likely for 12 months. That is too long a gap for the House not to debate in Government time those important rural matters. I wonder whether he would be kind enough to re-examine the situation.

Mr. Cook: We will always keep the issue under review. If it appears appropriate to hold a debate, I am sure that the Government will wish to respond to any feeling in the House that is consistent with it being the right time for that debate to take place. However, I remind Opposition Members that they were the ones who pressed for a full public inquiry, which would have taken years rather than months to produce a result.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Does my right hon. Friend share my sense of disgust at

[Mr. Stephen McCabe]

the case of the 39-year-old Somerset father of two who apparently committed no offence in enticing two 11-year-old girls to strip naked for his sexual gratification, although he would have committed an offence if he had photographed his child victims? Surely we need an early opportunity to discuss that obvious loophole in the laws designed to protect children from paedophiles?

Mr. Cook: I share my hon. Friend's puzzlement about the case. Many hon. Members will find it difficult to comprehend that no offence existed under which a charge could be brought in the case. As I told the House last week, we are carrying out a review of sexual offences, with a view to producing legislation at some point in the future. We want to make sure that the range of offences is modernised so that it meets the current realities and has no substantial loopholes. I am sure that those carrying out the review will reflect on the case to which my hon. Friend refers.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to set out at the Dispatch Box the parliamentary timetable for legislation to impose a levy to recoup the costs of the air travel transport fund? The fund, which is operated by the Civil Aviation Authority, was set up 20 years ago to reimburse operators and bring back stranded tourists if a major travel company went broke. However, it has run out of money, and the CAA has emphasised the seriousness of the consequences should a major travel operator, package holiday company or charter airline go bust as a result of the very serious security threats in the wake of 11 September. We need appropriate legislation in place before the summer.

Mr. Cook: I remind the hon. Lady that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will be answering questions next Tuesday. This is clearly a matter on which he can be interrogated by the House. The hon. Lady raises a serious issue, and I shall certainly draw her remarks to the attention of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions so that appropriate steps might be considered. However, given where we are in the parliamentary year and the pressure of legislation, I cannot necessarily commit the Government to further legislation this Session.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): Will the Leader of the House make available some time before Budget day for a debate on the climate change levy? The levy has been in place for nearly a year, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will make his own statement about it on Budget day. However, it is a very important issue, affecting the steel and chemical industries in the north-east and Teesside, and the people who work in them. Before my right hon. Friend the Chancellor makes his decision, we should have a debate on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Cook: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his ministerial team are well aware of the views that have been expressed on the matter. However, a balance has to be struck. We have to make sure that we do not place our industries at a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the industries of other countries in the world, but we also have to make sure that Britain plays its full part in stabilising the climate. Although it will remain important, the health of our industry will be relatively less significant than the very sharp changes in lifestyle and health, among other problems, that will follow if we do not manage to get a grip on the problem and secure a stable climate.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the Leader of the House say whether it will be possible for the Deputy Prime Minister to come to the House for a debate in the near future? He has become almost invisible recently. I have not seen him in the House or on television, and as far as I am aware he has not punched a member of the public recently. Is the right hon. Gentleman still a Minister? If so, will the Government try to make better use of him?

Mr. Cook: I would urge the hon. Gentleman to attend Prime Minister's Questions. Had he done so yesterday, he would have seen my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in his place. I can tell the House that I saw my right hon. Friend only an hour ago, and he was taking part vigorously in our debates on public policy.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware of yesterday's excellent debate in Westminster Hall on the coal industry? It lasted an hour and a half and the Members present were all of the opinion that we need a full debate in Government time on the Floor of the House because of the many problems surrounding the coal industry. The debate dealt essentially with the future of the coal industry, but there are other matters to do with the impact of the industry on areas where pits have been closed.

I have raised matters in previous weeks that require a debate on the Floor of the House. To that list of items I have added vibration white finger, for which the Benefits Agency has a very peculiar test. People who get compensation for vibration white finger under the compensation scheme miss out on benefit provision. Along with the list of items that I have been pressing in recent weeks and those dealt with in Westminster Hall, that calls for a full debate on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend, who is one of our most regular attendees at business questions. No one raises constituency issues more assiduously than he does. He frequently reminds us of the many problems facing those who formerly worked in the coal industry and the communities that sustained it.

I will reflect on what my hon. Friend says. He argues his case with his customary logic and a well-researched brief. I have said to the House before that it may be appropriate at the right moment to have a debate on the present energy review. Perhaps my hon. Friend could raise some of these questions then.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government's generally admirable Adoption and Children Bill will shortly come back to the House for its Report stage.

He will also be aware of a cross-party amendment, to which I have added my name, which calls for unmarried couples to be considered for adoption. That would help deal with the concern about the tens of thousands of children requiring placement who are in care homes. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that would be an admirable change for the Government to make? In view of the confusion and press comment that there has been this week, will he confirm that the Government, along with Liberal Democrat Members, will support such an important measure, or at least allow Labour Members a free vote on it?

Mr. Cook: First, I should like to pocket the hon. Gentleman's praise for the admirable Bill. I am glad that it has his support. On the amendment that he proposes to make to the Bill, that is a matter to be argued on Report. I will make sure that the Report stage is held in good time for the hon. Gentleman and others to debate these matters.

The law on this was first changed in 1976, when some moves were made to allow greater liberality. Whether there is a case for a further move is for the hon. Gentleman to argue. However, the Government's position—and, to be fair, that of the previous Government—is that the interests and welfare of the child must always come first.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the appalling proposal to privatise the RAF's fire and rescue services. It is causing a great deal of concern inside the RAF and outside, particularly among trade unions such as the Transport and General Workers Union and the Fire Brigades Union. I have had representations from constituents, as my constituency has a long-standing relationship with the RAF. RAF Hornchurch was part of the ring of steel in 1940 in the fight against fascism. Could we at least have a statement or a debate on this?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is correct, in that there is a project in the Ministry of Defence to assess the most viable and cost-effective solution for the provision of airfield support within the Ministry. If any proposal is made to meet those needs with a privatised service, it will be tested against a public sector comparator to make sure that it represents value for money. It must also be tested against other policy requirements, including, of course, the security of the armed forces and Ministry of Defence airfields. Should a decision be reached, I am sure that it will be announced to the House and that my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to offer his views both in advance and afterwards.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Will the Leader of the House make time available for an urgent statement on the policing of Greater Manchester, particularly in the light of the Commonwealth games to be held this summer? Greater Manchester police are facing a shortfall of £22 million in their budget, exacerbated by the fact that the Government have not yet agreed to fund the £7.5 million cost of policing the games. The chief constable of Greater Manchester police has said:

> "We are in a desperate situation and if we don't get funding for the games, it will have a massive impact on policing in Greater Manchester."

It is vital to all the people of Greater Manchester that we have a proper debate so that there is an opportunity for a statement and we can extract that promise from the Government.

Mr. Cook: I remind the hon. Gentleman that Manchester sought to hold the Commonwealth games and, indeed, fought hard for that. I congratulate it on its success. Naturally, there are consequences of Manchester's success in securing the Commonwealth games. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman gives a full, rounded picture of the position on Manchester police funding. Recently they received a special grant which has made theirs the first police force in the country to have digital radio for their services.

Mr. Brady: A cut.

Mr. Cook: Hardly. That puts them ahead of all the other police forces in the country and it will continue to ensure that they provide an excellent service.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will my right hon. Friend make time to introduce legislation on the continuing scandal of short measures of pints of beer in our pubs? Is he aware of the recent research conducted by the Campaign for Real Ale which shows that nine out of 10 pints being served in England and Wales are short measures, and that things are getting worse? Over the past three years the number of short measures being served has increased by 10 per cent. *[Interruption.]* I am glad to hear the inheritors of the men who watered down the workers' beer supporting this. I invite my right hon. Friend when he visits Cardiff for Labour's spring conference to partake of a pint of Brain's, the finest beer in Britain. If he finds time to introduce legislation, he will be the toast of Cardiff and, indeed, of Britain—because everyone who pays for a full pint, should get one.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a matter of great concern to the public and to many Members of this House. Any short measure is a clear public scandal and I assure my hon. Friend that we will seek to bear down as hard as we can. I would be in trouble with many hon. Members if I tried to express a preference for one particular regional beer over another.

Mr. Tyler *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cook: I see that I carry the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) in my caution on this point. I will be coming to Cardiff soon and I shall sample Brain's beer and consider whether it possibly reaches equivalence with the excellent McEwans beer that is brewed in my native country.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Many of us will remember with nostalgia and affection the silver jubilee celebrations in the days of our youth. Will the Government make a statement on how the new generation can similarly enjoy the golden jubilee celebrations of Her Majesty the Queen's reign this year, by lifting the absurd threat of administration charges for traffic orders, risk assessments and health and safety inspections, which have been quoted as £800 for a street party; and similarly, by ending the demands for absurd levels of third party

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

insurance? Would it not be nice to read a headline that says, "Cook calls for common sense. Bring out the bunting!"?

Mr. Cook: I regret that I cannot write these headlines, but the hon. Gentleman makes an attractive suggestion which I enjoin on all newspaper editors. We hope that the golden jubilee will be a success. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that my colleagues at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport are working hard to do all we can to support it. There is no requirement for third party insurance for street parties. We hope that local authorities will apply common sense with regard to the other charges that he mentioned and will want to work with local people to make a success of local celebrations. That is why we welcome the decision of some local authorities to reduce or remove these charges.

NHS Cuts

1.23 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

> the decision by the south east regional executive of the NHS to instruct every health authority and NHS trust in that region to implement cuts in planned expenditure and services by the end of the current financial year.

The matter is specific and important. The cuts have been ordered by the regional chief executive to eliminate a projected deficit of £60 million in the NHS in the south-east of England. The cuts will apply to each NHS institution in Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire. The chief executive's letter is explicit in saying that savings will be required not only from those authorities and trusts that are at the moment projected to be in deficit at the end of the financial year, but from those that are set to break even or to achieve a surplus.

Ministers have made no public announcement so far, but it is now clear that the matter is urgent. A leaked letter to health authorities and trusts from the chief executive of the NHS south-east region, dated 14 January, demands immediate action to implement the savings required:

> "Proposals need to be capable of being actioned to deliver savings before 31st March. I do not want reasons as to why savings cannot be achieved but proposals on what could be actioned. I recognise that this will mean reductions in areas that do not contribute to national imperatives . . . You should revisit all revenue and capital spending plans for the remainder of the year".

We need a debate because local people have a right to know where the axe will fall. I hope that there will be an opportunity for Ministers to be questioned and to tell the truth to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said and I have to give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24, and I cannot therefore submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

1.26 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that at 11.30 this morning the Chairman of Ways and Means moved that the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill be set down for debate, and in the business statement the Leader of the House said that it would be debated at 7 o'clock on Monday evening. Would you consider some means by which the time for tabling amendments can be extended? Under the procedure, amendments to be considered for selection on Monday would have to be on the Order Paper by tomorrow morning or this evening, which means that there are only seven and a half hours in which to table such amendments. Do you not think that that is a wholly inadequate time for what is, after all, a deeply controversial and, many of us believe, wholly unnecessary piece of legislation?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman might realise that I cannot make an exception for one Bill. It would be very difficult for me to do so.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I of course fully accept the ruling that you gave my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), but I seek your advice as to how to raise the ghastly case of my constituent, 83-year-old Arnhem veteran Bill Holman, whose surgeon telephoned me a few minutes ago to say that Mr. Holman spent 36 hours waiting among 40 other people on trolleys in casualty, with really severe stomach pains. I could not get into business questions because I was telephoning Mr. Holman. He told me that at one point he was considering suicide. The place was so overcrowded and the staff were so over-stressed that he had his coat instead of a pillow under his head at one stage. How much longer will this go on in our hospitals in Kent?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has already used his ingenuity to help his Arnhem veteran. The hon. Gentleman knows his way around the Order Paper and knows how to get in touch with Ministers.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Following exchanges in the House yesterday at Prime Minister's questions, Members of Parliament will be aware that they are not, unlike medical staff, under a duty of confidentiality. Does that not nevertheless place a responsibility on MPs, given parliamentary privilege, to recognise, first, that best practice involves seeking the permission of a patient, where a patient is competent to give consent, before raising their case publicly; and, secondly, that medical staff are not in a position to respond to allegations made against them by patients' relatives, other third parties, the media or MPs without risking employment sanctions or being reported to their professional regulatory body?

Would you consider, therefore, Mr. Speaker, some guidelines to Members of Parliament, similar to our self-denying ordinance on the question of sub judice, that will show best practice and recognise patients' right to confidentiality and the difficulty that medical staff have in responding to allegations made, because of the risk that they will be reported to their professional bodies for breach of confidentiality? I should be grateful if you would consider issuing such guidance.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman gave me notice of this point of order, and I understand that, in doing so, he said that he would write to me. The best course of action is for him to write to me, so that I can consider this matter.

Public Accounts

1.30 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the 38th to 47th Reports of the Committee of Public Accounts of Session 1999–2000, of the 1st to 16th Reports of Session 2000–01, and of the Treasury Minutes on these Reports (Cm 5021, 5071, 5078, 5127, 5201 and 5261).

I feel very privileged to be Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Dating from Gladstone, the office has been held by some very distinguished Members, some of whom went on to even better things. Harold Wilson, for example, held the post before becoming Prime Minister, and my immediate predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), held the post before becoming chairman of the Conservative party.

I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor. He asked me to pass on his good wishes to the Committee, but, ever scrupulous about our impartiality, he thought it better for the chairman of the Conservative party not to attend today.

My right hon. Friend often said that his challenge as Chairman of the Committee was to make audit exciting. Did he succeed? He certainly raised the Committee's profile during his four years as its Chairman, and it was—almost to coin a phrase—a profile with a purpose. That higher profile caused the Committee's work to be taken more seriously and resulted in it having a greater impact. His drive and intellect were matched by an appreciation of the Committee's impartiality, and he was quick to condemn failure in our public services, regardless of political sensitivities. Even in his first two years as Chairman he was prepared to put his name to reports that were very critical of the previous Conservative Government. He was utterly impartial. He had a very clear agenda as the Committee's Chairman and understood that its work could make a real difference to the quality of people's lives across the spectrum of Government policy.

My right hon. Friend took a particular interest in the Committee's work on hospital-acquired infection, which affects thousands of people each year at a staggering cost that is measurable financially and in lives lost. The Committee's work raised the profile of that issue and led to the first concerted programme of action to make hospitals cleaner and safer places.

My right hon. Friend became increasingly frustrated by the fact that the Committee would see the same errors repeated time and again, so he commissioned three reports—on privatisations, the private finance initiative and information technology projects—that identified those recurring themes and made practical suggestions for improvement. The IT report that he commissioned has had a particular impact. It drew on 25 reports, spanning 10 years, and contained a wealth of experience gained from studying IT projects. Its objective was to look forward and to identify lessons from the past that would be relevant to future IT projects. The Government's response to it was positive, and I hope that its impact will continue to be felt for many years to come.

My right hon. Friend was a very keen advocate of the need for Parliament to have the power and the information to hold the Government properly to account. He intervened on numerous occasions to ensure that the powers of the Comptroller and Auditor General were strengthened. In particular, he played a leading part in the debate on the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000, as well as in the ensuing review, led by Lord Sharman, of audit and central Government accountability arrangements. That review recommended a significant extension of the CAG's powers, on which I hope the Treasury will respond in the very near future.

My right hon. Friend inherited a Committee steeped in a long tradition, spanning 140 years of thorough and worthwhile work. During his chairmanship, he raised the profile of the Committee's work and focused its energies more rigorously on issues of importance to people's day-to-day lives. I am sure that the House will join me in commending his contribution to the Committee's work, and we wish him well in his new role. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Other significant changes have been made. In the past year, the Committee has lost a number of valuable members. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and to the hon. Members for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), for Edmonton (Mr. Love) and for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy). It gives me great pleasure, however, to welcome to the Committee the hon. Members for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) and for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) and—two new additions to the House—my hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne).

Membership of the Committee is not an easy ride. The subject matter varies widely across the range of government and it is often very technical and difficult to master. Members have to work hard in preparing to dissect two entirely different topics every week that Parliament sits. No other Select Committee has anything like our work load. Members of the Committee work with energy, commitment and enthusiasm and I am indebted to them for their support. I pay tribute to them, and I am sure that some of them will wish to catch your eye later in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I also pay tribute to the former Committee Clerk, Mr. Ken Brown OBE. He retired in December after serving the Committee for six gruelling years and after 40 years' service to the House. Ken will be known to many Members, and he will be remembered for his good humour, sound advice and his ability to get things done. He served three successive Chairmen of the Committee and we all came to rely on his sure-footed approach. He understood perfectly the dynamics of the Committee and was able to find appropriate ways to push at the boundaries of the conventions within which we operate, of which there are many, but he was careful never to breach them. I thank the other Committee staff for the sterling service that they provide and welcome Mr. Nick Wright, our new Clerk, to his work.

I look forward to working closely with the new Financial Secretary, the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). We have always had a very good working relationship in the past and he is, uniquely, a member of the Committee. I understand that the convention is that he makes a formal appearance, and we look forward to seeing him at some time in the near future.

The Committee's work would be pointless if it did not have an impact. Much of its impact is the result of the expertise of the Comptroller and Auditor General and his staff at the National Audit Office. The Committee is so strong because it is serviced by the NAO, which employs 700 people. Between us, we have generated savings of £1.4 billion over the past three years. We have produced 30 reports over the past year alone on matters as diverse as the National Blood Service and the refinancing of the Fazakerley private finance initiative prison contract. We have ranged right across government.

Those considering possible reforms of the Select Committee system should look at the Public Accounts Committee—at the way in which it is so expertly serviced, at the care with which the reports on which we base our deliberations are prepared and at the impact that they have every week of the year.

We cover many issues, but when we first considered taking evidence about obesity—just one of the subjects that caused contention—some members questioned whether the issue was within the locus of a financial scrutiny Committee. It was suggested that, surely, people had a right to choose to be fat. One of my Committee, the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg)—who is in his place—said that

> "the vast majority of people eat too much, they indulge, they do not do any exercise and basically it is their own fault."

That is typical of his valuable contributions to our Committee.

Our evidence session revealed that obesity is very much a public policy issue; the public purse, in the form of NHS care and benefit payments, certainly picks up much of the cost. Obesity contributes to 30,000 premature deaths each year and costs the economy £2.5 billion a year.

Before our deliberations, the NAO helpfully provided a body mass index dial, which the hon. Member for City of Durham viewed with incredulity. How could it be that he—a finely honed athlete—should be uncomfortably close to the obese category? Indeed, so strongly did he feel that he stood up before witnesses—permanent secretaries from five Departments—and gave them full sight of his muscular physique, toned by many years actively gracing these Benches. "Could you describe me as obese?", he challenged. The assembled mandarins flinched or blanched and, with an aplomb of which Sir Humphrey would have been proud, they ducked the question. The issues that surfaced, however, were real, and the costs, in terms of cash and human lives, enormous. I mention the subject because it was the first time that the PAC considered a subject that involved so many Departments, and it was a good and useful exercise.

Our work encompasses all central Government spending. It covers a staggering breadth of activity, with a level of complexity to match. Hard-pressed public servants in our hospitals, schools and armed forces, to name just a few, work to deliver ever-more complicated services against a backdrop of rising public expectation. All their work is carried out in the glare of publicity in a media often interested only in failure. It is true that some public servants might see my Committee in the same light—interested only in failure. That is not true, and to do so would be to misunderstand our purpose and approach. I want dwell for a moment or two on what I believe to be the central purpose of the Committee. At the start of this Parliament, it is right that we should ask ourselves why we are here and what we are going do with the powers given to us for the next four or five years.

In brief, the members of my Committee—I think that I speak for them when I say this—represent the interests of the taxpayer. That is why we are here as Members of Parliament, and our priorities reflect those of our constituents. We want to be sure that taxpayers' money is spent properly on what Parliament has approved, and we want to be sure that the services delivered to the public are of good quality and achieve the outcome intended. By bringing our constituency and personal perspectives to the issues that we consider, we speak for the layman—indeed, we are laymen—but we do so with much more authority because our deliberations are informed by the detailed work and expert analysis provided by the NAO. We, with our experience, can speak for our constituents.

It is well known that we do not interrogate Ministers. We normally interrogate permanent secretaries and are unique in that respect. As a Committee and the mouthpiece of Parliament, we have a unique relationship with the British civil service. It is renowned for its honesty and integrity. I believe, however, that my Committee has a role to play in ensuring that it also develops a reputation for successfully delivering public services. It is no longer good enough to have a worldwide reputation for honesty and integrity.

The British civil service has to deliver successful public services. We have an important part to play in understanding why projects and programmes have not delivered what was expected, but we seek also to identify the elements of success when we find them and to suggest solutions. We do not want to be negative all the time. We do not want to be just an undertaker. We do, however, want to be a practical force for good, trying to suggest how things can be done better.

We do not get involved in policy, which is our key to success. It is why we are a united Committee and why we hunt as a pack. No one can put a piece of paper between any member of the Committee because we focus our attention on the civil service, not on policy, and on trying to get things done.

Our task is to ensure that the learning points from our work are not lost, but crystallised and acted on. The fact that more than 90 per cent. of our recommendations are accepted by the Government clearly shows that our concerns are well founded and our suggestions well grounded. If anyone says that Parliament means nothing, that Back Benchers have no power and that Select Committees mean nothing, here is one Select Committee—meeting twice a week, producing up to 50 reports a year—that has 90 per cent. of its recommendations accepted by the Government. That is not a bad track record.

We are also sometimes criticised for focusing on relatively small bodies that spend relatively little. My response to such criticism is that if we constantly target very large spending Departments, there is a danger that those in the smaller bodies will feel free from the discipline that parliamentary scrutiny provides. In our experience, the smaller spending areas are most vulnerable to fraud, mismanagement and impropriety because often there are fewer controls. We believe that each public pound is as important as the next, and we take an interest in them all.

In summarising our work for the past year there are four themes of particular interest: the quality of financial management, improving public service, innovation and risk, and accountability. First, monitoring the quality of financial management is central to our role and it is a fundamental part of our work. The past year has seen a

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major change in the way in which the Government account for public expenditure. After 140 years, the wholly cash-based system by which Parliament approved Government expenditure has been replaced with one in which Parliament votes on expenditure in terms of resources, reflecting when liabilities are entered into, rather than when cash is paid out. For Departments, the challenge of changing systems has been immense, and I pay tribute to Sir Andrew Likierman and his team in the Treasury and their personal contributions in driving through this very difficult work. It has often been a uphill struggle.

What next? As a result of the shift to resource accounting, we have a wealth of information that was not available to us before. We need now to play our part, and we owe it to the taxpayer to devote more of our time to understanding and interpreting the information that is now available. That in itself is a massive task for Parliament and a huge challenge for us if we are to hold the Government to account day by day. We intend to do our best.

Reliable and timely accounts are essential if we are to grasp the potential of resource accounts. We can make progress only if those accounts are delivered well and on time and they are accurate. Last November, we reviewed the progress that Departments have made as they move from the old system to the new. I accept that the transition to the new commercial-style accounts, which are complicated, has caused many Departments headaches and difficulties, but it has been largely successful, with many Departments making substantial efforts to improve the quality of their resource accounts.

We were disappointed, however, that far too many Departments had qualified opinions on their accounts. That position must improve. Departments must also address the widespread and persistent lack of timeliness in delivering their accounts to the Comptroller and Auditor General. Delays in submitting accounts suggest a more disturbing malaise, and we must ask whether senior staff in Departments, including permanent secretaries, are sufficiently engaged in the process, although I am sure they understand it. It is essential that senior staff in public bodies take seriously their personal responsibility for the public funds with which they are entrusted.

As I said, the propriety of the British civil service is not in doubt. My concerns, and the three examples that I shall briefly give, are about the need for sound systems of control and early warning signs before things go badly wrong. The first example in which my Committee recently played an part, and acted particularly strongly, concerns the Public Trust Office, which existed to protect the financial interests of the mentally incapacitated and was therefore responsible for one of the most vulnerable sections of the community. The Committee first reported on the very poor service provided in 1994, and we were dismayed to find in 1999 that the improvements we had been promised had still not materialised—indeed, performance had declined.

A further dimension to the PTO's problems emerged when we considered the management of unclaimed balances in court funds, weaknesses in its financial reporting and bonus arrangements for the agency's former chief executive. The Lord Chancellor's Department had responsibility for the PTO, but its approach was woefully hands off. It had ignored the warning signs so clearly heralded in our earlier report. For example, despite the PTO's worsening performance, the Department allowed its chief executive to continue to receive her full performance bonus. In the course of our subsequent work, the Department acknowledged that its oversight should have been a lot better; supervision should have been more rigorous and greater leadership should have been shown to help the agency think more imaginatively about its operations. In accepting our recommendations, the Lord Chancellor's Department took the radical step of closing the PTO and creating a new system to protect the interests of those vulnerable people. Clearly, we have to keep a close eye on that in future, but it is an example of the PAC's work and the way in which we have acted.

Failure to act on warning signs was a factor in our report on the corruption case involving Focus housing association. Two former Focus employees and a property dealer were convicted after the two employees took bribes from the dealer in connection with a purchase by Focus of 47 houses between 1991 and 1995, many at inflated prices. The case illustrated the failure of the Housing Corporation, which oversees housing associations, to act with sufficient urgency and improve their regulation of them. The Housing Corporation acknowledged to the Committee that there were inadequacies in its regulation of housing associations in the early 1990s, particularly in assessing their internal controls; those weaknesses may have made it easier for the corruption to occur. While the corporation began to improve its regulation, following a PAC report in 1994, it took until 1998, long after the discovery of corruption at Focus, to complete those improvements, which was far too slow.

Suspected impropriety at whatever level in government should be investigated properly and thoroughly to protect public funds. The corruption was discovered as a result of an investigation prompted by allegations received by Focus, but only after it and the Housing Corporation had received between them no fewer than six earlier warnings of possible impropriety. The case reinforces the need for allegations of impropriety to be swiftly and fully investigated.

It is outrageous that the Comptroller and Auditor General did not have the right of automatic access to the housing association, but had to negotiate with it for six months before gaining access to the information that he needed to bring the matter to our attention. Parliament has had a central role in such matters throughout history, but in that clear case of impropriety it took six months for the CAG to gain access, which is not good enough. We shall soon have the Government's response to Lord Sharman; I hope that they accept his recommendation that the CAG should have automatic access so that people working in that sector are aware that they are answerable to Parliament for the way in which they use public money.

Further education is another sector with which there are problems. It is a large sector and receives about £3 billion a year. Most colleges manage their financial affairs successfully, but our ninth report found that 72 FE colleges—some 17 per cent. of the total—were in financial difficulty. Financial problems on that scale give rise to serious questions about the funding, organisation, governance and management of the sector, and unnecessarily divert management from its primary role of delivering quality and successful education. We found that the Further Education Funding Council focused too much on trying to help colleges once they had got into difficulty, rather than spotting the warning signs and taking early preventive action.

We urge the Learning and Skills Council, which now has responsibility for the sector, to take a more pro-active approach than its predecessor. It must identify problems earlier and take preventive measures sooner if the sector is to meet the targets for widening participation and improving quality. That illustrates a wider problem that has vexed other committees. There is a danger that bodies with responsibility for oversight of a sector confuse their support and regulatory functions. Instead of policing a sector, they are captured by it. We recently looked at the Charity Commissioners; they are a notable example in which there is confusion about the role that they play.

I shall say a bit about better public service delivery, which is now at the heart of the political agenda. That reflects the genuine concern and belief across the political divide that there is enormous scope for improvement. The issue must, therefore, be central to the Committee's remit.

I want to focus on one element of public service delivery that has become something of a recurring theme for the Committee—equity. I hope that we can emphasise equity in our work in the next few years. It is the principle that access to and quality of the services that a citizen receives should not vary according to one's postcode.

For example, in the Committee's 43rd report of 1999-2000, we considered hip replacements. Total hip replacement is a highly effective procedure that reduces pain and increases mobility in almost all cases. In England, the NHS performs more than 30,000 replacements each year, at a cost of about £140 million. Most patients who have a hip operation receive an excellent service, but we expressed concern about variations in access to treatment and the quality of care that people were receiving. Believe it or not, patients can wait for an operation for anything between two and 16 months, although the average is eight months. Clearly, waiting 16 months for a hip operation is completely unacceptable. Integrated pathways for hip patients reduce their length of stay in hospital and improve outcomes, but what do phrases such as "integrated care pathways", which are used by the bureaucracy, mean? This particular term means people talking to each other in the NHS. Less than a third of trusts use pathways for all hip replacements. We hear much about joined-up government, but our role in the Committee in this matter and indeed all others is to ensure that we have joined-up management as well as joined-up government. There is no point in all the Ministers in the world ensuring that we have joined-up government—if they can do such a thing—if we still do not have joined-up management.

Sticking with health, I mentioned the terrible blight that hospital-acquired infection represents for patients. It kills about 5,000 people a year and costs the NHS about £1 billion a year. I am pleased that, since the Committee worked on it, the issue's profile has been raised considerably, but I still remember being staggered by the differences in how trusts were handling the problem. Again, there were enormous differences throughout the country. Infection control nurses have been shown to be vital in reducing the level of hospital-acquired infections. At the time of the National Audit Office investigation, the number of beds that one of these crucial nurses had to cover varied from about 150 in some trusts, which is fine, to an impossible-to-manage 1,800 in the very worst cases. Such a difference may mean that a patient's chances of picking up an infection and dying—that is what we are talking about—depends on which hospital they are lucky or unlucky enough to end up in.

More recently, and again on health, the Committee took evidence on another example of poor-quality service following our recent investigation of NHS waiting lists. Drawing on the CAG's report, we noted that there were sharp disparities in patient waiting times across the country. For example, 37 per cent. of people in west Sussex wait more than six months for admission, but in Dorset, less than 1 per cent. wait six months. That is a huge disparity on a central issue of political concern. It is also a concern for our constituents and it simply cannot be right. Indeed, these wide variations can occur in adjacent areas. I know that that is the case. They occur between Lincolnshire and Humberside in my constituency.

Variations in patient care are not confined to waiting lists and hip replacements. The Committee found the same problem in the previous Parliament when we examined cataract surgery and cervical screening. Although politicians spend a lot of time arguing party political points about health, there is a huge amount of detailed management work to be done that makes a real difference to people's lives, irrespective of views on the future of the NHS. We intend to pursue those problems. Almost 6 million people a year are admitted to hospital in England for at least one night, so good information systems that provide real information on current and planned uses of resources are essential.

We highlighted the Royal Shrewsbury hospitals NHS trust because it has a good system, which has dramatically reduced the number of operations cancelled for non-medical reasons. Sadly, that is rare.

Too many trusts continue to have inadequate information systems. In the 21st century, bed managers in 90 per cent. of hospitals can find out whether beds are vacant only by physically inspecting them or telephoning wards. It is disappointing that the NHS executive has not done more to build on the success of systems such as those developed in Shrewsbury. Although the new NHS information technology strategy aims to tackle that, many trusts will continue to operate without the information that they need until new systems are available nationwide. That is a simple matter, but it could make so much difference to people's lives.

I have already considered some of the disparities in waiting times. Why should patients, who may have waited many months for an operation, face the disappointment of a last-minute cancellation simply because the trust in their area—they have no choice about where they are being sent—does not adopt the good practice that already exists in other parts of the country?

I am pleased to say that our criticism has not fallen on deaf ears. When questioned, the Department of Health acknowledged that such variations need to be tackled, and is taking action. Distributing resources more fairly and targeting them to remove variations is an important first step. Setting national standards through the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and a national service framework, and testing compliance with the Commission for Health Improvement, are also crucial. We shall keep an eye on all those matters. We were told that differences

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in management processes were a factor in the variations. It is therefore imperative that best practice is quickly rolled out to ensure consistency of service.

The autumn of 2000 provided a grim reminder of the misery that serious flooding can cause.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Committee's work is valuable because it does not simply isolate opportunities for improvements but provokes them? He mentioned hip replacements, consistency, hospital-acquired infection and the regulation of waiting lists. There have been significant responses to our work, such as improvements in the NHS from which people have benefited.

Mr. Leigh: I am happy to accept that. The value of our Committee is that we do not try make party political points and we can therefore focus attention on issues, sometimes through pretty hard questioning and embarrassing the civil service. Most of the time, the Government respond. I pay tribute to those who respond and take our Committee's work seriously.

I was about to consider flooding, a serious matter that came to the fore in the autumn of 2000 when approximately 10,000 properties were hit by floods. Up to 5 million people and 2 million homes, businesses and other buildings in England are at risk from flooding. Yet the protection that homes and families might receive and whether flood warnings are issued depends on where one lives. That is remarkable. I did not know that before I began to study the Committee's work. When we took evidence on that serious issue, we learned that fewer than half those at risk of flooding live in areas covered by the Environment Agency's flood warning systems.

The Environment Agency needs to examine why different regions use different warning systems. It must satisfy itself that the methods used are the most effective in the circumstances and that they do not simply reflect local attitudes or the willingness to make funds available for warning systems. We were appalled to discover the poor condition of flood defence assets.

Nearly half the flood defence structures and a third of the barriers were categorised as fair, poor or very poor. We found that 165 km of flood defences are derelict. When someone is unfortunate enough to experience flooding, they can sometimes only use sandbags. However, in 2000, not everyone who wanted them could get them. Members of the public whose properties are at risk should not have to live with uncertainty about whether they will receive warnings or whether sandbags will be available.

Of course we welcome the extra investment for flood protection, but it will take years to take effect. A country-wide strategy is now required to deliver appropriate flood defence measures to the public, where similar flood risks exist regardless of where they live. This reflects our belief in equity. The current organisational responsibility and funding arrangements for inland flood defences are extremely complex. They involve a significant number of bodies—as I know, representing a low-lying area. They are confusing to the public, and possibly a hindrance to a consistent level of service.

To take a completely different example—one can range over the whole of government; I am just going to pick up one or two examples—there is also disparity in the treatment of benefit claimants across the country. For example, when we considered those who undergo medical assessments to determine their eligibility for disability and incapacity benefit, we heard another tale of large regional variations. The money involved is significant: more than £19 billion is paid each year in such benefits. Timely assessment is vital to avoid unnecessary delays for the prospective claimant, which could cause them worry or hardship. It is also important to protect the public purse by ensuring that people are paid only what they are entitled to.

The Committee heard that the time taken to process cases due for review varied across the country from 90 days—quite good—to 170 days. For example, those living in the west of Scotland have to wait nearly twice as long to hear the decision on their case as those living in the west country. The simple question that we want to ask is why they should have to do so. The Department for Work and Pensions needs to step up its efforts to ensure that claims are processed quickly, so that claimants across the whole country get their benefit without delay, and people who are ineligible are speedily removed from the system.

Equal access to public services and consistency in the quality of those services are essential. People across the land pay the same levels of tax, and we believe—this is a central part of our work—that they rightly expect to, and should, receive the same levels of service. My Committee will, I hope, continue to highlight cases of inconsistency. We will continue to define the elements of success where services work well, and provide a pointer so that the quality of services across the country can be brought up to the level of the best. There is no doubt that so much in our public services is of the best, but so much lags far behind. If our Committee can focus a spotlight on the worst services, and drag those responsible—including civil servants and officials—before us, we will have done our work.

If someone in the private sector fails, they may lose their job. In the public sector, perhaps the worst that can happen is that they come before the hon. Member for City of Durham, or my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, but we will give them a hard time. We will not flinch from doing so because it is their job to provide the best public services throughout the nation.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the NHS seems to be the only organisation in the country in which someone who fails can get a £95,000 bonus?

Mr. Leigh: The Committee has studied that case recently, and will produce a report to which the Government will have to reply. I cannot go into too much detail until that has happened, but we were horrified by the case, and held a very hard-hitting hearing on it. It is simply not acceptable that people who fail in the public sector can be shuffled off—even into another job, in the NHS—so that those who are trying to investigate them cannot do that. We have to sort that out. We must ensure that people do not have a job for life just because they are in the public sector. Those who use the NHS have paid for their health care, and they deserve the best. If people are fiddling the waiting lists, they will have to go, and they will have to pay the price.

I turn to the theme of innovation and risk management. Innovation is essential if public services are to improve, and it entails risk. We are not against risks. They are not something to be avoided, but they must be carefully identified, evaluated and managed. That is so easy to say. One might think that those are just words, but how often have those words been taken into account over the past decades?

Numerous reports by the Committee have focused on the issue of risk. Two, in particular, demonstrate the flexibility of our approach to the issue. In December, we reported on the debacle—there is no other word to describe it—surrounding the benefit payment card, which was a vast and complex project that failed at vast expense. Estimates vary, but the figure involved could be up to £1 billion. Some clear learning points surfaced in our inquiry.

The other report was published in November. It considered risk management across government and identified important gaps in risk management systems. If risks are not managed, enormous sums may be paid out. The benefit payment card is a classic example, although we acknowledge that the project was innovative and that it had special features that added to the risk, notably its status as a pioneering private finance initiative project and the need to join up the systems of two purchasers with different business objectives. While the various parties identified many risks at various stages, they underestimated the difficulty of tackling a huge and complex project at the heart of achieving benefit delivery and post office automation, all in one go.

We also investigated many basic management failures. When projects go wrong, which they inevitably do, management must face up to the prospect of failure and take prompt action to avoid abortive costs. Time and again in our work, we witness management's failure to get a grip. We might use fine words—the jargon and the long phrases in National Audit Office reports—but everything comes down to getting a grip. It took the former Department of Social Security a laboured 18 months to put the project out of its misery. The Government have set up better IT project management arrangements and I am sure that they take on board many of the lessons of good practice highlighted in our reports.

Our first report this Session considered what has been done to encourage Departments to improve risk management. For risk management to become a standard feature of how they carry out their activities, the benefits that it brings to service delivery and safeguarding public money need to be understood and accepted by all staff. One would have thought that obvious and clear, but if it is so obvious and clear why has it not been done? For example, we found that only 25 per cent. of Departments set clear risk management objectives. The initial Cabinet Office assessment of departmental risk frameworks shows that some are much more developed than others.

I hope that the report puts an end to the myth going round Whitehall that the Committee is a barrier to innovation and risk. Some permanent secretaries criticised my predecessor—in private, of course, not in public. The myth is, "If people in the civil service innovate and take risks, they might end up in the hot seat before the Committee." We will criticise Departments if they fail to identify and manage foreseeable risk, but we support greater innovation and we are prepared to accept that, on occasion, something unforeseeable will scupper even the best-planned project. One can at least plan for the future, but that is often not done. That was particularly the case with the former Department of Social Security's IT systems.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we often find not a lack of understanding, but a lack of skill to implement risk assessment and risk management across the Departments? We do not oppose risk, but we do oppose the inability to carry out a proper risk assessment and put in place adequate management strategies at the start of a project.

Mr. Leigh: That is absolutely clear and we shall continue our work on it. We believe that risk taking and innovation are wholly consistent with careful and proper control of public money. To follow on from that intervention, if Departments have sound control systems they are more likely to have the confidence to innovate, because they will be able to take account of adverse circumstances. In the game of politics, we all know that policies, Ministers and requirements change all the time. Risk management will become an integral part of how Departments operate. Their civil servants have the skills to identify and assess risks and take the action to manage them. Having the right skills to manage risky projects is a salient issue.

I want to make as an individual a point that I put to the Treasury permanent secretary. It is worth reminding the House that those in the highest echelons of the civil service have, without exception, a background in policy rather than project management. Perhaps for that reason, those people of honesty and integrity, who have brilliant minds, sometimes fail to get a grip on major projects. Time and again, they are called to our Committee to explain themselves.

No project director—no one who has ever attempted to run a Government project—has ever become a permanent secretary in the history of the civil service. That says something about the culture, which needs to change. There is now a culture of delivery and the public expect first-rate public services across the nation. We expect our senior civil servants to have hands-on experience of how to deliver a successful project. We found that one project was run by seven people over its lifetime. Some lasted just a few months before being shuffled off to another part of the management structure.

Geraint Davies: Many people might find it unbelievable that no permanent secretary has run a project in his entire career. Can the hon. Gentleman explain what he means? Do not those who join the civil service run projects and work their way up or is he suggesting that all such people are parachuted in at senior level?

Mr. Leigh: No. Project director is a term of art and no person responsible over months and years for delivering a major IT project such as the benefit payment card—the one in the hot seat—has risen to the top of the civil service. I put that to Sir Andrew Turnbull, the Treasury permanent secretary, and he could not deny it. To be fair to him, and as he said, permanent secretaries need many other skills. They have to advise Ministers, which may require a particular ability that does not arise from running projects, but the civil service culture is changing and many people will expect a different type of person to rise to the top.

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We welcome the Cabinet Office and Treasury initiatives to improve risk management by Departments, but they need to monitor how Departments implement their plans to ensure that they are underpinned by effective action to manage risks. I also welcome the decision that the public sector should apply the Turnbull requirements on corporate governance being adopted in the private sector. The Government must get to grips with finding ways to reward, encourage, promote and retain good project managers.

My final theme is accountability, which is vital. Last February, Lord Sharman published a valuable review of audit and accountability in central Government and the momentum behind his recommendations must not be lost. Opportunities for Parliament to consider and legislate on issues of financial accountability are few and far between. Believe it or not, the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 represents one of the few opportunities to do so since Gladstone's time. My predecessor and the Committee were disappointed that the Government did not take the opportunity to iron out anomalies in the financial accountability arrangements, although they were pleased to contribute to the Sharman review, which they established in response to our concerns.

The Sharman report made a series of welcome recommendations designed to strengthen central Government audit and accountability arrangements. The Committee endorsed that report in our sixth report in 2000-01. It recommended that, as a matter of principle, the Comptroller and Auditor General should audit all executive, non-departmental public bodies, that his access rights should be on a statutory basis, and that if a Department has a substantial stake or influence or if a company has a public interest role, he should be eligible for appointment as auditor of companies.

The report went on to recommend that external validation of performance information for central Government should be progressively developed. It also made a number of recommendations to bring central Government corporate governance arrangements into line with best practice in the private sector to address issues of audit burden and the effect of audit or risk taking, and to ensure that best use is made of audit work.

We are still waiting for the Government's response. The report was produced almost a year ago, and the Government have still to respond, but I think that they will fairly soon. The report covers important matters of direct concern to Members of the House, and further delay would be unacceptable. I know that the Treasury has been in close contact with the CAG and his team on the practical issues of implementation, and encouraging progress has been made. If—I use the word advisedly—the Sharman recommendations are implemented in full, that will be a significant step forward for accountability to Parliament.

Two issues may cause difficulty. In our report on the Sharman review, the Committee raised the issue of access to the civil list, which is the one area of royal spending outside our remit. Since 1988, the National Audit Office has had access to relevant information held by the royal household relating to the use made of the grants paid by Departments to meet the costs of royal travel and the royal palaces. The Comptroller has produced reports on both those grants, which the Committee has examined. Indeed, we considered his report on royal travel only last week. Both reports provided an opportunity for the palace to show that it has taken seriously issues of costs and efficiency. It has done pretty well, and I think it has proved the case for greater transparency. I urge the Government—I mean this sincerely—to reconsider the question of the CAG having similar access rights to the civil list.

Two other bodies are currently outside the scope of our remit, the first of which is the BBC. It is essential and right that there should be improved accountability to Parliament for the funds spent by the BBC. The sums are large: some £2 billion each year. Believe it or not, Gavyn Davies, now the chairman of the BBC, recommended when he chaired the review on the future funding of the corporation that the CAG should have access to the BBC. That was before he became chairman. That is the same man who recommended that Parliament should have some access to the BBC. That view was supported by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport and by Lord Sharman.

All those parties failed to be convinced by the corporation's line—in my view, it is a line—that parliamentary accountability would impair editorial independence. Examinations of the value that the BBC gets from the way in which it uses our money could be completely separate from editorial decisions. We would not get involved in who should be on programmes and who should run the corporation. We, on behalf of the people, merely want some idea of what the BBC is doing with £2 billion each year.

I should be pleased to hear from the Chief Secretary whether he has consulted the chairman of the BBC on this point. I know that the Financial Secretary will reply to the debate, but the Chief Secretary will be writing to me on this matter. Has Gavyn Davies changed his mind? Why should he change his mind?

A similar point was made in the 1960s about the CAG's access to universities. It was said that there would be difficulties with academic freedom and independence, but no one would now suggest that his involvement in that sector has compromised academic freedom. The NAO spends its time examining implementation of policy across government without the need to question the policies in the first instance.

If every family in the country is compelled to pay the licence fee—they are not compelled, but we all know that they do so—it is a poll tax by another name. I believe that that large sum of money should be subject to the same scrutiny as all other taxes, and we will pursue that point.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) *rose—*

Geraint Davies: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is a discussion of the BBC's finances in order? I would welcome a report on the BBC, but we have not had one, and I do not think that we should discuss the matter. I bow to your wider wisdom, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): We are hearing a report from the Chairman of the Select Committee. He is alluding to something that might be, so

I do not think that he is straying from the reasonable terms of the debate. I am prepared to hear what he has to say on that matter.

Mr. Leigh: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon).

Mr. Bacon: I was interested in what my hon. Friend said about academic freedom. Does he agree that, far from compromising the BBC's editorial independence, scrutiny of its finances by the CAG could enhance its independence? Since the CAG has had oversight of the finances of universities, there has been a growth in academic freedom. There are now joint honours degrees in basket weaving and sociology and a professor of in-flight catering. By analogy, surely the BBC should welcome the chance of greater independence that scrutiny brings.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was an overlong intervention.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend has made an interesting and worthwhile point, and I look forward to hearing him develop his arguments.

Similar arguments apply to whether the CAG should have access to the Financial Services Authority, which was established as a company limited by guarantee with many of the attributes of a public body. Its purpose is to protect the public's interests. It is funded by a compulsory levy on the 34,000 firms in the financial services sector.

I was shocked to discover that the CAG, Parliament's watchdog, has no access to the FSA. As the Equitable Life saga showed, the citizen has a direct interest in the authority's work. It is crucial that there is some accountability to Parliament for the way in which it discharges its functions. Parliament has no power to obtain independent evidence on its activities. That is a matter of some urgency, and I look forward to hearing what the Chief Secretary has to say about it. Greater transparency would bring benefits, so that another Equitable Life fiasco could be avoided.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Is it not striking that, of all the issues on which I have received correspondence from my constituents, the Equitable Life case is the one on which I have received the most, yet as a Member of Parliament I am not able directly to examine the FSA's work? That concerns many of my constituents. I fully support what my hon. Friend has suggested.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. We look forward to hearing what the Government intend to do about these sensitive issues that are of huge importance to many people.

We have a clear agenda for the future. We shall focus on issues that directly affect the public, and shall ask the questions that they want to ask on topical issues. We are shortly to consider access to and quality of higher education. We have work in hand on the millennium dome and the inappropriate adjustments to NHS waiting lists.

We will be asking how the foot-and-mouth crisis was handled, about the financial implications for the taxpayer of the events at Railtrack, about the lessons that can be learned for the future management of and investment in the railways, whether the way forward for London Underground—when it is eventually decided—provides the best value for money, and what lay behind the suspension of individual learning accounts. We will aim to get to the bottom of those matters, and offer recommendations for improvement.

I am glad to stand here today as Chairman of such a distinguished Committee. Our Committee has a long history, but the careful stewardship of my predecessors has ensured that it has remained relevant. We have a serious role to play in improving the administration of government, and I am delighted that my colleagues on the Committee are so adept at what they do. By holding to account those responsible for delivering public services, the Committee aims to ensure that there is a vital check from which the general public can take much confidence. It is a great privilege to chair the Committee.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chairman of the Committee has been given a certain licence in introducing his first report, but I will not necessarily apply it as widely to other Members.

2.29 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I do not present as sleek a figure as I had hoped following the obesity report. Obviously the recommendations are not working.

I greatly enjoy serving on the Committee. The work is the most interesting that I have experienced in nearly 15 years as an MP. The Committee does a genuinely worthwhile job. I must admit that I have served on other Select Committees that I felt were a waste of time, because Governments—Labour as well as Conservative—never seemed to listen. This Committee's work seems very relevant, and we receive positive responses, which makes our work worth doing. I become cynical as I grow older, but serving on the PAC strikes me as an excellent way of spending my time.

I thank all the Committee's staff for doing a tremendous job, and for being so helpful and obliging. Sometimes people who are getting old, as I am, forget what they have done. They forget that they already have their papers, and ask for them again. We never have any problem on such occasions, because our staff are so helpful. I also thank the National Audit Office for its help and expert advice. Its outstanding professionalism goes without saying, and it makes life a lot easier.

Yesterday we received a delegation from the South African Public Accounts Committee, which asked, among other things, whether we were given any secretarial support. I said that we were not, but I should have said that we can call on 750 auditors at any time. We could be described as the most-briefed Committee in the House, with the best possible support.

Let me join the Committee's Chairman, the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), in extending my thanks and good wishes to Ken Brown, the Clerk, who retired earlier this year. His influence and personality will remain with the Committee for many years. He is greatly missed, and I wish him a long and happy retirement. He was a genuinely nice man, and there are not many people of whom that can be said. I thought a great deal of him.

[Mr. Gerry Steinberg]

I wish good luck to our previous Chairman, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who has taken what must now be an almost impossible job. Did I say that I wished him luck? I am not sure that I wish him too much luck—a little bit of luck, perhaps.

I also congratulate our new Chairman on his recent appointment following the general election. We are monitoring him carefully to see that he does his job well. So far we have given him 9½ out of 10, so he is okay.

Unlike the Chairman, I do not want to trawl through all that we have done. I want to concentrate on three reports on the national health service and some of the issues in them that we have identified as giving cause for concern. Many of those issues were discussed at a valedictory hearing with Sir Alan Langlands, the departing chief executive of the NHS.

It is clear to me that the NHS executive has experienced great difficulties in overseeing and monitoring the activities of many NHS bodies. Consequently, management failings have caused serious problems in the service, resulting in the wasting of billions of pounds over the last 10 years or more. In, I think, 1996, the previous Government introduced regional executives, but I do not believe that they ever succeeded in doing the job that they were meant to do. In my view, their purpose was to link the centre with those working at local level; but they were unaccountable, and often failed to pass on authoritative guidance from the NHS executive to trusts. In many instances, the priorities of both this Government and the last were not apparent locally.

One example of the executive's lack of success in preventing management failings is the control of hospital-acquired infection in acute NHS trusts. Our Chairman mentioned that. A hospital-acquired infection may result in prolonged or permanent disability, and a small proportion of patients die. Such infections add to patients' discomfort and to the length of their stay in hospital, which itself causes problems.

Hospital-acquired infection was the subject of a PAC report entitled "Inpatient Admission, Bed Management and Patient Discharge in NHS Acute Hospitals", about which I shall say more shortly. It was a damning report, which severely criticised the management at all levels. As the Chairman said, the cost to the taxpayer is some £1 billion a year—an incredible amount. In view of that, and in view of the suffering experienced by about 100,000 patients each year, one would have thought that trust managers would make the problem a priority. According to a National Audit Office report, however,

> "in a number of NHS Trusts Chief Executives may have a low level of awareness of infection control issues and . . . may be unaware of the extent and cost of hospital acquired infection and how it is being addressed in their NHS Trust".

One trust allocated the measly sum of £500 or so to its infection control team in 1998, while another allocated £1 million. That illustrates the discrepancy mentioned by the Chairman.

In many NHS trusts, hospital-acquired infection has generally had a low profile. Although the Department of Health has launched initiatives, particularly in the past two years, we found that a quarter of trusts' service agreements with health authorities did not cover infection control services, and that when they were covered they were often inadequate. We found that, contrary to guidelines issued by the Department in 1995, direct involvement of chief executives in strategic management and supervision was very low. We also found that 21 per cent. of trusts had no infection-control programme, and that only 11 per cent. of the programmes that did exist had been approved by chief executives.

That is a perfect illustration of the NHS executive's failure to convey the seriousness of some NHS problems. We noted that there was scope for savings of some £150 million a year if infection rates could be reduced by a mere 15 per cent., but that the issue was not taken seriously by senior managers of trusts. Not only is this costing the taxpayer huge amounts; tragically, people are losing their lives.

Last Thursday, going home in the train, I was making some notes in preparation for my speech. Incredibly, when I opened the *Evening Standard* I was confronted by an article on this very subject. It was headed:

> "Doctor's campaign against 'filthy' wards"

and, below that,

> "GP takes action after hospital superbug kills his wife".

I shall quote extensively from the article, because it sums up the tragedy and the fact that not enough is being done about it, although we have taken up the issue.

The article says:

> "A retired GP has launched a campaign to improve hygiene in hospitals after his wife died from a superbug she picked up on a 'filthy' ward while recovering from a routine operation."

The retired GP in question was Dr. Roger Arthur. The article continues:

> "His wife Patricia, 73, died in St Helier Hospital in Carshalton last month from the superbug methicillin-resistant streptococcus aureus, or MRSA, an infection which kills 5,000 hospital patients a year and is a factor in the deaths of 15,000 more.
>
> Dr Arthur says the real figure may be much higher.
>
> The scale of the problem is highlighted in the fact that, at the time of Mrs Arthur's death, St Helier had a dedicated MRSA ward, designed to keep affected patients in isolation—but it was full.
>
> She had gone to St Helier for surgery to remove a benign obstruction in her bowel. Her husband said: 'The operation was a success and she was discharged after eight or nine days.
>
> I noticed she had a bit of a cough but she seemed fine. However, when we got home she seemed to become ill and within 10 hours I could see she was going downhill fast. We went back to the hospital and they did some tests. The doctor came back and told us that it was MRSA.'
>
> Mrs Arthur died from the infection four days later.
>
> Dr Arthur, from New Malden, has little doubt how his wife became infected. He said: 'The ward she was on was absolutely filthy. There were sweet papers, fluff, old bits of Elastoplast and the tops of disposable syringes behind the bed when we came in, and still there when we came out.
>
> I ran my finger along the windowsill by my wife's bed. There was a thick layer of dust and a vase with dead flowers. There were cleaners around but they seemed to be cleaning the middle of the floor and not bother anywhere else.
>
> I was told there was a ward for MRSA patients but that was full, so people with the infection were remaining in normal wards and infecting other patients.'
>
> St Helier Hospital was the subject of a damning report last August by the Commission for Health Improvement, which said levels of cleanliness were 'seriously compromised', with wards smelling of urine and mortality rates significantly higher than the national average.

> A Department of Health spokesman said: 'The Government takes the issue of hospital-acquired infections very seriously and believes infection control and basic hygiene should be at the heart of good management and clinical practice in the NHS. A compulsory national surveillance service is being developed and a first phase, focusing on MRSA, was launched in April 2001.'"

That Department of Health spokesman may well be right. However, the PAC met Sir Alan Langlands and Liam Donaldson, chief medical officer, to discuss the report on 6 March 2000. Two years later, the problems are still occurring and that is not good enough. The Government's response was quite encouraging, but it is clear that there is much to be done. When we read about such a case, it is obvious that something must be done pretty quickly.

Everything that Dr. Arthur says was borne out in our report. Over the past eight years, isolation facilities have been significantly reduced, which must have contributed to the problem quite significantly. The majority of hospital-acquired infections are caused by bacteria. Some infections spread from person to person. Antibiotics have been used successfully for more than 50 years to control and to overcome bacterial infections. That has led to the emergence of highly resistant strains of bacteria. They are commonest in hospitals where high antibiotic usage allows organisms to evolve. The close concentration of people with increased susceptibility to infections allows the organism to spread.

MRSA poses one of the biggest threats to infection control in hospitals. In some, it is endemic. Cleanliness is paramount but I was staggered to read in the report—I could not believe it—that effective hand washing or hygiene was very poor in hospitals. It says:

> "A number of studies have generated data that confirm that Doctors who decontaminate their hands between seeing patients reduce hospital infection rates. Yet many observational studies, mainly conducted in intensive care units, show low rates of hand washing especially among Doctors. Insufficient washbasins, supplies of liquid soap and paper towels, are some of the reasons that have been given for this."

I have no reason to believe that the NAO report is not correct. If even the doctors cannot do that, and they know the problems that it will cause, that is outrageous. For many years I was a head teacher at a nursery school. One of the first things we taught the children about hygiene was that they must wash their hands very carefully. Goodness gracious me: if we are teaching young children of four and five to do that, it is a shame that doctors themselves cannot do it. It is incredible that doctors are contributing to that horrific scenario. However, new clinical governance arrangements are being introduced. I hope that that appalling situation will be addressed vigorously.

As I have said, the PAC has commented on the need for better co-ordination within and between NHS organisations. In our report on in-patient admissions and bed management, we were concerned at the delay in many hospitals in discharging patients owing to poor co-ordination within hospitals and with outside agencies, which meant that some hospital beds were occupied virtually unnecessarily.

The NAO report highlighted 20 areas where performance at many trusts could be improved to match the lead of others. That would result in fewer cancelled operations and shorter waiting times for emergency patients, and reduce delays in discharging patients from hospital, which in turn would yield significant savings and free up resources for improving other aspects of patient care.

Often patients are brought into hospital far too early. Incredibly the report showed that if there were a 10 per cent. increase in same-day admissions, it would release about 180,000 bed days for alternative use. Few hospitals had effective systems for monitoring and co-ordinating key resources such as beds and theatre time.

In particular, the Committee was concerned that in more than 90 per cent. of trusts bed managers obtained their information on bed availability only through physical inspection and telephoning wards throughout the day. That seems archaic in a modern NHS. On any given day, around 6,000 over-75s who are ready to be discharged from hospital are blocking beds and costing the NHS £1 million.

In fairness, the Government have recognised the scale of the problem and are taking action. For example, only last week, my local social services department was informed that it had been allocated £1.886 million to ease bed blocking in the next financial year. There is a severe problem. The Government are doing something about it but we must ensure that even more is done.

Mr. George Osborne: The hon. Gentleman is right that efforts are being made to improve the discharge of patients from hospitals, but does he agree that we need a joined-up approach, to use the jargon? We need to look at the closure of care homes and of places in care homes in wider society, because that provides less opportunity for discharging people from hospitals.

Mr. Steinberg: The hon. Gentleman is right. I do not intend to get into a political battle with him over the issue, but he should remember that the Conservative Government encouraged the increase in the number of private care homes, which are now being sold off for property development, reducing the number of care places. I will not go into that. Let us try to keep it non-political this afternoon but I agree that there must be a joined-up approach and much more co-ordination between the NHS and local social services departments. More care places must be found.

The real problem is clearly outlined in the report, which informs us that the number of general and acute beds fell from 200,000 in 1986 to 138,000 in 1997, a loss of 62,000 beds. For years I was warned by health authority officials that efficiency gains of 3 per cent. a year that had been demanded since the 1980s would eventually have a detrimental effect on local health services. As a result, beds have been lost and there has been an increase in bed occupancy and reductions in staff. The efficiency savings became cost-cutting exercises. The cumulative effect of those efficiency savings has been an increase in bed occupancy from about 70 per cent. to over 90 per cent., which leaves little capacity to cope with peak demand.

I shall now be a little controversial. I do not think that matters have been made any better—in fact, they may have been made a lot worse—by the new private finance initiative projects, which appear to result in the loss of further beds. We are told that bed numbers in those projects are agreed by health managers and independent experts. I have had a lot of experience—I am not being arrogant, because one of the first PFI hospitals in the country was at Durham.

It is not the so-called experts who make the decisions about bed numbers, but the financial consortiums. I know that from my own experience. The new university hospital

[Mr. Steinberg]

in Durham opened recently and, for the six or seven years since the building of the hospital became a possibility, I was told that it would have enough beds. However, within a week of the hospital's opening, it was clear that it did not have enough beds, and that there was a severe shortage. That is not surprising. The number of NHS beds has fallen by around 2 per cent. a year since 1980, but admissions have risen by some 3.5 per cent. in the period. Given those statistics, it is no wonder that there is a bed shortage.

The NHS is under constant scrutiny by the PAC. As a consequence, there has been a significant improvement in management over the years. There is no doubt that, during the past few years, there has been a significant strengthening in accountability and performance monitoring in the NHS. That is partly due to the excellent reports that we receive from the National Audit Office, and the work that the Committee does. That may sound arrogant, but I believe that the PAC's work has helped encourage the improvements.

Government spending is not as straightforward as it was years ago. It used to be that only Government Departments spent millions or billions of pounds on services, but now executive agencies and quangos spend billions of pounds of public money every year. For the sake of continued accountability, efficiency and best value, the NAO and the PAC must scrutinise all public spending.

In the previous Parliament, we failed to persuade the Government to legislate to ensure that. However, Lord Sharman, who was commissioned by the Government to carry out a review of Government audit and accountability, has recommended that the NAO should be appointed automatically as the auditor of all newly created executive non-departmental public bodies—in other words, quangos. I was pleased with that recommendation, and I hope that the Government accept it.

That has already been happening in practice. For example, the NAO was given the job of auditing the new Learning and Skills Council and the Postal Services Commission. However, I believe that that appointment should have been automatic. In that way, Parliament would be able to ensure that all such organisations were accountable to it, and therefore that all public expenditure was accountable to Parliament.

2.52 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): When I rose in the equivalent debate in December 2000, I noted that there were so few hon. Members in the Chamber that I would have to speak for an awfully long time if the debate was to continue until 7 o'clock. On that occasion, I did not fill all that time, and you will be pleased to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I do not intend to continue today until half past six, or whatever time the winding-up speeches might be expected to begin.

It is perhaps a pity that so few hon. Members want to take part in this annual debate. After all, it covers a huge range of Government affairs, and it offers Members an opportunity to speak about a large number of specialist interests. I am sorry that more do not choose to do so. I am equally sorry that the debate does not seem to attract an enormous amount of attention from the press. However, perhaps that is just the way of things.

Like the Committee's new Chairman, the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), and the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), I shall begin by paying tribute to Ken Brown, the PAC's former Clerk, who retired at Christmas. As the hon. Member for City of Durham said, he was an enormously nice man, but he was also extremely helpful. I probably bothered him with my questions about the workings of the PAC as much as anyone, with the possible exception of the Committee's previous Chairman, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis). He always took the time to explain to me everything that I had to have explained, however idiotic my questions must sometimes have seemed.

It was great proof of the esteem in which Ken Brown was held in the House, and the respect that was felt for him, that so many hon. Members and others attended a farewell party for him on the Terrace. They had known him during his long service in the House, and valued the work that he had done. Not only that, but some who attended were aware that his father and grandfather had both acted as Clerks in the House. I hope that he has begun what will be a long and happy retirement, with many happy memories of this place as a result of the tributes that were paid to him on that day.

I also pay tribute to the PAC's previous Chairman, with whom I like to think I worked effectively during his period of office. I hope that I shall continue to work effectively with the new Chairman as well, but the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden made a name for himself as a good Chairman, raising the Committee's prestige and increasing its influence in parliamentary and national affairs. It is to his credit that the PAC should continue to be held in the respect that has been its due for a long time. The Committee is an all-party body, and always reports unanimously. That is what gives it its strength.

I am pleased to be on the Committee, and the hon. Member for City of Durham made it clear that he felt the same. It is a good Committee, and I recommend membership to any Back-Bench Member, in government or opposition. Membership probably amounts to one of the most powerful positions available to people who are not in the Government, and I hope that other hon. Members will seek to become members of the Committee. I understand that some parties have not always found it especially easy to fill all the places on the Committee. Sadly, my party does not as yet have so many places to fill, so the difficulty is not so great. However, that may change in the near future.

I think that it is a great pity that we should have found it difficult sometimes to find members for the Committee. The PAC is a very interesting and powerful Committee to belong to. It is one of the few Select Committees in which Back-Bench or Opposition Members can make a real difference to the way in which things work, by influencing Committee recommendations that are then implemented by the Government. Normally, only Ministers can do that, but the PAC gives Back-Bench Members that power. That is why I recommend membership of the PAC heartily to those hon. Members who have not taken up the option so far.

As is true of all Committees, however, changes perhaps need to be made to the PAC. The Committee has been in place since Gladstone's day, and it may be time for us to rethink our way of working. I am delighted that the new

Chairman has decided that we should all go on an away day to try to work out whether changes need to be made.

I suggested a number of changes in my equivalent speech a year and a bit ago, when we last had this debate in the House. Since then, more matters worthy of consideration have come up; among the issues then raised was the question of whether we need a second PAC.

As has been mentioned, the PAC is a very hard working Committee, which takes up an enormous amount of its members' time. It is possible that we should distinguish between bigger cases and smaller ones, with the second Committee discussing the smaller cases, and the main Committee discussing only those cases of really major importance.

I am sure that that proposal will be welcomed by the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb). He is one of the critics of the Committee to whom the new Chairman referred in his speech. When the hon. Member for Gainsborough talked about this particular criticism, I was sorely tempted to pretend that I was in some pantomime, and to shout, "He's behind you!" However, I resisted that temptation.

One criticism that I did not mention in 2000 is the sheer length of time that it takes for reports to come before us. Today, the House is discussing reports that appeared before the PAC a long time ago. The initial incentive for the NAO to draw up a report will have made itself apparent even before that, and we are talking about difficulties with Government policies that first arose two or three years ago. Those issues may well have been clarified and dealt with properly many months or even years before this debate began.

It is a pity that the process should take so long. A matter has to be pulled before the NAO, then the NAO has to investigate it and publish a report. That report then has to be the subject of a Committee hearing, then the Committee must look at the transcript of that hearing and prepare a draft report of its recommendations. That draft report has to be approved and sent off to the Treasury for its response. Finally, the Treasury's response is discussed in this annual debate.

It is a lengthy process. If we could find some way to speed it up, we could deal with some matters rather more quickly than we do at present.

Mr. Bacon: The Government closed down individual learning accounts on 23 November. The National Audit Office is investigating the matter and hopes to publish a report later this summer, perhaps by May, so that it can be discussed by the Committee before the summer recess. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is a model of how we should do things in the future?

Mr. Rendel: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Perhaps he will back me on this point when we come to our away day—it certainly sounds like it.

Another matter that we might want to discuss in changing the structure of the Committee is a way of asking a further set of questions. We each have a quarter of an hour in which to ask our questions and although the Chairman is very good about sometimes allowing us back in at the end of the session, it would be useful to have a second go. We may think of something that has come up as a result of other members' questions to the witnesses.

Occasionally we may need a second hearing. There was one occasion recently, which I shall refer to later, when we had a second hearing on the same subject. Recently we were discussing whether we might need another second hearing when it seemed that a witness had been a bit misleading and needed to be called back. There may be a case for having occasional second hearings as well.

We might need to think more about whether members should have a chance to discuss the recommendations that come out of the hearing. At present, we have our hearing and the NAO drafts a report with the Chairman as to what recommendations they think should come out of the hearing. The recommendations come before us as a draft and are often passed more or less on the nod. When it comes to making recommendations, the influence of individual members is not that great.

I should like to talk about the powers of the NAO. This comes out of one of the reports that we were discussing on the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 and the Government report on the investigation into audit arrangements by Lord Sharman. I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will allow me, in discussing this, to talk a little about the BBC, as the sixth report of the 2000-2001 session gives its response to the Sharman report which covered the BBC. There is a good case for increasing the powers of the NAO, as the Sharman report proposed. I hope that the Government will take due account of the Sharman report—after all, they set it up. Sometimes, sadly, Governments set up reports and then pigeonhole them and forget about them for a long time. I hope that that will not happen with the Sharman report, because there are strong arguments for increasing the powers of the NAO to investigate all areas of Government spending of taxpayers' money, not least the areas mentioned by the Chairman—the civil list, the Financial Services Authority and the BBC. I find it extraordinary that the BBC's accounts are not audited by the NAO. There is every reason for that to happen.

Some people have argued, in response to Sharman, that many private sector auditors are at least as good and effective as the NAO and that we can trust them. I have no doubt that many private sector auditors are extremely good at their job. However, it is worth remembering what happened at Enron. At least one very well known private sector auditor seems to have gone way off the rails not only in failing to audit Enron properly in the first instance but then, when things turned out to have gone badly wrong and the audits were found to have been a failure, in apparently starting to shred some of the papers to hide the evidence. If that can be done by an audit company of the quality and prestige of Andersens, I hate to think about what goes on in the private sector audit world. There are better arguments than ever for saying that when taxpayers' money is at risk, we ought to have our parliamentary auditors, the NAO, in charge of the audit.

Mr. George Osborne: Is it not also a case of democratic accountability? We are talking about public money, and Parliament, which is the representative of the people, should be able to hold the BBC to account for the way it spends its money so that we can see whether BBC News 24, for example, which costs tens of millions of pounds, is money well spent.

Mr. Rendel: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that that is the first principle—where public

[Mr. Rendel]

money is involved, it should be audited by the NAO, which is Parliament's auditor. The NAO acts on behalf of us all; it acts on behalf of the taxpayer. It is not the Government's auditor, but the auditor for Parliament and the public. That is why it should, on the whole, audit public money. I was trying to argue that the only possible counter-argument might be that a private sector auditor might do a better job. For the reasons that I have given, that is no longer arguable, if ever it was.

I should like to go through a few of the reports and highlight some of our most important findings. Unless I was not listening hard enough, I do not think that either of the two previous speakers mentioned the sheep annual premium report. A very interesting point came out of that report. We heard that some of our farmers tried to flout the rules on the sheep annual premium. In some cases, for example, they reported to the Government that sheep had been stolen and tried to claim for them. It later turned out that they did not report the theft of these sheep to the police. They had simply disappeared, for some reason. That raised queries as to the real status of the sheep.

In other cases, farmers had their sheep counted on one side of the hillside, knowing very well that those doing the counting would have to drive the long way round to get to the other side. Meanwhile, the sheep went over the top of the hill and were duly counted on the other side as well. I am not suggesting that that sort of thing was widespread, but it was going on.

The witnesses made the interesting point that we are inclined to believe that we are the only ones who obey the rules coming out of Brussels and the European Union. We believe that those rules are purely for our benefit, because we obey them and everybody else ignores them. In fact, it was clear from what we heard that every country in the EU believes that it alone obeys the rules and that every other country ignores them. Some of those who inveigh against the rules coming out of Brussels and like to pretend that ours is the only country that always obeys them might like to consider that every other country in the EU holds that belief.

The important report on hospital-acquired infection has already been mentioned. The potential saving of £150 million has also been mentioned. That shows how much we need to do something about the problem. I do not think that the two previous speakers mentioned that recently there have been reports of whole wards, if not hospitals, being closed down by viruses that have taken hold. That indicates that the problem that we highlighted some time ago is still with us, and that savings can still be made.

We asked the chief executive why we were not spending money on better cleansing of hospital wards so that we could save this huge sum of money. He replied that the notion of spending to save

"is not one that people always latch on to immediately in a system where short-term affordability is often a barrier."

That important point has wide significance. Sadly, the Government often control their finances on a short-term cash basis. That is not always the case, given the move towards resource accounting, but there is nevertheless still close cash control on many organisations such as the health service. That often leads to greater long-term expenditure. This case in point illustrates my wider point.

The interesting point to come out of the report on hip replacements was, as the Chairman said, the lack of co-ordination between the various trusts. The PAC has been saying that we do not have joined-up government, nor do we have joined-up hospitals and trusts. We found that some hospitals discovered that a particular type of hip replacement material worked better than others, yet that information had not been sufficiently spread around the whole health service. As a result, some hospitals continued to use old implants and materials which had been proved less successful. That shows the need for a joined-up health service.

The Government response to the Chinook report came out this year. We now know that this is a topical issue because on 5 February we expect the report from the House of Lords Committee which was set up partly in response to our PAC work on the issue. We do not yet know what it will say, but from the types of witnesses it has called and recalled at least some indications are that it will take a rather different view from the Government's. I hope very much that it does.

The Government have always argued that they cannot possibly change the decision of the initial inquiry because there is no new evidence. That inquiry itself changed its conclusion between the initial decision taken at the bottom level by the people who did the work, who decided the pilots could not be blamed, and the air commodore at the top who decided that the pilots were to blame. Yet there was no new evidence between the initial decision at the bottom level and the top level decision. Already, the Ministry of Defence has changed its decision without new evidence. For the Government to pretend that they cannot override that decision and reach a different conclusion without new evidence is thus contradictory.

I hope that the Lords report will give the Government a face-saving way of withdrawing from the obdurate way in which they have faced the issue until now. I strongly believe that whether the pilots were to blame or not, there is no proof that they were to blame, and that is the issue. The tenor of these reports is that in such cases the pilots should never be blamed unless there is absolute proof that they were undoubtedly to blame.

There are a number of different possible causes of the Chinook accident, including the malfunction of the full authority digital electronic control, or FADEC, system. Another possible cause, raised by one of my constituents, could be the late change of weather conditions in the area around the Mull of Kintyre. My constituent, who used to be involved in these things himself, pointed out that in the old days pilots taking off on this sort of mission would have a face-to-face meeting with the meteorologists so that they could be told not just what the overall weather pattern was, but in more detail what likely changes they might meet during their flight. That no longer happens. There may be a case for saying that it should have happened and that if it had happened, the accident would never have taken place. If that is so, this is another case of a Government cut leading to a disastrous consequence. That point, too, weighs against any suggestion that there is absolute proof that the pilots were to blame.

Sadly, I was not at the hearing for the in-patient administration, bed management and discharge report, so I hesitate to say too much about it, but I attended the meeting at which the report was discussed. Clearly, major costs are involved. The major lesson from this is that if we are to reduce the costs of so-called bed blocking, we need to put more money into the social services functions of local authorities. That is how we can get or keep patients out of hospitals if that is the best thing to do. The hon. Member for City of Durham pointed out that the private finance initiative has sometimes cut the number of hospital beds and that clearly is happening. It is not the major worry, but it is a worry.

One of the difficulties with this whole issue is that funding for social services comes from local authorities while funding for the health service comes from the Government, although local authorities get a lot of their funding from Government too, so the position is not quite so clear cut as one might think. The difficulty of two sources of funding going in two different ways demonstrates once again a lack of joined-up government. It is good news that this Government have put such emphasis on the need for joined-up government, but in this case at least they have not yet properly resolved that problem.

It might be odd for me, as an instigator of the NAO report on SERPS, to allow the debate to pass without commenting on that report. I doubt whether a PAC report has ever led to such a large-scale change of Government policy in financial terms. We are talking about a policy change worth some £12 billion—a huge sum. The PAC can be proud of its efforts, first, to highlight the scandal of SERPS for widows, and secondly to refuse to accept the Government's first attempt to redress the balance. The fact that we hammered away at it and insisted on a better solution to the problem is to our credit. Many people throughout the country will benefit from the way in which we forced the Government to change their plan.

The report on parole is also particularly interesting in the light of more recent events. At the time I put it to Mr. Narey that

> "the fact of the matter is that almost certainly some of them"—

that is to say, some prisoners—

> "will be innocent, even though the court has found them guilty. In those circumstances it does seem to me less likely that they will get parole."

Mr. Narey replied, quite simply:

> "I would agree with that."

A few weeks ago we heard of the case of Stephen Downing, who spent some 27 years in prison for murder—a far longer term than most murderers spend in prison. Why? Because he was innocent and refused to say that he was guilty. In the terms of the Prison Service, because he was not facing up to his guilt he was not eligible for parole. The injustice done to that man was vastly exacerbated because of the policy, which as far as I know is still in place, that if prisoners insist that they are innocent, in practice they will not get parole. That can lead to a huge injustice, as in Mr. Downing's case. I hope that the lesson from our hearing will now be taken on board, strengthened by Mr. Downing's case.

It would also be unusual for me to allow this debate to pass without mentioning the English Heritage report. We had a double hearing on it. Although the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) might think this is a minor matter, the hearing was fascinating, perhaps because it was the sleaziest subject of all that we came up against. We discovered that Sir Jocelyn Stevens, who had been chairman of English Heritage, had persuaded his board to allow Kenwood House, a public asset, to be leased to the ex-King of Greece for his daughter's wedding and, extraordinary as it may seem, the terms of that agreement were such that although the ex-King would cover all the expenses of the function, the only extra profit money to English Heritage was to be by way of a donation, the size of which would be decided by the ex-King of Greece. I hope there has been no other case in which a public asset has been rented to a private individual in return for money, the amount of which that individual decides. It is extraordinary that anyone could deal with a public asset in that way.

What was worse was that when the chief executive of English Heritage was asked whether the donation had been made and said that it had, on the first occasion she failed to reveal, first, that it had only just been made, and then only in response to a letter from her to the—by then—ex-chairman, pointing out that the donation had not yet been made and asking whether it was not about time that it was made, since the PAC hearing was about to take place. Secondly, she failed to reveal that although the donation had been made, it had been made not by the ex-King but by the ex-chairman of English Heritage—an extraordinary story. Rightly, the PAC decided to bring the chief executive back for a second hearing when the story became clear. Perhaps not entirely surprisingly, the former chief executive of English Heritage is no longer its chief executive.

We also had a hearing on the blood service. It became clear that volunteers who gave blood were not being properly treated by the blood service, and that some were inevitably being put off as a result. We cannot afford to put off volunteers who give their time and their blood to the national health service. There has been a failure to care for them, in that they often queue for a long time. They sometimes have to wait around for so long that their cars exceed car parking times, but they receive no help to pay any parking fine, although I understand that such help is given in some other parts of the health service. So if volunteers are kept waiting too long they have to pay fines in addition to giving their blood voluntarily.

Although the recommendation that something be done was fully accepted, people are still being kept waiting for long periods. I know of a young man who recently went to give blood for the first time. On arrival he told the assistant, in answer to a question, that he had recently been on holiday in Mexico, among other places. The assistants failed to tell him straight away, "I am sorry, but because of the malarial problem you cannot give blood now; we would love to have you back in six months." He waited two hours to reach the front of the queue, at which point he was sent home because his blood could not be taken. That is not the way to treat volunteers if you want to encourage people to give of their own blood freely for the sake of the wider community. The fact that that was still happening a week or so ago shows that, despite our recommendation, we have not yet been able to cure the original problem.

That is enough from me on the individual reports. I shall end with a few more general comments about general themes that have emerged from our reports.

Repeatedly, very large computer projects have gone wrong. We should draw from that experience two lessons, which we have discussed in the PAC. The first lesson is that in a massive computer project, the chance that somewhere in the project something will go wrong that

[Mr. Rendel]

will affect the whole project is much greater. If the project can be split into more manageable modules, so that each module is to some extent self-standing, and perhaps even usable on its own even if other modules are not yet ready and working, it may be possible to save some of the costs involved in searching through one massive computer system to locate an error.

The second lesson is that the bigger a computer project is, the harder it is to transfer the risk to the private sector if it is being run as a PFI project. If, two years down the track, with a year to go before the policy must be implemented according to the law that is introducing the new scheme of social services, tax or whatever, one suddenly discovers that the major computer project simply does not work, what can one do—pass it over to a new computer firm? Of course not. A new firm would not have nearly enough time to write a new computer programme to implement the policy. The only thing that can be done is to pour more and more money and resources into the firm that has already shown that it is not running a good project, to help it get that project up and running in time. So, far from the risk's being passed to the private sector, the risk often remains with the Government. The bigger the computer project, the greater the likelihood that that will happen.

I appeal to the Government—I hope that they will listen—to try to modularise their computer projects into smaller, bite-sized chunks, although "bite-sized" is probably the wrong word to use when talking about computers. I hope that that approach will enable the Government to overcome some of the problems that arise when one failure in a massive project causes the entire project to go wrong, as has happened in one case that the Committee Chairman mentioned, or when, as has happened in other cases, a lot more money has to be poured in to ensure that the problem is overcome entirely.

Mr. Bacon: The hon. Gentleman has given way very generously. Does he agree that although the issue of computer consultancy firms not providing an adequate service to the public sector is very serious, the issue of project management by the public sector, which has been alluded to, is crucial? The example comes to mind of the National Audit Office report on the implementation of the National Probation Service information systems strategy, which had seven programme directors in seven years. That is a fault of the public sector management, not of the firm.

Mr. Rendel: Yes; there is undoubtedly a problem there, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to it, although it is a slightly different problem from the one I was highlighting. I am sure that the PAC will want to examine it.

There are problems with the private finance initiative in relation to large computer projects. There are also problems in relation to the transfer of risk in other areas, such as hospital-building projects, which the PAC has highlighted. Given that all parties are currently to some extent reviewing PFI—what it means to pass things across from the public to the private sector—and given that, approaching from different angles, we are all perhaps forming views different from the ones that we started with, I hope that all parties will, during their review of the PFI, recognise the following important truths about risk transfer.

There is a genuine difficulty with transferring risk. It is never possible to transfer the whole risk. If the public sector needs something, it can never manage to transfer the whole risk in a project, and to pay for the whole risk to be transferred when one is not actually transferring the whole risk is a waste of money. PFI projects, by their nature, are bound to be more expensive, partly because one is paying for the risk factor and partly because one is probably paying for higher interest rates, because it is well known that, on the whole, the private sector cannot borrow as cheaply as the public sector can. The complexity of PFI contracts is such that, very often, PFI projects take longer to manage. We have seen that particularly in the hospital sector; we have read recent reports of the length of time that some PFI projects are taking.

I am not arguing that PFI is never the right answer, but we need to answer many questions about it if we are to expect it to be the solution for many major Government projects in future, particularly because we are now adopting resource accounting. If resource accounting means one thing, it should surely mean that it is easier for the Government to justify putting public capital into major assets than it has been. Because we are no longer doing cash accounting, we no longer expect the whole value to be paid for up front. The way in which assets are accounted for is changing and it should be easier for capital to be spent in the public sector in future.

The second general theme that emerges from many of the reports is that of interdepartmental working and the issue of joined-up government, which I have mentioned already once or twice. As a member of a local authority, I used to worry about interdepartmental working, even within the local authority. Very often in a local authority you find, as I am sure that you are aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the individual departments are very much segmented. A housing officer in a local authority, may never end up having anything to do with planning, finance or recreation.

In the private sector, people are often deliberately moved between different parts of the company to give them wider experience and enable them to take senior management posts. That does not tend to happen in local authorities and it certainly does not tend to happen in Government. I hope that among the themes that emerge from some of the reports that the Government will take notice of is the need to ensure that there is interdepartmental working and cross-Government working and experience, so that civil servants can move more easily between Departments. Many of our witnesses have said that they would like that to happen, but in practice there does not seem to be much effort going into it. I hope that the Government can do something to help that process.

We do useful work, and I believe that it is valuable work—the taxpayer benefits a great deal from the PAC's efforts—and it is also very interesting work. I am delighted to have had the chance to serve on the Committee for just over two years now, and I hope that I may be allowed to do so for some time to come.

3.30 pm

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): It is my privilege to speak—like last year, the press literally could not wait for this debate.

It is crucial that we all emphasise, as the Chairman of the Committee and others have, the importance of the NAO and the PAC to good governance in Britain. We have a dynamic whereby an auditor-supported Select Committee scrutinises value for money, management, efficiency and effectiveness, with a Chairman from the Opposition, and enables feedback from the Government to produce change in the interests of the taxpayer and public service.

It is a great privilege to serve on the primary Select Committee, which was, of course, established by Gladstone to scrutinise all Departments. The Chairman of the Committee referred to other areas of public expenditure, and there is a good argument to extend the remits of the PAC and the NAO to chase virtually all public money and ensure parliamentary accountability. I say that to ensure that my position is clear.

I, too, pay tribute to the former Clerk, Ken Brown—a very effective Clerk and a very nice man, as has been said—and to the Committee's previous Chairman, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who did sterling work. I also welcome the new Chairman.

I shall not deal with the generalities for too long, but I want to refer to risk, which has been mentioned. I believe that, increasingly, the highest risk is to take no risk, because we end up with no innovation, and the civil service culture is gradually changing in that way. However, when all is said and done, we have the best civil service in the world, and our role is to try to make it even better.

I shall allude to the reports that refer to some of the less contentious issues on which we concentrate—the NHS, the PFI and the railways. *[Interruption.]* I was just checking that hon. Members were awake. Hon. Members will know that the NHS is the biggest employer not only in Britain but in Europe, with some 990,000 employees in a business that delivers approximately 5.5 million operations every year. Given that massive bulk of work, it is no surprise that we can find opportunities to encourage improvements in value for money and effectiveness in delivering high-quality public services.

In commenting on the Committee's reports on the NHS, I should like to focus on patient care, variations in performance and co-ordination between the NHS and other agencies. Hon. Members have already referred to the report on hospital-acquired infection, in which it was noted that about 15 per cent. of such infection could be eliminated, saving approximately £150 million. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said, our report highlighted the fact that more hand washing would significantly reduce the incidence of infection in the NHS.

Despite the appalling case that my hon. Friend mentioned involving St. Helier hospital, Carshalton, I am pleased to say that the Government have responded with improved education and hygiene training, by spreading best practice, including on prescribing antibiotics, and by introducing a new surveillance system for hygiene. There is a new traffic light rating system, under which red is the worst, then amber and green. I understand that no hospital has a red rating for cleanliness, but I am keen to discover St. Helier hospital's current status. The point is that, once more, the PAC has focused attention on an area of public concern, which then agitated change in the public interest.

We found a massive variation in the effectiveness and cost of hip replacement operations throughout the country; people waited for different times and costs differed. I am glad to say that we are beginning to see progress, with the establishment of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence making recommendations on which type of hip is most effective. Indeed, we are making progress in shortening the time people wait for their hip replacements; I understand that in some areas waiting times have been reduced by between 20 and 40 per cent. That is another example of our being an agitating force and of our information provoking improvements in public service.

Sir Alan Langlands, who oversaw the management of the NHS, stressed in his valedictory report the need to produce national improvement standards and to introduce benchmarks and performance targets. He welcomed the establishment of NICE and the Commission for Health Improvement as quality and standards watchdogs. We shall continue to ensure that standards continue to rise, and we shall focus on those areas where that does not happen.

Patient management and waiting lists are hot, contentious issues. In a recent report we revealed that about 6,000 patients may have been affected by the fiddling of waiting lists, but in the wider context of 5.5 million operations the figure represents less than 0.1 per cent and the problem is now being sorted out. I am pleased to say that, in response to some of our recommendations, the NHS is beginning to introduce better scheduling systems and a new so-called national booked admissions programme. We are agitating for positive change, rather than moaning about isolated problems.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) mentioned the difficulty that we face because of bed blocking. The simple fact is that NHS activity is increasing. About 6 per cent. more funding is going into the NHS each year, whereas social services funding is increasing by 3 per cent. a year. That creates an imbalance, with insufficient places on the outside to take the number of people coming through the NHS. The situation is better than it might otherwise be because of the new focus on rehabilitation, whereby people return to their homes rather than having to be institutionalised in care homes.

The biggest growth in NHS operations is in the number of day cases, which have increased from 1 million to 3.4 million a year over the past 10 years. Contrary to what my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham said, people do not necessarily occupy beds for a long time; they go home, which is obviously a good thing. During the valedictory hearing, the point was made that, if the totality of care beds were to move from acute or intermediate care perhaps to short stay or institutional stay provision, we could more rationally invest our money in the right proportion of different types of bed.

Those involved in private nursing care have talked to me about the difference between the marginal costs of providing beds inside and outside hospitals. Of course, one of the driving forces for the NHS is the need to deliver an extra 5,000 intermediate-care beds, with an

[Geraint Davies]

extra £900 million of investment, and another 1,000 extra beds in NHS hospitals, with another £300 million. So there is a response, and there is a new move towards care trusts, in which social services and health services are managed together to provide an integrated service.

There has been much debate about who manages the health service, but mismanagement occurs in only a small minority of cases. I have been a local authority leader, I have run my own business and have worked for a multinational company, and I believe that local authorities that deliver services efficiently should assume responsibility for running social services when they are next to a hospital trust that is not delivering them properly. That is part of a larger debate, but the simple point is that there must be joined-up government. The report that considered bad management focused on an issue that, no doubt, will be the subject of much more discussion.

Private finance initiatives also have a bearing on the NHS. As we always do, the Committee produced a number of reports. In particular, we considered the Fazakerley prison PFI, which involved Group 4 and Tarmac. The interesting point related to refinancing and the way in which money was reborrowed. Group 4 and Tarmac were set to make a windfall of £10.7 million, and clawback had not been negotiated in the contract. However, Group 4 and Tarmac kindly returned £1 million. They probably realised how much they were going to make and did not want to make too much of a fuss.

Since then, reports have considered the effectiveness of 121 PFI contracts that will be responsible for about £100 billion of public expenditure over the next 20 years. We found that 80 per cent. of managers thought that the PFI deals were very good, which suggests that there was a good response to them. However, when we dug under the surface, we found that only 55 per cent. of them kept open-book accounting, that only 49 per cent. were involved in benchmarking their prices and that only 43 per cent. knew what profit the private contractor would make. Only 15 per cent. had refinancing gains.

I mention those figures as a pointer for the future. The Committee should closely monitor the requirements in reorchestrated PFI deals to ensure that we deliver value for money and that we do not simply rely on the testimony of the managers who look after the PFI deals. They simply say that the contracts are good value for money. However, when we asked them whether they had refinancing deals or how much had been made by the private sector, I wondered whether they were capable of making the necessary judgments. Clearly, the question about PFIs should not be who is right, but what is right. What is right is a matter for us and we must ensure that we obtain value for money.

For more politically sensitive issues such as the tube, the Government should, and will, make their decision according to the acid test of value for money. They should not decide on the basis of what people think but on the basis of what is the most cost-effective way of delivering a quality public service.

The Committee's duty is not to consider PFIs in generic terms. Some say that they do not like PFIs and others say that they do. The evidence that the Committee has obtained testifies to the fact that some PFIs clearly work while others do not. However, the information that we have before us will help us to provide advice on how the ones that fail could have done better and the ones for the future could do better still.

The relatively uncontentious report entitled "National Savings: Public-Private Partnership with Siemens Business Services" has not received much press publicity because it simply said that it was a PFI done well. The objectives were clear, provisions were made for clawback, risk management and risk transfer and—without going into too much detail—National Savings renegotiated to reduce its exposure to fraud from £250,000. Provisions for clawback, compensation and penalties would appear on a checklist of best practice, and one finds such provisions in this case. That might explain why many people do not find the report interesting, but it should be read by other managers involved in PFI negotiations to ensure that best practice is benchmarked, as it is in the NHS with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Commission for Health Improvement. We can learn lessons from failure and from success and those lessons should be taken on board in a world of joined-up government.

Another contentious issue in the public arena is the railways. The Committee's report, "Strategic Railway Authority: Action to Improve Passenger Rail Services", found that significant problems existed, in particular with Railtrack. As we know from a previous report, it had been privatised for £1.9 billion when it was worth £8 million, which represented a loss to the public purse of £6 billion. It was not only handed over cheaply, but it failed to keep a proper asset register on the condition of its assets. That fact came to light as a result of the events that have been in the public eye. It did not know the state of its assets and our evidence was confirmed by the testimony of Tom Winsor, who told the Transport Sub-Committee that the trouble with Railtrack was that it was incompetent and ineffective in the management of its assets and in the treatment of customers.

The Committee found that Railtrack had made no real attempt to gain information on the assets making up the network, and that was one of the key reasons why customer needs were not being met. We produced our report and asked questions about punctuality, reliability, passenger satisfaction, cleanliness, late-running trains and so on. We discovered that the rail authorities did not have sufficient information or an incentive to provide the service that people naturally expect.

I remember vividly that we discussed the fact that Connex was considering—it still is—taking out seats so that people could stand on trains. That is supposed to provide more capacity. Our hearings on the rail regulations produced some unfortunate findings. The Committee stressed that the problems were not just with delivery, but with the overall structure. I am glad that, following the hearings and the Committee's insistence that it consider corporate governance and delivery, changes in Railtrack have occurred. We are moving towards requiring it to produce an asset register in the near future. We will therefore be able to build the 10-year plan on a more solid base.

I have kept my comments to a minimum given the generous amount of time that others Members have taken. Under new leadership, the Committee will have an increasingly important bearing on the delivery of public services. I am glad that its dynamics mean that it will not simply take potshots at the Government but will generate positive recommendations for change. In 95 per cent. of cases, such recommendations lead to improvements in public services. It has been a pleasure to share my thoughts with the House.

3.49 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): As the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) concluded his speech, I thought I heard the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) say that the debate still had three or four hours to run. I read the speech that the hon. Member for Newbury made in the previous debate, and I note that he began his remarks by saying that he was conscious that no one else was seeking to catch Mr. Speaker's eye. I therefore came prepared with lots of documents, not least because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) finds it amusing when I quote from documents in the Committee. Of course, I subscribe to the Fidel Castro view that if a speech is less than four hours, it cannot do any good. However, I suspect that I would try your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that of the House were I to go through all the documents that I have brought with me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton and I are at a disadvantage. As new Committee members, we have not witnessed much of the work that is being debated today, so I have decided to restrict myself to a couple of general themes that are of enduring interest to the work of the Committee and the NAO, which I shall illustrate with quotes from Committee and NAO reports.

I begin, however, by joining other hon. Members in paying tribute to the work of the retiring Committee Clerk, Mr. Ken Brown, who has been enormously helpful. I wish his successor, Nicholas Wright, every success in his new job. He has already been very helpful to Committee members. I also pay tribute to the NAO, in particular to the work of its press office under the able stewardship of Gabrielle Cohen and Keith Davis, both of whom have been enormously helpful.

The Committee's work is of central importance. The act of this House of Commons taking money from taxpayers by compulsion and forcing them to pay into the consolidated fund—into the Exchequer—is a cardinal act. It is of central importance that the House has that ability, but it is equally important that having taken money from taxpayers, the way in which it is safeguarded, looked after and spent is transparent, open and accountable.

In the last debate on public accounts, the then Financial Secretary said:

> "I conclude from the debate that the Government need to focus on two matters. First we must continue to improve the management of the systems by which public money is collected and deployed. Secondly, we must continue to improve the management of projects to deliver public services."—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2000; Vol. 359, c. 865.]

That sums up the themes that I want to address. The first is that we need good procurement. Central Government—the same applies to other forms of government, such as local authorities and health authorities—have a role in that. The public sector needs to understand procurement and to be a good buyer. That is central to successful government. It is welcome that the Office of Government Commerce is taking a greater role under its new chief executive, Mr. Peter Gershon. He has appeared before the Committee two or three times and is doing an excellent job in persuading Departments of the importance of skill in procurement. I sometimes think that he has an uphill struggle, but he is trying to make it a priority in Departments.

My second theme is that of good project management, which the Financial Secretary also mentioned. I would add good risk management to that, because they go together. Risk has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members. No one on the Committee is opposed to the public sector taking risks. It is, however, a matter of understanding what the risks are and, having identified them, ensuring that they are carefully managed. We all take a risk when we walk out of the front door, but it is knowing that there are risks and properly managing them that matters.

In the document "Working with Suppliers: The Code of Good Customer Practice" the Office of Government Commerce says:

> "Central civil government will work to a high standard of professionalism when dealing with suppliers. It will do this by",

among other things,

> "effectively managing risks during a procurement process and working with suppliers to reduce risks during the business relationship."

Both of those are central considerations.

In that earlier debate, the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), who used to serve on the Committee, referred to information technology projects. He could, however, have been referring to any kind of project when he said:

> "We should recognise that they"—

IT projects—

> "are not a marginal technical decision but part of the mainstream business activity of departments, and must be treated as such. We need to manage to staff in a way that is appropriate for a project. We must provide training and incentives to keep the staff with the project while it is introduced. The status of staff, especially in the public sector, must be appropriate to their responsibilities. Most important, staff must be accountable, not only for their success, but for any failures."—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2000; Vol. 359, c. 854.]

When Mr. Gershon from the Office of Government Commerce came before the Committee, we discussed civil service culture, the approach to the management of staff and the attitudes of staff. I was interested to know whether he thought that the way in which the civil service moves staff around, which is inherent in its culture although not in that of the private sector, is fundamentally inimical to successful project management. Mr. Gershon agreed. He said:

> "In my experience of private sector organisation, yes of course they want to appoint the best people to the job, but they also want the project to be completed successfully . . . and some say, 'No, we need to promote that man in situ because he is critical to the project, we need to keep him in place, but he should not suffer financially or careerwise as a result'".

He had spent 30 years in the private sector, and in his limited experience of the public sector he saw less of that approach in the civil service, for good and understandable reasons.

Mr. Gershon went on, however:

> "But as there is an increased focus on the successful delivery agenda, there is a question of whether we need to put in place mechanisms that might help retain key people in key jobs, and

> "something ought to be done about succession planning so that if someone does move for legitimate career reasons, there is someone to backfill in."

That brings me to the point that I raised with the hon. Member for Newbury, which is that the public sector does not seem to have taken that approach on board.

The NAO issued a report on the implementation of the National Probation Service information systems strategy. The project overran its budget by about 70 per cent. and ended up costing £118 million, which was about £50 million more than it should have cost. That project had seven project directors in seven years, which was fundamentally the fault of the project managers, not of the suppliers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said, project management is central. It is time that that was more widely understood and acted on in Whitehall. Successful project managers need to move to senior leadership and senior management positions in Whitehall to a greater extent.

Some years ago, the Cabinet Office published a report on the use of consultants in the public sector. In a previous incarnation, I used to work for the consulting industry and came to know the report rather well. On page 59, it points out:

> "In most effective organisations, management skills are high and they manage consultancy projects very tightly."

Again, just as it was possible to delete the reference to "IT" from my earlier quotation, it is possible to delete the word "consultancy" from this one and still be left with the idea that it is cardinally important to manage projects tightly.

The report went on:

> "To maximise ownership and accountability the same individual, where possible, will often see the project through from inception to implementation."

I think that the Government are alive to that approach, but it is a case of promulgating it through the Departments and making sure that people act on it. It is essential that the Government understand the central importance of project management in what they do rather than in what they say.

In the short time that I have been on the Committee, it has dealt with the loss to the Revenue from fraud on alcohol duty, which amounted to £858 million, the loss of £48 million as a result of the project for the National Probation Service and the collection of the benefit payment card cancellation, which cost more than £1 billion. That is nearly £2 billion, equivalent to nearly 1p on income tax. It is right for us as elected representatives to ask how much hard work had to go in to earn the money to pay the £2 billion of tax to the Exchequer which was then wasted.

The subject of risk management is closely tied up with that of project management. Paragraph (iii) of page 1 of the Committee's report, "Managing Risk in Government Departments states:

> "Risk management will only become a normal and integral part of the way departments and agencies operate if civil servants have the skills to identify and assess risks and take the action necessary to manage them."

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) pointed out the need to ensure that civil servants have the skills to identify risks.

The recent closure of individual learning accounts, which was alluded to earlier in the debate, raises the question: where was the risk management? We might ask where was the understanding, even, that any risks were involved. I sat through the proceedings of the Education and Skills Committee yesterday morning and listened to the evidence of officials. The Committee was concerned about the apparent absence of any recognition that there were serious risks that needed to be managed. The Audit Commission published a report called "Ghost in the Machine", on the need to watch out for computer fraud in the public sector, and found that, again, the question of risk management appeared to have been completely ignored.

My next point concerns where the Committee should begin to focus its attention in future. According to a newspaper report in December, fraud and waste cost the NHS between £7 billion and £10 billion a year. I asked the chief executive of the NHS about that last week when he came before the Committee to talk about the report on inappropriate adjustments to waiting lists. I recently received the transcript of the proceedings from the Committee Clerks, and the stenographer had typed the figures as £7 million and £10 million. I corrected them to billions, and then I thought that I had better attach a note to say that the figures should be in billions because the sums are so huge that people would think that I was not serious.

Seven to ten thousand million pounds is enough to pay for between 30 and 43 hospitals like the recently completed Norfolk and Norwich hospital. In fact, that hospital is still being built, but patients are moving into it. It is a PFI project on the borders of my constituency. I mention in parentheses that no one bothered to build a road to the hospital, so it is difficult to get to even though it is consuming £229 million of public money. My point is that between £7 billion and £10 billion goes south every year in the NHS, and if that estimate is not correct, we need to get to the bottom of it. Those losses have been happening for years, and the matter needs much closer attention than it currently appears to receive.

The Department for Social Security, now the Department for Work and Pensions, is another area that needs the Committee's steady attention. Indeed, we shall soon be looking at fraud in income support. I have before me the DSS appropriation accounts, and I am looking at the page on which the CAG sets out in a certificate his views on the accounts. Just as the auditors of a private company sign off accounts, the CAG signs off the DSS accounts, in this case to the House of Commons. He has qualified his opinion of these accounts, saying:

> "In my opinion, the appropriation account properly presents the expenditure and receipts . . . except for irregular expenditure arising from errors in benefit awards and from fraudulent benefit claims".

I tabled a parliamentary question to the Department for Work and Pensions asking in how many years since 1972 the DSS appropriation accounts had been qualified in that way. I was a little concerned when the Department phoned to ask me what was irregular expenditure, so I pointed to the CAG's certificate and said that that was precisely the term that he had used.

If one looks at the itemisation of that irregular expenditure, one finds that the DSS estimates that losses through error and fraud for income support and jobseeker's allowance in 1999–2000 were £1.32 billion, and in 1998–1999 the CAG noted that the Department had estimated that the combined level of fraud on income support and jobseeker's allowance could have been as high as £1.53 billion. Those are huge sums. If one considers only the health service and the DWP, one finds that huge sums are disappearing without the NAO being able to identify where they have gone because the Government are not managing the situation closely enough.

I share the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) that in recent years the Committee has spent about 4 per cent. of its time examining the accounts of the royal household. Although it is entirely appropriate that the royal household, which is the subject of great interest, is transparent, open and accountable and that its accounts are examined by the House, we should concentrate on going after the billions before we worry about the £5 million spent by the royal household. In any case, that figure is a reduction because the household is being extremely well managed, as was made clear in the evidence that we heard last week.

The final matter that I want to mention is less significant in macro-financial terms, but it is none the less of huge importance for many people. I refer to the sources of public funding for students. The NAO has recently produced a report on the subject, "Improving Student Achievement in Higher Education", on which we will shortly take evidence from the permanent secretary at the Department for Education and Skills.

The report contains an interesting chart that shows the 23 different sources of public funding from which students may seek support. The system is extraordinarily complex; for example, single parents who want a child care grant go to one source and those who are eligible for school meals grants go to another. One practically needs a PhD simply to understand the method of obtaining student support. I have raised the matter with the NAO, and I continue to encourage it to examine it.

The complexity of the system has direct implications for the economy, effectiveness and efficiency with which public money is deployed for student support. On the two occasions on which tranches of the student loan book were sold, it was at a very large discount to face value. The reason is that the quality of the student loan book is not very high—a lot of the debt is not repaid. As a result, the market requires a high discount before it will buy the debt.

As I said, last year the then Financial Secretary alluded at the end of his speech to the importance of focusing on collection systems as well as on systems for deploying public expenditure. If we could find a more economical, effective and efficient system for collecting the moneys that students owe, and there are many possible models, we would do a great service to the taxpayer but, equally importantly, make it much easier for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to go on to higher education.

Talking to people in my constituency on the doorstep and elsewhere has left me without the slightest doubt—I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House have had the same experience—that the extraordinary complexity of the student loan system has a big deterrent effect on a certain stratum of potential students who are on the cusp of deciding whether to go to university. That decision is as important for people from well-off backgrounds, but it is extraordinarily important to those who have not been used to getting into debt or who are from families in which no one has ever been to university. I hope that the NAO will take the issue seriously in future.

In conclusion, I would just like to say what a privilege it is to serve on the Committee. As a new Member I still have a lot to learn, but I have been thoroughly enjoying the Committee's work. I believe that it plays an absolutely central role in ensuring that the money that we take from taxpayers is accounted for in an open and transparent fashion. The House of Commons, in sanctioning the Committee, is doing a very fine job.

4.8 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on his speech and, in particular, on yet again mentioning his local hospital. He is truly adept at getting his local hospital into almost any speech and Committee sitting, and as a result he will no doubt get good coverage in the *Eastern Daily Press* tomorrow morning.

Like my hon. Friend and other Members who have spoken, I am extremely honoured to be a member of the Public Accounts Committee and to take part in this debate. I was a Government special adviser at the late lamented Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the days when "special" and "adviser" were not dirty words, which my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) will remember. I remember discussing with Ministers the introduction of multi-billion-pound BSE compensation schemes. I remember the permanent secretary telling the Ministers, "It's all right for you; you just have to go before the departmental Select Committees. I'm the one who has to appear before the PAC." It was at that moment that I decided that, should I get into Parliament, I would try to become a member of the PAC, as it seemed like the right place to be. I was delighted when, by the mysterious powers of selection that the House uses to choose members on Select Committees, I found myself serving on the PAC.

I genuinely feel that serving on the PAC has been about the most rewarding aspect of my work at Westminster since being elected. It is not only I, a Member for just seven months, who thinks so; refreshingly, the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who has been a Member for 15 years, takes the same view. That shows what interesting and valuable work the PAC does. Like other Committee members who have spoken, I pay tribute to the people who support our work including, obviously, the National Audit Office, the Comptroller and Auditor General and their large staff, but also the people who service the Committee directly. Everyone has paid tribute to Ken Brown, but I also thank Nicholas Wright, who has stepped into his shoes. The Committee Clerk has an important function in servicing our work, and I pay tribute to both men.

I thank Committee members, a couple of whom are still in the Chamber, for their friendly and generous welcome of new Committee members. The bipartisan—tripartisan, I should say, since the hon. Member for Newbury is here—nature of the Committee is its greatest strength. In our party-political world, the fact that all parties are represented on the Committee and that we agree reports together gives us enormous authority. Serving on the Committee is even more pleasant now that we are under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). He had a hard act to follow, it is fair to say, but he has done so with great aplomb and humour; I wholly approve of his relaxed and sceptical approach. I fully support people who, in seeking to reform

[Mr. George Osborne]

Parliament, say that the Chairman of the PAC should be paid the same as Cabinet Ministers and get a Government car. I very much hope that my hon. Friend bears that in mind when he is deciding whom to call in the next meeting.

Finally, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) for raising the profile of the PAC. He has gone from the difficult job of sorting out the civil service to the almost impossible job of sorting out my party, in which I wish him every success, since the future of Conservative Members depends on it. When I was thinking of applying to become a Committee member, he told me that it would be a crash course in government. He was right; even though I have previously worked as a Government adviser, it is fascinating to see different aspects of Government work in Committee.

In the seven months in which I have served on the Committee, we have examined the intricacies of air pollution policy and what it is like in the royal train, and we have witnessed some major successes. Despite problems with the hearing itself, the introduction of income tax self-assessment was an example of a massive project that was delivered on time and to budget, with savings in advance of those that were originally planned. I am afraid that we have also witnessed woeful failures, as Members have already mentioned. Most Committee members would probably agree that the most shocking and alarming hearing in recent months was the one last week on inappropriate adjustments to NHS waiting lists. That is a soft description of a shocking report on a gross abuse in the NHS.

From what I have seen as a Committee member—I hasten to add that I have served as one for only seven months—the PAC works best when it fulfils what, I imagine, was its primary function when it was established by Gladstone, and operates as a forensic watchdog on behalf of the taxpayer, with a deterrent effect on the misuse and waste of public money. Returning to my anecdote about my days as a special adviser, when accounting officers are forced to approve an item of Government expenditure, somewhere in the back of their mind they should ask whether they could justify it to the PAC if they had to. That is our primary function. When Customs and Excise allowed hundreds of millions of pounds to be lost in alcohol duty fraud in a period of just three years because of lax enforcement and inadequate controls, its chairman must account for its failure before the PAC.

We also looked at the NIRS2 information technology project and the cost of that overhaul. Tens of millions of pounds were spent because the people in charge did not anticipate changes to the welfare system; the project was not flexible enough to allow those changes to be built in without a massive sum being spent. As the hon. Member for Newbury said, by the time those people finally realised that that was problem, they had only one option, which was to stay with the existing contractor.

Those are examples of the primary function of the PAC. At the risk of creating more disunity in the Conservative party, I disagree with my hon. Friends the Member for South Norfolk and for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) about looking at relatively small items of Government expenditure, as well as large items. Whatever the size of the budget that accounting officers manage, the fact that they may have to appear before the PAC has a great deterrent effect.

Mr. Bacon: I do not believe that we should not look at small items. On the contrary, important lessons about openness, transparency, accountability and the right way to go about procurement and risk management can be learned from small cases just as much as large ones. I was merely pointing out that there are huge gaping holes in government which are not getting enough attention.

Mr. Osborne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I fully support what other Members have said about Lord Sharman's recommendations. One gaping hole is the BBC; another is the Financial Services Authority. It will be interesting to see if the Financial Secretary to the Treasury says something about the Sharman report in his reply, but perhaps we shall have wait even more months for a response. However, my hon. Friend made a good point.

The PAC is less successful when we try to get to grips with broad and nebulous issues, when there are not hard facts and figures, and there is not someone who is clearly accountable. I enjoyed our recent hearing on modern policy making in government—I enjoyed cross-examining the permanent secretary at the Cabinet Office about how many strategy units were looking at transport policy—but, nevertheless, we were not dealing with hard facts and a proper accounting officer. That was a less successful hearing. Perhaps we can look at that when we are sipping champagne and eating caviar on our away day; I hope that that away day does not come before the PAC, as we would have a bit of a constitutional crisis if it did.

There is a genuine issue at stake: how do the PAC and the National Audit Office stay on top of the Whitehall landscape, which is undoubtedly changing, with a profusion of targets, initiatives, such as the private finance initiative, strategy units, aspirations, agencies and so on? As someone said to me, it has more units than the British Army and more tsars than the Russian empire. The PAC must get to grips with that and do what we do best—concentrate ruthlessly on a certain target or agency, examine the facts and see whether the benefits outweigh the costs. We should get behind the rhetoric, find out whether public money is being well spent and pore over the accounts. We should draw general lessons from the particular, rather than trying to do it the other way round. We should bear that general point in mind when considering the future of our work.

The general lesson that has struck me most in the work of the PAC concerns the danger of arbitrary targets; I shall concentrate on that for the rest of my speech. There is a tendency in government—this is not a party political point, as this happened under previous Conservative Governments—to pluck arbitrary targets from the air and impose them on the civil service. Such targets often sound very nice—the obvious example is cutting waiting lists—but the result is often huge distortion in the way in which public services are delivered, as perverse incentives can emerge through attempts to meet them.

The Committee saw such effects during our recent consideration of air quality. The Government have a reasonable aspiration to reduce pollution in the atmosphere. No one could disagree with that aim, but in seeking to achieve it, they have produced nine arbitrary targets. They want to reduce carbon dioxide by X amount, particles by Y amount and so on. When one considers how the targets were arrived at, one sees that, in this particular case, those who were responsible for them used pretty uncertain emissions forecasts that depended on unreliable factors such as projected economic and transport growth and all sorts of things that people find difficult to predict. Using that information, they produced a forecast of emissions and fed it into a computer model that was in itself extremely complicated and prone to error.

Using that model, those involved formulated targets for air quality that depended in turn on variables such as the state of the weather. They then mish-mashed those targets with evidence of the health effects of pollution on individuals—more information that was pretty uncertain and unreliable—and suddenly produced nine targets. When they were doing that work, they had no idea about the targets' impact on society, the economy, public services, industry and so on. The one study that they carried out, which considered the cost of trying to achieve one of the targets in London alone, found that it would cost £100 million—and even then, the target would not be achieved.

That is the danger of picking arbitrary targets. As I said, we saw it most powerfully in terms of NHS waiting lists. As we all know, the waiting lists initiative imposed the arbitrary target of reducing in-patient waiting lists by 100,000. I shall not get into a party-political argument about whether that was the right thing to do. None the less, I should like to mention an anecdote of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who is a wily dog in the Committee and a great source of entertainment. He said that Tony Crosland had told him that Governments spend four years trying to cover up the mistakes that they make in the first six months in office.

It is tempting to apply that principle to the waiting list initiative, but I shall stick to the simple issue of its administration and deal with how it affected hospital admissions. The National Audit Office took a detailed look at the matter, on which the Committee has already had two hearings. The relevant report has been mentioned today. It is clear that immense pressure was exerted from the centre to ensure that the targets were met. It was probably political pressure. The targets gave rise to a range of very perverse incentives. Out-patient lists mushroomed. These so-called waiting lists for the waiting lists almost doubled to 450,000 people. Obviously, that happened because the pressure to produce the in-patient lists meant that people were pushed on to out-patient lists.

Even more seriously, the National Audit Office found that there had been a significant distortion of clinical priorities. In producing its report, it surveyed more than 550 consultants. It found that 52 per cent.—more than half of all those who were sampled—said that working to meet the NHS waiting list targets meant that they had to treat patients in a different order from that which their clinical condition properly indicated. Some 20 per cent. of consultants said that they gave such treatment regularly. Indeed, when the NAO report was published, one orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Gordon McLellan, from Oldchurch hospital in Essex, said:

> "I'm very pleased that the NAO has confirmed what consultants and patients have known for a very long time",

which was that clinical distortion was occurring.

Distortion was also evident at GP level. We considered in a hearing the effect of the North Staffordshire NHS trust giving £1,000 incentives for GPs to meet out-patient referral targets. In other words, there were incentives for GPs to stop referring people to hospitals so that those hospitals would have a better chance of meeting their waiting list targets. As is widely known, in at least nine trusts, that abuse went far beyond the distortion of clinical priorities and involved deliberate fraud and manipulation of waiting lists. Patients' records were altered and patients were inappropriately suspended. Some were not added to the list until the month of their appointment. Most scandalously, people were deliberately offered admission dates when it was known that holidays had been scheduled. The NAO found that at least 6,000 patients in nine trusts had been affected.

When the chief executive of the trust came before the Committee, I did not find his answers very satisfactory. Frankly, I did not find convincing his assurance that the practice that I have described was not widespread, but was limited to the nine trusts that the NAO happened to investigate. Indeed, when I tabled a written question to the Health Secretary asking about the number of trusts in which more than 10 per cent. of patients were suspended from the in-patient list at any one time, I was told that there were 35 such trusts, including my own, the East Cheshire NHS trust. In one trust in Walsall, more than 30 per cent. of patients are suspended from the list at any one time. Although the Health Secretary says that on-the-spot inspections will now take place, I think that the Department of Health should adopt the NAO report's recommendation and conduct a proper investigation into trusts where evidence—on, for example, suspension percentages—suggests that there is a likelihood that some distortion might have taken place.

Mr. Rendel: The hon. Gentleman mentioned one of the unsatisfactory answers that we received in the hearing. Does he agree that we received another unsatisfactory answer when we asked the chief executive whether there were any cases in which clinical authority was put behind management authority in priority in order to meet the targets? The chief executive said that he thought that no such case ever arose, but it seems entirely illogical to suggest that one can try to meet a management target of shortening waiting lists without making it more important than the clinical target.

Mr. Osborne: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Of course, that is exactly what happened in many hospitals and with many consultants, as they freely admit. The examples are legion.

In conclusion, the setting of arbitrary targets and the creation of arbitrary incentives in the civil service will give rise to a range of perverse incentives, manipulations and distortions. That is human behaviour. It is very bad for public administration and can cause a gross breach of public trust, as the NAO found in terms of waiting lists. That has been one of the most valuable lessons that I have learned while serving on the Committee. We should continue to focus on the proliferation of Government targets. We must see how they are working in practice, how they were arrived at and the cost of trying to meet them. I look forward to doing that work and much other work on the Committee.

4.28 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): It is a great pleasure to respond to the debate on behalf of the Opposition and to congratulate the Committee. In particular, I congratulate its Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). I also congratulate those who have spoken: the hon. Members for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) and for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), and my hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). I want to begin by reassuring them, as some of them expressed concern about whether they might have been speaking for too long. We must remember that it was the late Mr. Gladstone himself who founded the Public Accounts Committee. He would have regarded even the 60-minute speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough as a mere oratorical morsel and an introduction to some great speech that would have flown from his lips in the days when he stood in the Chamber.

I want to add to the plaudits that many hon. Members have given my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), the former Chairman of the PAC, and to the Committee staff, its former Clerk, and the Comptroller and Auditor General and his staff—the 750 accountants whom the hon. Member for City of Durham mentioned. Their expertise and skill enable members of the Committee, as they will be the first to acknowledge, to place senior civil servants under intense and searching scrutiny in open session.

The PAC's work could be summed up as demonstrating the true ethic of public service. The speeches that we have heard from all parts of the Chamber show a commitment to search for examples of success, but also of failure, in order to seek remedies so that the people who send us here to represent them receive better quality public services in future.

The debate revealed some interesting lessons from the PAC's experience that are relevant to the development of the Select Committee system. As several hon. Members have pointed out, the PAC is bipartisan or, indeed, tripartisan. Since taking on my current Front-Bench responsibilities, I have attended several PAC sessions. However, unlike the Financial Secretary, I have to be content with a seat in the one-and-nines at the rear. I have noticed that questions from Committee members are always courteous, but also insistent, relentless and thorough.

The reports of the Committee and of the National Audit Office are written in lucid English, and render even the most abstruse topics of public administration comprehensible to inexpert minds such as mine. Fashionable jargon, such as "synergy" and "roll-out", is thankfully absent. The Committee is always well briefed. As the hon. Member for City of Durham said, the PAC has clout because it has resources, back-up and expertise that are not available to the departmental Select Committees. Perhaps hon. Members might like to reflect on that.

The need for a partnership between the PAC and the departmental Select Committees is a theme of the Sharman report, to which several PAC members have alluded. That message was implicit in several speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton spoke of the enormous variety of inquiries that the NAO and the PAC carried out. The hon. Member for Newbury also drew attention to that. When I was asked to respond to the debate and went to pick up the relevant papers from the Vote Office, I was aghast to receive a pile of about 20 different reports. However, as my hon. Friend said, they provide a crash course in the workings of government.

The PAC cannot be expected to do everything, however, despite the undoubted importance and wide-ranging nature of its work. That suggests that there should be a method of bringing together the work of the PAC, the departmental Select Committees and, for example, the Environmental Audit Committee. When my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton mentioned arbitrary environmental targets, it occurred to me that that was being considered not only by the PAC but by the Environmental Audit Committee, albeit from a slightly different perspective.

Several hon. Members referred to the PAC's report on discharging patients from hospitals. That is standard PAC territory; good management makes a genuine difference to handling such discharges.

Geraint Davies: The NAO has a remit that covers almost everything, whereas that of the PAC is to focus on specific items that we believe to be problematic. Hence we are able to cope with a vast amount of work without support.

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. I am the last to argue that the PAC should try to narrow its interest or inquiries. In the previous Parliament, I served with the hon. Member for City of Durham on the Education and Employment Committee, and I share some of his frustration about the way in which members of a departmental Select Committee could labour for a long time on a report but feel that the effort was, if not worthless, then ignored by the Government of the day, of whichever political colour. I contrast the Government's approach to departmental Select Committee reports with that to PAC interrogations and reports. By "Government", I do not simply mean Ministers.

Bed management can make a big difference to hospital discharging. My hon. Friends have pointed out other aspects, and the availability of care beds was the most telling example. Such considerations inevitably lead to policy; they are not confined to management. There are therefore roles for different Committees in trying to get to grips with complicated problems.

I want to tackle two or three themes that have emerged from the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough drew attention to the PAC's prime duty of trying to monitor and improve the quality of financial management throughout the public sector. I agree with the importance that he placed on that task and his strictures on the need for timeliness in providing accounts. Unless that is done, no adequate scrutiny or check can be carried out on the quality of the financial management.

Several hon. Members spoke about their belief that the civil service does not always rate project management experience as highly as policy experience. My days as a special adviser go back a few years. Then, the highest fliers in a department tended to be given jobs in policy-making, not management divisions. I hope that the Financial Secretary can say that that is no longer the case and that a mix of policy and management roles is regarded as a desirable part of the most talented civil servants' career paths.

Good management can make a real difference to the quality of service, as we have seen in the Committee's reports on hospital admissions and bed management, on hip replacements, on managing the reduction in the number of vacant family quarters in the armed services and on the administration of the Siemens partnership with the Government.

This raises a difficult question, however. When I was listening to the comments of the hon. Member for Croydon, Central about hygiene in hospitals, and the need to crack down on the problem of hospital-acquired infection, I felt—though I may have interpreted him wrongly—that he was placing a great deal of faith in central direction and centrally imposed targets. There clearly need to be proper scrutiny and audit, but any Government will need to strike the difficult balance between trying to impose targets and standards with the noble aim of driving up the quality of service that the public experience, and avoiding the risk of sapping the ability or willingness of those who manage the services locally to take initiatives to innovate and to develop a culture of responsibility down at the sharp end. There is always a risk of eroding a sense of local ownership of those responsibilities for the highest possible quality of service delivery.

Geraint Davies: I was simply trying to make the point that minimum standards of hygiene are essential to avoid a massive outbreak of infection that could kill many people. We found substantial variation in those standards, and we need to raise them. That being said, there are clearly grounds for local enterprise and innovation to push forward the best practice benchmark.

Mr. Lidington: I am all in favour of disseminating best practice. The problem is that it is not enough simply to announce national targets or standards, if people do not have the commitment and sense of ownership at local level to drive up those standards and to take pride in delivering them to those whom they are responsible for serving.

That leads me on to the way in which the Committee follows up the reports that it produces. We have heard good examples of marked improvements in the quality of public services as a result of what the Committee has said in its reports. One example was the Committee's report on hip replacement, which helped to persuade the Government to set up a national joint registry. The Government should be given credit for responding in that way.

There have, however, been other examples in which a long time has elapsed between the problems being identified and action being taken. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough referred to the Public Trust Office, in which problems were identified in 1994, and to the fact that no effective action had been taken five years later. The same criticism could be made of the inaction of the Housing Corporation after problems with the Focus housing association were identified in the early 1990s.

I hope that the Government—or, perhaps, the Committee, if it chooses to do so—will follow up issues such as the management of finances in further education colleges, and the efficiency of management in the National Blood Service. In the latter case, the crisis in the service happened in 1997, and the PAC reported in April 2001. The Government response in October last year said that the National Blood Service had, at last, agreed a time scale for negotiations with its staff on changing terms and conditions, to bring about the improvements to the standards of service that donors deserved and which the PAC had supported; but that it would take up to two years—even after agreement had been reached—to bring those changes into effect. That means that perhaps seven years will have elapsed between the crisis arising and the changes being put into effect to tackle the shortcomings identified in 1997.

I want to say a few words about the Sharman report, which is relevant to the sixth report of the Committee for 2000-01. I hope that the Financial Secretary will say something about this when he winds up the debate. It is nearly two years since the Government commissioned Lord Sharman to carry out his review, and nearly a year since he delivered the report. It is not unfair to ask the Government how much longer they intend to keep us waiting for their response. That response will be a big test of the Government's commitment to striking a fairer balance between the Executive and Parliament. At the risk of introducing a note of partisanship, I think that they have so far failed that test on issues such as the selection of members of parliamentary Select Committees, their failure to accept the report of the Liaison Committee, and the reform of the second Chamber. I hope that their response to Sharman will give them the opportunity to pull back some of the ground that they have lost.

I support the call from my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough for the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee to have access, as of right, to non-departmental public bodies. That would sit well with the suggestion made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) a few days ago, when he called for the heads of major NDPBs to be subject to interrogation and confirmation hearings by parliamentary Select Committees before taking up their appointments.

I also agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough about bringing the BBC within the scope of NAO and PAC inquiries. It seems logical that, so long as licence fee payers continue to pay what amounts to a form of poll tax, the BBC should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny in the way that my hon. Friend advocated.

I hope that the Minister shows us that, on this issue at least, the Government are on the side of greater accountability and greater openness. That is the right way to go and the way to secure the qualitative improvement in public services that we all want to achieve.

4.48 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): This excellent and wide-ranging debate does credit to the breadth, depth and quality that one associates with the Committee and its reports. The Committee has a proud tradition, and Gladstone has been mentioned. He often is when the traditions of the House are discussed—and with good cause, as the Public Accounts Committee is one of his great creations.

Those traditions were undoubtedly embellished by two Members who have chaired the Committee during my membership of the House: Lord Sheldon, one of my

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

predecessors as Financial Secretary, and the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis). Both gave distinguished service. The task of chairing the Committee now falls to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who is, if I may say so, ably suited for the responsibility.

I say that having had considerable experience of the hon. Gentleman over a long period. In the 1980s and 1990s, he and I spent many hours in Committee with my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who sends his apologies for being absent. He must attend an urgent constituency function, so he has left for Durham. We have all had the opportunity to observe each other at close quarters and, having listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech, I am bound to say that it did not disappoint in any way.

Membership of the Committee, and certainly its chairmanship, requires an acute, sceptical, inquiring and independent mind, which the hon. Member for Gainsborough has always had. He has a further quality that is important when considering such subjects as those dealt with by the Committee—a sense of humour. Without that, one simply could not get through.

This afternoon has been an eye opener in a number of ways. I have been exposed to two of the new boys on the Committee—the hon. Members for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). Both show the qualities that I have described as being essential to Committee membership. The hon. Member for South Norfolk showed his skills as a wordsmith. Indeed, I note from "Dod's" that he founded a company dedicated to words, so his threat to detain us long was taken seriously.

The hon. Member for Tatton has hopes for the fare at the away day. Although a member of the Committee, I do not seem to have been invited. Perhaps the fare will be too rich for my taste, but not rich enough for the hon. Gentleman, as I note, again from "Dod's", that he is related to a delicatessen on his mother's side. That might explain the nature of his appetites. By the sound of the Chairman's pre-emptive strike in terms of extending the Committee's scope to the Financial Services Authority, the royal household and the BBC, it will be an interesting away day and we look forward to the outcome of the discussions.

On a serious note, Treasury Ministers and civil servants owe the Committee and those who serve it a debt of gratitude. On behalf of my Department, I associate myself with the gratitude and respect offered to the Clerk and the staff, particularly the outgoing Clerk, who gave a great deal of service over many years to the Committee and the wider public. Liaison between the Committee, its staff and various Departments of State is vital to the success of its work.

The Committee benefits from the assistance of the Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn, and his staff at the National Audit Office. Their financial audit work and value for money studies are key aspects of the structure of accountability that we are all concerned to promote. Their professional approach is welcomed by all.

The Government are committed to improving the management of Departments. The Committee and the hon. Member for Gainsborough have been receptive to working with us to raise standards, and we look forward to a continuing and positive dialogue in the future. The Chairman and members of the Committee came to the Treasury a few months ago. It was an enormously helpful exercise, and I hope that we will be able to repeat it. The Government welcome opportunities to engage the Committee. We have a common agenda on public services, and a common interest in ensuring that the public get value for money, in promoting best practice and in encouraging improvements in departmental management processes and information.

This year, the Committee has inquired into a wide range of areas, which has resulted in many valuable recommendations. Its recommendations have undoubtedly helped to improve the delivery of public services, and stand as a record of the efforts of members of the Committee.

I shall deal in some detail with the report on "The Management and Control of Hospital Acquired Infection in Acute NHS Trusts in England", which is of particular importance and a tribute to the Committee's work. I was interested in the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) in that regard. His speech added to our understanding of the thought processes behind that report, and cast a searching light on some of the challenges for the health service.

The Committee tellingly observed:

> "Hospital hygiene is crucial to preventing hospital acquired infection, including basic practice such as handwashing. We find it inexcusable that compliance with guidance on handwashing is so poor."

Listening to my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, Central and for City of Durham, I was struck by the fact that, over the years, with the decline of the Nightingale approach—the strict, disciplinarian, nurse-led approach to ward management—there has been growing concern about the increasing number of outbreaks of infection due to something as simple as whether nurses have washed their hands. Nurses believed that they had a disciplinary role in relation to everyone on the ward, whether they were a visitor, a patient, a doctor or a consultant. I cannot help but feel that the absence of that mindset has contributed to the failures that the Committee has vividly highlighted. It is important that the questions and analysis that the Committee asked and delivered continue to be applied to such problems.

The Committee has reported on the NHS no fewer than five times in the period covered by these reports. That is a telling indication of how far the Committee shares with the Government a concern to improve that key public service.

I was particularly struck by the Committee's report following the valedictory appearance of Sir Alan Langlands, the former NHS chief executive. I had the pleasure of serving in the Department of Health as an Under-Secretary of State during his tenure. He was a dedicated public servant and, in many respects, an inspirational leader. The report strikes an excellent balance between recognition of the progress being made to improve the NHS—it is undoubtedly being made, and we should pay tribute to it, as Members have indeed been good enough to do—and the need to identify, clearly and frankly, areas that still need attention.

It goes without saying, although in fact it needs to be said, that all the Committee's recommendations are considered fully and almost all of them are implemented.

As the Committee would expect, however, Departments and other public bodies do not and should not wait for its recommendations before acting, as many options for improvement will already have been identified by the preceding NAO report. A case in point is the 41st report, entitled "The Gaming Board: Better Regulation". The Gaming Board took full account of the NAO's report as soon as it was published in June 2000, and set in hand appropriate measures.

The particular power of the Committee's own hearings and subsequent reports lies in the fact that they serve as a real stimulus to Departments and other public bodies to consider and, where desirable, implement the options for improvement identified by the NAO—which has been rightly dubbed Parliament's financial watchdog. Members in all parts of the House, particularly the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), emphasised that the NAO was an instrument of Parliament. That is an important point, which ought to give the wider public a sense of the significance of the Committee's work.

The wider public will not, of course, see reports of today's debate that reflect its importance, because the press are simply not interested in debates of this kind. Both press and public, however, are interested in the Committee reports themselves, and in what the Committee's Chairman and members say while they are being published.

Mr. Bacon: I was interested in what the Financial Secretary said about the NAO being responsible to Parliament. According to the front page of the NAO's website, the NAO is totally independent of Government, and reports to Parliament. I therefore find it odd that the web address is "nao.gov.uk". That may seem a small point, but would not "nao.parliament.uk" make more sense? Will the Financial Secretary suggest the change to the CAG?

Mr. Boateng: That is an interesting point. Given the NAO's independence and its accountability to Parliament, I am not sure that it is for me to make the suggestion, but no doubt the NAO will take account of it. I must confess that I have not looked at the website; I must do so. The hon. Gentleman's point is perfectly reasonable, and will appeal to the techies and anoraks among us—not that I disparage in any way the hon. Gentleman's close attention to the details of websites.

The challenge is to ensure that the public recognise the impact of the work of the NAO and the Committee on the minds of public servants and Ministers.

We have had an interesting insight—I look forward to more—from the hon. Member for Tatton, who at the tender age of 24 had such wisdom and insight into the ways of the world that he was able to be a special adviser to a Conservative Minister. That may explain rather a lot, but he gave an insight from a political adviser's perspective of how the anticipation of an appearance before the Committee concentrated the minds of senior civil servants wonderfully. As a Minister with a rather different perspective, I share his view that the anticipation of an appearance does just that. Importantly, it gives the Department and Ministers an opportunity to think again and where necessary to make changes when it is clear that things are not going as they should.

References have been made to the probation service and to information technology. I was prisons Minister in the latter part of that period. I well recall that, in some ways, the Committee's work and the NAO report came as a great relief, because they broke what had tended to become a rather internalised cycle of denial at the Department: that things were not as bad as some outside who had to do the work on the ground—probation officers—said it was. The NAO report and the work of the Committee played an enormously important part in ensuring that the changes were made that now enable us to deliver to the probation service the sort of IT back-up that it needs. It is important that we help the public to understand that, and I put on the record my gratitude as a Minister for the work that the Committee does.

I commend the way in which the Committee comes back to check on progress in various areas where it has had concerns. That was particularly important in relation to the 13th report, entitled "The Refinancing of the Fazakerley PFI Prison Contract", in which I had particular reason to be interested as prisons Minister. I am a great believer—I make no apology for it, although I know that this view is not held by everyone—in the role that the private sector can play in the delivery of effective and humane prison services. The Committee's concern over the refinancing operation contributed to the drawing up of guidance for a more equal sharing of the gains of refinancing between the public and the private sector partners. That was to the benefit of the sort of partnership between the public and private sectors that we want.

It was recognised that a problem needed addressing. It was addressed, and as a result the credibility of those partnerships has been enhanced. That was because the Committee worked in the way that it did. Its work and the public accountability that it enhances are rightly admired across the world. Indeed, that has been reflected in the speeches this afternoon.

The role of accounting officer is pivotal to our structure of accountability and ensures that the head of each organisational hierarchy is personally accountable for its activities. This year, a number of officers have appeared before the Committee on a variety of issues. The Committee's reports have helped accounting officers to identify failings and gaps in departmental control systems. That is important, and it acts as a continuing driver for improvement. We must ensure that we learn the lessons of the past and improve the way in which the Government do business.

For example, recommendations from the Committee have contributed significantly to changes in procurement practice and guidance. Those hon. Members of all parties who spoke about procurement and its importance were absolutely spot on. I know that procurement is of particular interest to the hon. Member for South Norfolk. I agree with him that, when we look back at the past decade or so, it will be clear that Governments have had to improve their procurement strategies. It has been a learning process, and the Committee has contributed to that.

Several hon. Members referred to procurement in relation to the private finance initiative. I believe that the PFI has a real role to play, but I suspect—in fact I know—that my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham is more sceptical. However, it is clear that the number of NHS beds that is delivered is entirely unrelated to the method of procurement. Whatever form of decision is taken with regard to the delivery of a new hospital or

[Mr. Boateng]

facility, it is clear that there has always been a debate and a tension about the number of beds that should be provided.

That calculation can be got wrong under the PFI, but also under the old methods by which public investment was delivered. The important thing is to improve the procurement process, as a robust analysis will ensure that what is needed is delivered. We are still on a learning curve, but I am happy to say that the Government are getting better at procurement. That will benefit the public, and is likely to lead to the achievement of even greater value for money.

Mr. Bacon: The Financial Secretary spoke of the robust analysis of PFI projects. In the December 2000 debate, the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) said that he was in favour of mortgaging assets in certain circumstances. He said that that had enabled many people to own their homes who otherwise would not have been able to. However, does the Financial Secretary agree that, when complex financial engineering is involved, a robust analysis must ensure that matters such as the discount rate are chosen correctly? For example, the Treasury is about to reoccupy a building that has been refurbished. The discount rate for that project was ludicrously high at 6 per cent. That had a fundamental effect on the apparent public sector comparator.

Mr. Boateng: I am afraid that I am unable to agree with the hon. Gentleman. I fear that he may have shattered the happy mood of consensus that we were seeking to develop in the debate. However, there will always be a discussion, both post and ad hoc, about whether one has got it right. Time will tell. I think that the new Treasury building is great value for money. If the hon. Gentleman comes along to the opening, he will see for himself. Indeed, the whole Committee should come, but I fear that the fare will be much too simple for the hon. Member for Tatton.

I should like to say a few words about resource accounting and budgeting. In December 2000, following the commencement of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000, the system of planning, controlling, monitoring and accounting public expenditure has moved on to a resource basis. That was the basis of some of the discussion when the Committee visited us in the Treasury building.

From the outset, the Committee has supported and encouraged the more commercial approach brought about by the implementation of RAB, acknowledging that it should lead to improvements in the clarity and quality of financial information available to Parliament and assist with departmental management. As we reach the end of this financial year, we are seeing an increase in the number of ways in which the benefits of RAB are starting to be realised. In particular, improvements have been seen in departmental asset management, including disposals of surplus items—a massive task that would never have been achieved without the requirements of RAB, including the need to account for assets held.

Resource budgeting is being expanded for the coming spending review—SR2002—representing a step change in the management of some £240 billion of Government-owned assets, better incentives for managers at all levels and a better measure of the full cost of providing public services.

Mr. Rendel: Since the Minister has got on to the subject of disposing of assets, I wonder whether he knows whether the Passport Office has yet disposed of the 300 umbrellas that it purchased to protect those who were having to wait outside in long queues. When we asked why it was keeping them, the reply was, "You never know, there might one day be a power cut and everyone would have to go outside and wait in the rain—if there happened to be a storm at the same time as a power cut." That seemed a slightly dubious reason for keeping the umbrellas.

Mr. Boateng: I must admit that the fate of the immigration and nationality directorate's umbrellas has not been brought to my attention. However, I promise to write to the hon. Gentleman about it—even as I speak, urgent inquiries are doubtless being made as to their whereabouts. I was in an office on the opposite side of the road at the time, and I recall that they came in very handy. One hopes and believes that they will never be needed again for that purpose, but who knows? In the scenario painted by the hon. Gentleman, they might be. We will certainly write to him about that.

There is more to do in taking resource budgeting forward. It will place the UK among world leaders in public finance reform. There is a great deal of interest, not least among our European partners, in the progress that we are making in this area. I want to pay tribute to the permanent secretary and Treasury staff who have been engaged in this process, and to the front-line staff who are delivering it.

The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and I recently visited the Customs and Excise facility at Southend. I saw the area where mail is received and the envelopes opened for VAT cheques. It was fascinating to talk to the dedicated and committed staff. Many of them had worked there for many years, man and boy—and, indeed, young woman and pensioner, because some had come back after retiring. They shared with me the complete revolution that had resulted from the introduction of a measure to deal with incoming envelopes. They were sorting out cheques that needed to be accelerated and banked immediately because of their size.

There was great attention to the imperative of getting that money into the bank as quickly as possible. So when one listens to complex and technically challenging expositions as to what resource accounts and budgeting is, one should never forget that people are doing the business on the ground to deliver the benefits that it is so demonstrably delivering.

Mr. George Osborne: I am interested in the Minister's experience in Southend. During the months that I have served on our Committee I have long felt that it would be useful to have not just the permanent secretary of the Health Department, but also a doctor and a nurse to check what was going on, or not just the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence, but also a soldier. Perhaps we could look at that in the away day.

Mr. Boateng: This away day gets more and more interesting. Quite how the top brass will take to a squaddie being dragged along with them to a Committee is a different matter. Joking apart, there is a serious point about following through the changes that occur at that level to their logical consequence on the ground.

There is, of course, more to do. The resource accounts for 2001-02 will be qualified for a small number of Departments and we need to work hard to achieve the timeliness of accounting information that is routine in the private sector. The remaining problems arising are being resolved and we are confident that all of the benefits of RAB will be realised. I look forward to that and to seeing the impact of increased and improved information on the work of the Committee in due course. For perhaps the first time it will be possible to hold Departments to account for items such as their management of assets and working capital movements. We are beginning to see the fruits of that, as was made clear in the course of my exchange with the hon. Member for Newbury.

I just want to say a few words about whole of Government accounts. Building on the principles adopted for resource accounts, the Government are moving rapidly towards the production of whole of Government accounts. Akin to commercial group accounts, whole of Government accounts will bring together all areas of Government work in a single account. The intention is to present a true and fair view of the Government's activities, providing a complete overview of the public finances for the first time. That will further improve accountability to Parliament and taxpayers.

The Government are introducing whole of Government accounts in two stages. Accounts bringing together the activities of central Government bodies will be published in 2003-04, following dry run presentations in this financial year and 2002-03. Whole of Government accounts with full public sector coverage are to be published from 2005-06. We look forward to the continuing contribution of the PAC and NAO to the development of whole of Government accounts and to working with them on these matters.

I shall say a few words on performance reporting. The Government have introduced significant developments in the provision of information about departmental performance. Tough, outcome-focused targets are set for each Department and are published in departmental public service agreements. The targets need to be met by Departments in return for additional investment. We had some interesting exchanges about targets this afternoon. The next spending review will build on the approach, setting targets focused on the Government's key priorities, linked to a prudent allocation of resources. We need to make sure that the information that underpins reporting on targets is reliable. We think that the introduction of independent validation would help to provide assurance on the quality and integrity of data systems. That is the importance of the working group established by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to consider arrangements for improvements in the validation of PSA data systems. The National Audit Office, the Office for National Statistics and the Audit Commission have made valuable contributions to the group and the conclusions of the work will be announced in the Government response to Lord Sharman's recommendations in his report, "Holding to Account", about which I shall say more in a moment.

Mr. Rendel: Does the Minister accept, in line with earlier remarks, that the law of unintended effect, which hits Government so often in all sorts of ways, is particularly likely to have a deleterious effect when the Government are setting targets? The Government set a target for one thing and almost invariably in order to meet that target create another problem.

Mr. Boateng: I would not say "almost invariably". There is that danger and it must be guarded against in the setting of the targets. That is why information and analysis before the targets are set is so important. That danger is there, and one would be foolish to deny it. However, I would question the suggestion that targets are plucked out of blue air—or blue sky.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): Thin air.

Mr. Boateng: Thin air; I am much obliged to my hon. Friend. I have been present in the course of the conception, gestation and birth of targets and sometimes it is a prettier sight than others, but they are never plucked out of thin air. They never just appear out of the blue skies. They are the products of a laboured exercise. The important thing is to ensure that we get the mechanics of that exercise right—that we feed in the right information, conduct the right analysis and ensure that the evidence that underpins the targets is fit for the purpose. That is not always the case, and it is sometimes necessary to revisit them. However, the hon. Gentleman makes a fair point of principle and it is important to have regard to it.

I said that I would say something about Lord Sharman's report and hon. Members on both sides would be disappointed if I did not. As my predecessor—now the Minister for School Standards—and colleagues explained in debate in the House and the other place during the passage of what became the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000, the Government have never objected in principle to extensions to the statutory powers of the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to audit and access. The importance of independent audit is well recognised as a key accountability tool, and access to information associated with an audit is essential for the Comptroller and Auditor General. Our concerns focused on the practicalities of change, particularly how to avoid undue burdens for the private sector if non-statutory access rights became statutory, and the need for assurances about the quality of audit if competitive influences were removed.

The Government welcome Lord Sharman's recognition of those concerns and the need for them to be addressed through protocols between the Government and the Comptroller and Auditor General. Following publication of the report, my officials have had productive discussions with the Comptroller and Auditor General's officials on the content of those protocols. I am enormously grateful for the constructive way in which the NAO has approached those discussions. In the light of the assurances that we have received, I hope that it will be possible to make a positive response to the recommendations.

We are grateful to Lord Sharman for considering audit and access, and for his views on accountability more widely. We have taken time to consider Lord Sharman's recommendations, as they do relate to issues that were for a long time a source of intense and stimulating debate.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) will be glad to hear that our consideration of the recommendations is now nearing completion and my right hon. Friend the

[Mr. Boateng]

Chief Secretary hopes to publish the Government's response to Lord Sharman's report shortly. We hope to respond positively.

Mr. Bacon: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: I think that I have given way sufficiently.

I do hope that I have given hon. Members, particularly the sceptics among them—they are members of the Committee so, by definition, they are all sceptics—the sense that we do intend to respond positively. I trust that our response will signal the end to long-running disagreements over many years, during the terms of office of many Governments of all political persuasions, between Government and Parliament.

It has been an important debate. It has not been possible in my response to cover all the arguments that hon. Members made. They made some very important points about risk management. We are glad that the Committee continues to welcome the improvement that has been made in risk management processes in Government. We are continuing to improve the management of risk and to develop statements of internal control.

A progress monitoring exercise is being planned for the spring to assess progress in developing internal control systems and to identify issues on which Departments will need further support and guidance to help them to complete the effective implementation of that policy. The Committee's role has been enormously important. It has brought to light valuable evidence of strengths and weaknesses, and it has played a similar role in the promotion of innovation. Risk management is crucial if we are to promote innovation in the delivery of public services. If everyone is risk averse, necessary improvements are not likely to occur.

Our long-term goal is to deliver world-class public services through investment and reforms that ensure that taxpayers receive good value for money. The work of the Committee and the contribution of its Chairman, members, advisers, staff and Clerk—with the NAO—is crucial to achieve those goals and, indeed, to the very purposes of Parliament. Scrutiny is absolutely central to Parliament's role; it drives improvement and helps to ensure that regard to regularity, propriety and value for money is given in all aspects of Government projects and operations.

We are enormously grateful not only to hon. Members for the contributions that they have made today and to those hon. Members who have taken the time to attend for all or part of the debate, but to the Committee for its on-going work. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the Committee, to being challenged by its scrutiny and to the public receiving an improved service as a result.

5.32 pm

Mr. Leigh: With the leave of the House, may I briefly thank, on behalf of the members of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) and the Financial Secretary, who has shown his characteristic skill and humour, for summing up this debate? I apologise to the Financial Secretary for the fact that he has not been invited to our away day. I will certainly issue an invitation if he can promise to turn from gamekeeper to poacher for a day.

I am reminded of a recent conversation that I had with an NAO official. I was double checking that none of the illustrative questions prepared for Members are ever given to permanent secretaries or their staff. Of course, the members of the Committee are independent; they ask their own questions. The NAO official, who used to work for the Treasury, told me with great glee that the Clerk of the Committee once made a mistake and sent the illustrative questions to the Financial Secretary, and that they were then promptly distributed all around Whitehall. Although the Financial Secretary is a member of the Committee, we have an interesting relationship with him. We have a very good dialogue.

I do not think that any hon. Member has thanked those who are currently sitting in the place to which no reference must be made. They always attend PAC meetings. Sometimes, after perhaps an hour or two when they have not had to say anything, a Member will fix an eagle eye on them and ask a question, and they immediately come up with a good response.

I thank the Financial Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury—the Opposition spokesman—and the hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. I thank the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who feels so strongly about the NHS, and the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies), who dealt so expertly with the PFI, the NHS and the railways.

I thank my two new colleagues—my hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne)—who have been so keen and determined to get to the nitty-gritty. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton said, they have led the way in the charge against arbitrary targets. My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk is, of course, a management consultant, so he is ideally placed in this Committee.

I also thank those hon. Members who have not spoken today—my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), who listened carefully to the debate, and the hon. Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins), who attended the earlier part of the debate. I particularly thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams)—he really is a friend. His work is a tremendous tribute to the House. He has given a generation of service to what is not a bipartisan but tripartisan Committee, as shown by the welcome presence of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) in the debate. Without the work of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West, the Committee would not work in the way that it does.

I read a report in a national newspaper that is usually sceptical—indeed, downright rude—about Parliament. It said that the Committee was one part of Parliament that was deeply impressive. I hope that, in the time that I am the Committee's Chairman, I can maintain that fine tradition.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the 38th to 47th Reports of the Committee of Public Accounts of Session 1999–2000, of the 1st to 16th Reports of Session 2000–01, and of the Treasury Minutes on these Reports (Cm 5021, 5071, 5078, 5127, 5201 and 5261).

Fair Trade Chocolate

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger]*

5.35 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): May I say how pleased I am to have secured this dabate and to be able to talk about my involvement with Fairtrade chocolate and cocoa, which began by chance. I had gone for a break at lunchtime in Victoria street and went to The Body Shop to purchase a few cosmetics. However, I succumbed to the temptation of what I believe is called an impulse buy. Next to the cash machine was a cleverly sited row of chocolate bars and, as I am a self-confessed chocoholic, my hand strayed towards them. I added one to my purchases.

It did not take long to investigate the contents of the bar. It was so good that I was prompted to investigate the wrapper and I then discovered that Divine chocolate was a Fairtrade product which is supported by Christian Aid and Comic Relief as well as The Body Shop and the Department for International Development. It is the product of The Day Chocolate Company, which is based in the United Kingdom and is part-owned by a co-operative of Ghanaian cocoa growers.

Later that day, while having a cup of tea—Fairtrade, of course—with my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey), I asked her whether she had come across fairly traded chocolate. She knew it well, having helped to launch it in her constituency. In fact, there are "Divine cities" that co-operate with The Day Chocolate Company to market the product the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, but I am not sure whether Bristol is one. As we left a cafeteria in the House, we put a comment in its book. "We have Fairtrade tea and coffee. What about Fairtrade chocolate? Divine chocolate is yummy!" Shortly after, a note appeared to say that the brand was "being investigated" and, in February 2001, Divine chocolate arrived next to the cash tills in the House of Commons. An early-day motion on the Order Paper welcomed its advent and quickly attracted signatures from many hon. Members.

Fairtrade has a good and growing track record across a range of products sourced from countries across the world. The fair trade movement is well under way in the United Kingdom and there are currently more than 90 Fairtrade Mark products. They range from bananas to tea and chocolate. In fact, a recent survey suggests that the majority of people would prefer to buy Fairtrade Mark products.

Backed up by the Fairtrade Foundation, the Fairtrade Mark is an independent guarantee of terms and conditions. They include a guarantee of a secure price above market price for the raw material, an extra social premium, long-term trading contracts, decent health and safety conditions and a commitment to support community programmes aimed at empowering farmers to increase their abilities to be self-sufficient.

On a visit to Ghana this summer, I learned the story of Kuapa Kokoo, the farmers' co-operative that produces the cocoa used in Divine chocolate, and how it has taken the concept of fair trade a step further. Kuapa Kokoo is linked to The Day Chocolate Company in the UK and owns one third of the company's shares. This unique arrangement means that the producers are able to play an active role in decisions about how Divine is produced and sold as well as to share in the profits. Consequently, cocoa growers will receive more than the fair trade premium and very soon, when the company reaches the profit stage, the profit from the end product will start to flow back to Kuapa Kokoo and its farmers.

Cocoa is at the heart of Ghana's economy and everything has developed on the back of it—its roads, hospitals and schools. In the late 1970s, the price of cocoa plummeted by two thirds. Droughts and fires in the early 1980s caused further damage and the economy was devastated. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund intervened and advised that liberalisation of the cocoa market would be necessary to rescue the economy. Kuapa Kokoo was a response to the Ghanaian Government's policy to liberalise the internal market in 1992 in response to the advice of the World Bank and the IMF.

Farmers, led by the late Nana Frimpong Abebrese, and with help from the British non-governmental organisation, Twin, were behind the move. Abebrese was the farmers representative on the executive board of the directors of the Ghanaian cocoa marketing board. He was concerned about what would happen to the cocoa farmers after liberalisation of the cocoa market, fearing greatly the entry of the private market. He saw the need for the farmers to have their own organisation to participate in cocoa trading and set out to establish that with the help of Twin, which provided the finance for Kuapa's establishment, as well as technical support and contact with the fair trade partners in Europe.

By trading their own cocoa, the farmers are able to manage the selling process more efficiently than the Government agents, and thus receive more of the profits. Kuapa Kokoo prides itself on transparency and democracy and sets itself high standards in its business practices. It uses accurate weighing scales that can be understood by the farmers and all the decisions affecting farmers are made by elected representatives. Kuapa Kokoo trains farmers to weigh and bag their own cocoa, which not only contributes to the end result of the farmers receiving more per sack than they would from other buying agencies, but provides them with useful skills. In addition, at the end of each year farmers receive a cash bonus per sack from profits.

My visit took me on a four-hour journey from Accra to Kumasi, a large town in the Ashanti gold-mining region of Ghana, where Kuapa Kokoo's headquarters are based. Kuapa Kokoo is a thriving co-operative that is composed of five main units: the Kuapa Kokoo farmers union; Kuapa Kokoo Ltd., which is a farmer-owned private licensed cocoa buying company; Kuapa Kokoo farmers trust, which receives and disburses moneys from the fair trade premiums and other funds meant for farmers; and the Kuapa Kokoo credit union, which was established in 2000 to promote savings and enhance development. When I visited last year, the credit union already had 8,000 members. Hon. Members who have credit unions in their constituencies will know that that is a considerable achievement in such a short period of time. The fifth main unit is The Day Chocolate Company, which was set up in 1998. It arranges the manufacture and marketing of Divine and Dubble chocolate bars in supermarkets across Europe.

[Linda Gilroy]

Kuapa Kokoo's strength comes from the participation of more than 35,000 ordinary small-scale farmers at village level. There are 750 villages in the co-operative. My encounter with one such village, Fernaso Domeabra, which in the Twi language translates as "If you love me, you will come to me", was an inspiration. Thanks to the Kuapa Kokoo fair trade connection, the village has a water project. The women and children no longer have to travel miles to collect water, which took up the best part of the day and left little time for education or for diversifying productive activity.

The village is one of several societies in the union in which women have developed an additional income-generating activity, in this case extracting palm oil, which helps to keep them going in the six months of the year outside the cocoa harvesting season. It also gives the farmers an income to supplement what they receive from fair trade and diversification, although they receive only about $50 a year. It is breathtaking to consider that the children's school fees are paid from such low incomes.

At an hour-long meeting with the co-op, the members' questions to me were very pointed. Why did the international buyers dictate the price of cocoa? What could I do to help with another water project? Some farmers from a village that does not have a water project had travelled four miles to meet me. They talked about the need for better health, and their solution, a health clinic, needed my support. When I later visited the farm of one of the women cocoa growers, I could see that snake and scorpion bites and cuts from large knives could cause death if not attended to fairly quickly. I could clearly see why a clinic was a top priority, along with a palm fruit-crushing machine, for which a plea was made by the women's leader.

I should explain that palm fruits grow in a cluster, and each tiny fruit has to be taken and crushed with a stone before it can be mashed to produce oil, so it is no wonder that the women wanted a machine to do it for them. That is a daunting shopping list, but one that they now have the capacity to tackle for themselves, thanks to the vision of the four people who worked to found their co-operative, Kuapa Kokoo. Almost half the people whom I met that day must have been under the age of 12. Within their lifetime their aspirations can be achieved in a sustainable way, and by their own efforts and those of their elders.

As a Labour and Co-operative MP, I spoke to the village elders about the Rochdale pioneers, founders of the UK retail co-operative movement over 150 years ago. I told the story of how the mill workers had started with a small initiative of setting up their own shop to avoid exploitation by the mill owners, who had started to adulterate with chalk the flour that they were selling in their shops to the workers. The mill workers' initiative was greatly expanded within the lifetime of their children from its small beginnings in Toad lane. Among their achievements is what is now the Plymouth and South-West co-operative society, of which I and several hundred thousand people are members. The society drew on the advice of a Rochdale pioneer who took the trouble to visit the 10 men in Plymouth who founded it some 150 years ago.

I am not sure that the people of Kuapa Kokoo believed me, but I believe that the seeds of co-operation which they have planted can produce similar dividends. The most effective thing that anyone can do to help them in their quest to improve their quality of life is to make sure that The Day Chocolate Company thrives. The people will then get not only a fair trade premium for the raw cocoa, but a share in the profit of manufacturing the end product. From little cocoa beans, bigger harvests may ripen.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am obliged to my hon. Friend for agreeing to take an intervention, and I congratulate her on securing the debate. She has explained that the benefits of the initiatives that she describes not only apply to the chocolate producers but are potentially much wider. Will she join me in welcoming the fair trade fortnight between 4 and 17 March this year? Will she join me in urging Members of the House to support that fortnight in whatever way they can, and also in urging the Government to encourage Departments and the civil service to assist that welcome initiative?

Linda Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend for that relevant intervention. I certainly urge hon. Members and everyone who has a part to play in encouraging fair trade to take part in that event. I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that two of the cocoa growers, Mary and Comfort, will be coming to Britain during that fortnight. They will visit Plymouth to meet some of the Plymouth and South-West co-operators, and go down to the Eden project in Cornwall where there is a tropical house containing, of course, a cocoa plant. I understand, although I have not yet visited it myself, that attached to the plant is a plaque referring to this project.

As a means of achieving a more balanced trade relationship between north and south, this end-to-end stakeholding by the producers of the raw material has a lot to offer. Not only does it seem set fair to increase their profits, but through having a say in how the chocolate is produced and sold, they increase their knowledge of the fiercely competitive European and western chocolate markets. A quick look at the notes of guidance as to what is involved in growing and harvesting cocoa, which I saw for myself when I visited the farm of a woman grower, shows why a cocoa grower deserves a fairer share of each bite of chocolate that we eat. It takes patience and exposure to considerable danger to establish and grow the golden pods, and harvest them for market. Waiting five years and risking snakes, scorpions and tetanus is definitely worth more than a fair trade premium in my book.

Kuapa Kokoo can get its members a better deal on all their cocoa, but they particularly benefit when their cocoa is sold to Fairtrade companies. Fair trade guarantees the farmers a minimum price for their cocoa of £1,666 a tonne and £66 a sack. That minimum price is intended to cover at least the costs of production, providing the co-operative with some security. Fairtrade companies also guarantee long-term trading contracts to the farmers. By contrast, Kuapa Kokoo farmers earn only £600 a tonne and £37 a sack when they sell their cocoa to conventional companies in other countries, and are not guaranteed long-term trading contracts.

Fairtrade companies pay an extra premium or bonus of £100 a tonne or £6 a bag to be used for community projects such as the water wells that I described or new toilets; it can also be given directly to the cocoa farmers to improve their income. When dealing with Fairtrade companies, the farmers are assured that the process for buying and selling produce is clear and fair. Unfortunately, although all its cocoa meets the required Fairtrade standard, Kuapa Kokoo can only sell a proportion of its cocoa, as little as 2 per cent., to Fairtrade companies because there is not yet enough demand. Only now are fairly traded chocolate bars becoming available in the shops on any scale.

Large international companies dominate the chocolate market in the UK, which is worth £4 billion; the European chocolate market is worth £14 billion, so it is a big market. Taken together, familiar names such as Cadbury, Mars, Nestlé, Suchard and Jacobs account for well over 80 per cent. of the retail market in chocolate confectionery. Competition between them ensures that their products remain innovative, strongly promoted and keenly priced, making it difficult for smaller companies such as Day to compete. Nevertheless, The Day Chocolate Company is doing well in integrating its product into the mainstream market. The Dubble chocolate bar is priced evenly with other similar products at 35p; the Divine chocolate bar is priced only slightly higher than comparable chocolate bars. At £1.19, Divine's newest product, Darkly Divine, with a substantially larger proportion of cocoa in the ingredients, will also be competitively priced. Because of the competitiveness of the western and European chocolate market, it is difficult for Day to maintain low prices and still return as much profit to the cocoa growers as it would like. The company is only now set to go into profit.

Despite the success achieved through advertising campaigns, competitive pricing and so on, Day still faces obstacles to assisting Kuapa Kokoo and furthering the objectives of fair trade. Certain trade tariffs make it difficult for Day to break into the western chocolate market while maintaining fair trade relations and facilitating the involvement of Kuapa Kokoo at all levels of production. Developed countries tend to maintain much higher tariffs on imports of processed commodities than of raw materials. It is therefore much easier for Ghanaians to sell cocoa to Europe than chocolate bars; in the European market, there is no tariff on cocoa, but the duty on chocolate can be as high as 27 per cent. If that tariff were reduced or removed, Day could undertake more processing of the product in Ghana, allowing the producers to be more involved and to gain more profits. Another impediment to Day's efforts to facilitate fair trade is the import duty on sugar. At present, it is not feasible for The Day Chocolate Company to use fairly traded sugar in its chocolate and bring out a mainstream-priced product. With the reduction of that tariff, Day could count fairly traded sugar, along with fairly traded cocoa, among the ingredients in its products.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) has attended the debate, because it was with his help as Chairman of the Catering Committee that we managed to get those products into the House of Commons Tea Room, the Terrace Cafeteria and Portcullis House. I also pay tribute to the Minister and his colleagues for the Department's support for fair trade in general and the work of The Day Chocolate Company and the Kuapa Kokoo project.

I have a small shopping list to which I hope the Minister will respond. Fair trade arrangements are still very small in relation to such markets and I hope that he can report on positive progress from the recent Doha talks that will not only help the cocoa trade, especially in Ghana, to thrive, but will also help fair trade arrangements in general to prosper. In particular, I would welcome his comments on the chocolate tariff and the sugar duty. I hope that he will join me in recognising the value of this special project.

The company's slogan is "Pa Paa Pa", which is Twi for "Best of the best". I believe that the Kuapa Kokoo project is unique in terms of the way in which developing world producers can not only receive a fair and ethical treatment from buyers of the raw material, but have a stakeholding in the manufacture of the end product. I hope that the Minister will join me in recognising the value of the project not only in its own right, but perhaps also as a model for building a better relationship with traders in developing world countries, to whom we certainly need to give extra consideration in the wake of 11 September and if the aspirations in the plan for Africa are to be met.

Finally, I hope that in responding positively to my shopping list, the Minister will make Divine chocolate a regular feature of his own.

5.56 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) on securing this debate and on highlighting the importance of fair trade. I echo the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) with regard to bringing to the attention of the House the forthcoming fair trade fortnight, in which I am sure that many hon. Members—and I hope the Minister—will be actively engaged.

I assure my hon. Friend that Bristol is indeed a divine city. It is a wonderful city, but it is quite specifically a Divine chocolate city. It is one of those cities to which The Day Chocolate Company came to launch its product—something about which I shall speak further [illegible] a moment. The city encourages fair trade in many ways, but I should like to mention two aspects that illustrate the importance of specific projects. The community of Bishopston in Bristol is linked to Kuppam in India. That community link or twinning arrangement has brought about the establishment of a shop on the Gloucester road where a wide range of Indian textiles and colourful clothing is now available. Also, one of the Oxfam shops in Bristol is designated for fair trade. A large variety of fair trade goods is available in that shop.

I think that the momentum of what my hon. Friend said relates to the importance of getting fair trade produce—in this case, the produce of The Day Chocolate Company—into the mainstream market, so that we can go into our shops and into the supermarket and pick up this most wonderful product. I have been introduced only today to the Darkly Divine chocolate bar. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), the Chairman of the Catering Committee, will recognise it as an addition to the products sold in Portcullis House and the other outlets in the Palace, and as the company's dark chocolate brand. We hope that all the products will be more widely accessible, as that is the only way in which the wider public will recognise the importance and value of fair trade.

[Valerie Davey]

Let me turn briefly to the launch in Bristol. The Day Chocolate Company held the event at the Hotel Du Vin, which is now well known in Bristol and is newly established in a very old building—the old sugar house. As one enters the building, one is reminded that, in the olden days, looking out through the archway, one would have seen the masts of the ships coming into Bristol with sugar, which prompts thoughts of the unfair trade on the basis of which we are conscious—perhaps now more than ever—that our city developed. That unfair trade was in sugar and slavery. It was poignant to be able to launch Divine chocolate—a fairly traded product—there, knowing that the cocoa growers were part of the company's management. It felt as if things had come full circle, from unfair to fair trade.

An increasing number of people in the country are aware that that is the way forward. Working with partners throughout the world to establish fair trade, whereby growers, producers, conveyors and buyers are part of something that works to our mutual benefit, is at the core of what my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and those in The Day Chocolate Company stand for. I respectfully suggest that the Minister and the Department also think along those lines. I look forward to his response to the debate.

6.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) on securing a debate on such an important issue. I know that she takes a strong personal interest in fair trade—that was evident from her remarks—and I greatly enjoyed reading the report that she produced on her visit. She kindly sent me a copy of it, complete with photographs, which brought it to life.

I confess that I discovered the delights of Divine fairly traded chocolate when, early in my ministerial career, I opened my Red Box to discover a couple of bars enclosed with some material about the product and the company that produces it. At that moment, I viewed my new responsibilities in a completely different and more relaxed light. At the end of last year, I attended Dubble's first anniversary celebrations. It was a happy and enjoyable occasion.

Fair trade is a small but significant part of the international trading system. Its aim is simple: to ensure that small and medium-sized producers are able to receive a fair price for their products and thus earn a living in an increasingly international market. In doing that, it tries to create a more equitable trading partnership between north and south.

The growth in sales of fairly traded products in developed countries has been dramatic, albeit from a low base. It has averaged 30 per cent. a year in recent years. Sales in the United Kingdom totalled £23 million in 1999, with chocolate, tea, coffee and, most recently, bananas accounting for most of that. I understand that Day Chocolate is stocked by all the major multiples—Tesco, Sainsbury's, Safeway, Waitrose, Asda, Somerfield, Morrisons, Boots and the Co-op—as well as Blockbuster Video, independent garage forecourts, and Shell.

Day has recently been active in promotional ties with the National Union of Students, the Nickelodeon children's cartoon channel, and the student and children's press. All that effort matters, because as my hon. Friend said, the product has to prosper in a strongly competitive market.

There is every indication of the trend continuing. As consumer demand increases, and a growing number of customers want to buy fairly traded goods, I hope that more fairly traded products can become available. Towards the end of last year, I met the Fair Trade Foundation to learn about its work. One of its initiatives is to increase the range of goods that have the Fairtrade label.

Through FLO—the European fair trade labelling organisation—a new process for assessing goods against the Fairtrade standard has been agreed. It is hoped that that will significantly increase the range of goods that can be certified. I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), who is unfortunately not in his place, about the importance of the fair trade fortnight. I look forward to having the opportunity to support it.

Fair trade has yielded many benefits over the years in the UK and in developing countries. There are opportunities to achieve more, but also challenges to be faced. The story that we have been debating—that of fair trade chocolate, Kuapa Kokoo and The Day Chocolate Company—clearly illustrates the achievements and the challenges.

Ghana is justifiably famous for its high quality cocoa production. It dominated the world cocoa market in the 1960s, but despite a peak in world prices, production fell dramatically in the 1970s and early 1980s. This was largely due to the taxation rate, which resulted in a decrease in industry incentives. Cocoa accounted for more than 75 per cent. of Ghana's export earnings in the 1970s, but for just under a quarter by 1992.

At this time, the Government of Ghana began to liberalise the internal marketing of cocoa. As we have heard, a group of local farmers formed the Kuapa Kokoo farmers union to provide a way of improving the economic and social position of cocoa farmers. Technical support from the UK was provided by Twin Trading, and financial support by the Department for International Development.

Kuapa Kokoo is now 10 years old and, like the British co-operative movement, it has gone from strength to strength. I was greatly stuck by the analogy drawn by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton between the work being done at Kuapa Kokoo and the origins of the co-operative movement in this country. Kuapa Kokoo is the only major cocoa-producing co-operative in Ghana; it now has 35,000 members and it exported more than 30,000 tonnes of cocoa last year. It is also the largest supplier of fairly traded cocoa in the world, providing almost two thirds of the international supply. It is estimated that over the eight years of its operation to 2000, Kuapa Kokoo has yielded £600,000 in extra income to its members, over and above world market prices.

The benefits of the co-operative are more than just economic, however. Last year a DFID-funded study reported on these benefits and in particular assessed the extent to which they could be attributed to fair trade. The study found that while Kuapa Kokoo fair trade sales have ranged between 2 and 9 per cent. of total sales, the support of the fair trade movement has had a disproportionately positive impact on its members. Indeed, Twin Trading played a key role in organising and developing the co-operative in its early years to take advantage of both fair trade and mainstream commercial markets.

The premiums from fair trade sales fund many of the social services provided by Kuapa Kokoo, including health, education, the credit union to which my hon. Friend referred, water and sanitation. For example, more than 100,000 people—both members and non-members of Kuapa Kokoo societies—have received free medical attention and prescriptions. My hon. Friend also mentioned other benefits in terms of new skills and involvement in decision making.

Kuapa Kokoo has not rested on those achievements, however. Ghana has yet fully to liberalise cocoa export marketing, and state control over export marketing means that prices paid to producers remain relatively low. Kuapa Kokoo was keen to increase the value added to its cocoa, as well as its understanding of global markets. To address both those objectives, it decided to produce its own branded chocolate for sale in western markets. Together with Twin Trading and The Body Shop, and with support from Comic Relief and Christian Aid, it formed The Day Chocolate Company.

The Day Chocolate Company is an ambitious and innovative venture. Unfortunately, the banks perceived it as too risky to finance it themselves. To overcome this problem, DFID provided a bank guarantee until September 2004 to enable a commercial bank to provide £400,000 of loan finance. In doing this, DFID was aiming to lower the perceived risk of similar ventures, and thereby to encourage further participation of private financial institutions in fair trade initiatives, and in development more generally.

The Day Chocolate Company is an award-winning organisational model of partnership between producers, a fair trade organisation and an ethically minded business. It has been successful in helping to promote fair trade through sales and distribution via 15,000 outlets, many of which had never stocked fairly traded items before; through highly impressive media exposure, which is important given the lack of a large budget for advertising; and through innovative development educational activities which are reaching more than 4,000 primary schools and more than 1,700 secondary schools. Kuapa Kokoo has a one-third shareholding in The Day Chocolate Company, and its two elected farmer board representatives give it a new level of involvement in, and understanding of, the global cocoa supply chain.

The case of Kuapa Kokoo and The Day Chocolate Company highlights a number of wider challenges and opportunities for growing trade in both developing and developed countries, and it is to these that I now wish to turn. First, developing country Governments must continue to improve the legal and regulatory environment for processing agricultural products, private sector development and foreign direct investment. If business is to flourish—we know what an important part economic development plays in lifting people out of poverty, which is what we are concerned about—it needs the right climate.

Secondly, the private sector in developing countries needs to enhance its international competitiveness. For example, Ghana is moving to liberalise export marketing of cocoa. By virtue of the technical and marketing capacity that Kuapa Kokoo has built up through Fairtrade and its partnership with The Day Chocolate Company, it is likely to be one of only three companies licensed to export in Ghana.

Thirdly, Ghana and other countries may export raw cocoa to Europe, but they face tariff barriers if they want to export processed chocolate. The Department and other donors are working with developing country Governments to strengthen their negotiating power in trade talks.

Fourthly, Fairtrade and other companies promoting trade with developing countries face intense competitive pressure, particularly as they tackle mainstream commercial markets rather than traditional fair trade markets. Such companies are often dwarfed by their competitors' size and advertising budgets, while consumers may not always convert a desire to support Fairtrade into purchases. The Day Chocolate Company, cafédirect and others are showing that innovative marketing and distribution can lead to success.

Fifthly, we need to recognise the link between fair trade in particular and corporate social responsibility more generally. A growing number of companies are becoming interested and involved, and the ethical trading initiative helps them to do business in a more socially responsible way. As the public become more aware of the connection between the way business is done and its impact on the livelihoods of people in developing countries who are trying to earn a living for themselves and their families, so the pressure for greater business awareness will grow, and rightly so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) spoke about the links that have been developed between the city that she represents and organisations in her community. As in a number of cities in this country, shops selling fairly traded products are opening.

The issue of fair trade shows how important trade in general is to developing countries. Compared to the UK market for Fairtrade products—the £23 million to which I referred—the total market for such products is £15 billion a year. We must therefore help developing countries to increase their trade and economic activity through international trade agreements. Here, of course, reform is of the highest importance.

That is why the everything but arms agreement is a major step in the right direction towards building fairer competitive markets for agricultural trade between Europe and developing countries, and why the Government are pushing for significant common agricultural policy reform in relation to sugar and other agricultural products, although we know that progress has been slow. To be honest, Members have been debating CAP reform in the Chamber over the past quarter of a century, owing largely to opposition from domestic agricultural interests in continental Europe.

That is why a new trade round—a development round—matters so much following November's Doha agreement. The Doha declaration is encouraging, as it commits World Trade Organisation members to the objective of duty and quota-free access for the least developed countries and puts agricultural trade firmly on the agenda for the world trade negotiations. That is why we were so keen to have a new trade round. Without a new round, there is no possibility of reform and we expect tariff reductions that favour developing country exporters.

Linda Gilroy: In common with many other Members, I have received a lot of letters from people at

[Linda Gilroy]

non-governmental organisations who suggest that the world trade round should not go ahead until the rules are changed. Will my hon. Friend say more about that? The proposal is misguided and mistaken in terms of helping people such as those we are discussing.

Hilary Benn: That is an important point. The proof of the World Trade Organisation's success will be in creating terms of trade that are fair and equal and allow economic development across the globe. Members will be only too conscious of the obstacles that are placed in the way of developing countries in trying to achieve that objective, and agricultural protection is the biggest obstacle of all. The single most significant step that we could take through the WTO talks to help developing countries would be to reduce the agricultural protectionism to which I referred. The simple truth is that, if there is no new trade round, there will be no possibility of negotiating that improvement.

The test will be the extent to which those talks produce the development round and the liberalisation in agriculture to which all hon. Members present are committed. I hope that that will allow us to make progress on tariffs on sugar and chocolate.

Last night, the House gave a Third Reading to the International Development Bill, which puts poverty reduction at the heart of what we are trying to achieve. In truth, we can do no other if we are to have a chance of reaching the millennium development goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. Creating a fairer international trading system that helps to make global markets work better for the poor, so that developing countries can maximise the opportunities and minimise the threats that arise from that global market, is of the greatest importance. In doing that, supporting small and medium-sized producers to compete effectively in international markets, including the fairly traded market, will matter a great deal.

I am genuinely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton, because she has done the House a service in raising this matter. She went to Ghana to find out about this problem for herself, and took the trouble to report to the House and secure this debate. In so doing, she has given us the chance to discuss an important subject.

Finally, I can honestly say that I have never participated in a debate in the House that has aroused such anticipation of gastronomic delight. It is to the eternal credit of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) that any Members present in the Chamber who find it difficult to resist such temptation will now be able to repair to a Room close by and enjoy the delights of the product that we have just debated.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Six o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 25 January 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Industrial and Provident Societies Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.33 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I start by declaring the assistance that I have received from the Co-operative party and Cobbetts.

In the northern part of my constituency can be found the excellent Pinner and Grammarians rugby football club, which plays in the Herts and Middlesex fourth division north, level 12, of the Rugby Football Union's structure. It turns out an excellent veterans' team, and it has a distinguished history. One of its former players, Stuart Wilson, went on to captain Scotland and to play for the British Lions. The club has the distinction of being the most junior rugby club to have seen one of its members, the late Cyril Gadney, achieve the honour of being president of the RFU. In the context of today's debate, however, the club's importance lies in the fact that it is an industrial and provident society.

In the south of my constituency, close to the Rayners Lane estate, there is the Tithe Farm social club, which is home to the excellent—but not as well known as it might be—Rayners Lane football club. It is also home to a series of social activities such as darts and snooker leagues. It, too, is an industrial and provident society. According to the Financial Services Authority, at the end of 2000 there were more than 9,000 other industrial and provident societies, with some 10.5 million members between them, funds of more than £14.5 billion and assets worth almost £61.5 billion.

Other examples of industrial and provident societies include the Homes group, a housing association that manages more than 43,000 properties and is the second largest registered social landlord in the country. Within the Homes group is Warden Housing, which, if its tenants vote for stock transfer, is set to redevelop completely the Rayners Lane estate; for which we have been waiting 20 years. Both the Homes group and Warden Housing are industrial and provident societies.

The excellent Lincoln retail co-operative society provides a range of retail and property services to its 133,000 members.

The last example that I shall mention immediately is the Women's Institute market in Dorridge in the west midlands. It has an annual turnover of some £68,000 and 45 active producer members, and it has sold home-made, home-grown and hand-crafted produce in Dorridge every Friday morning since 1974.

A couple of years ago, I made a mental note never to upset the Women's Institute—I cannot remember why—so I should like to place on record the considerable benefit that the 510 Women's Institute markets bring to our country. The House may be interested to know that last year, between them—they are all industrial and provident societies—they sold more than 1 million garden shrubs, 780,000 fruit and vegetable plants, 500,000 kg of fresh produce, 200,000 bunches of freshly picked flowers and 1 million pots of jam, marmalade and pickles. As if that was not enough, alongside the sewing, woodwork, pewterwork, knitting, lace-making, millinery, hand-made cards and pictures and yet more knitting sold last year, there were 10,000 pairs of bootees.

Industrial and provident societies have their roots in the self-help tradition of the Victorian era. Their origin dates in part from when the incorporation of legal bodies first became possible, with joint stock companies in 1844—the beginning, as I am sure that the House will be aware, of company law in this country. Incorporation allows an organisation its own legal personality. It can sue and be sued and own property and enter into contracts, and it enjoys the privilege of limited liability.

As we all know, the company is the commonest form of incorporated body. The number of registered companies runs to many millions, more than 1 million of which are currently trading. The company continues to be a highly effective means of attracting investment and of generating rewards for entrepreneurs and those who are prepared to take risks with their capital, and it will rightly continue to play a vital role in the development of our economy.

While the company was emerging, other legal forms of business ownership were emerging to meet other needs. The co-operative society emerged as a trading vehicle through which people could meet their basic requirements to buy food at a fair price. The building society emerged at the same time, as a vehicle to help those who lacked the means to purchase their own home. Friendly and provident societies also emerged, to offer mutual insurance against sickness or unemployment.

What all those different legal forms had in common was the fact that they were incorporated as independent legal bodies with a separate legal personality, but governed by their own legislation. Company, building society and friendly society law has changed substantially over the past 150 years but, with the exception of certain consolidatory statutes or specific narrow issues, industrial and provident society law has not changed fundamentally since 1862.

The motivation of industrial and provident societies, like their close cousins the building societies and the friendly societies, is mutual self-help rather than the generation of profit for investors. Trading successfully is, of course, necessary if any corporate body is to survive, but producing a profit is not the prime purpose of industrial and provident societies.

There are two types of industrial and provident society, the first of which is the co-operative society. A co-operative conducts its business in the interests of members, who gain from it on the basis of how much they use the service or its trade, rather than purely on the basis

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

of their investment in it. If people want to register a new co-operative society today, they have to satisfy the Financial Services Authority that the proposed organisation is a bona fide co-operative. Many retail and agricultural organisations and many social clubs are designed as co-operatives.

Indeed, the House may be surprised to learn that the Bill has produced a considerable postbag, including letters from members of industrial and provident societies. Mrs. Doris Humbles from Southbourne in Dorset wrote to me to say what a good idea she thought it was that small clubs should be protected. She went on to describe her club, saying:

> "The Christchurch Conservative Club does a very good lunch at a reasonable price for pensioners and it is difficult to get this kind of service elsewhere."

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) is a member of that Conservative club, but if he is—in the spirit in which these Friday debates are usually conducted—perhaps when I am next campaigning in Hampshire for the Labour party, he would be good enough to vouch for me and let me take advantage of the service provided by that excellent industrial and provident society.

The second category of industrial and provident societies are those that carry on a trade for the benefit of the community, rather than just their own members. Such societies are known as community benefit societies—abbreviated to bencoms. They include the many housing associations that exist, some social clubs and the new football supporters trusts. Industrial and provident societies give legal form—thus structure and clarity—to a range of community organisations and activities, for which charitable structures, public sector structures and the company model are not entirely appropriate.

A key attraction of the industrial and provident society is the element of democracy. Where a number of people are involved or are dependent as customers on the service or trade of the organisation, the one member, one vote principle that the industrial and provident society offers presents a powerful attraction. It is an arrangement by which power or control cannot be bought for money. Where a local community has been involved in creating or protecting an important community facility, the one member, one vote governance route helps to reflect the effort that all those involved have put in and their mutual dependence on one another. Industrial and provident societies that are members of the excellent Village Retail Services Association, which helps to keep rural post office and shopping facilities available to communities, are good examples of that.

A similar form of democracy can be created in a company. Indeed, some co-operatives have even decided to use the company model. I do not knock that approach, but the problem is that nothing can stop shareholders changing or abandoning the original purpose for which the company was set up.

A second key difference between the industrial and provident society and the company model is the approach of the different registration bodies. Under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965, the Financial Services Authority has to approve any changes to the constitution of an industrial and provident society, and it strictly monitors such changes to ensure that they are in line with the registered purposes of the society. That clearly offers added reassurance to members.

Companies House, by contrast, has no such function. It has a lighter touch, with the result that shareholders or members of a company can change the company's constitution more easily. Companies House does not scrutinise constitutional changes to companies. Such scrutiny is not needed, as there is no equivalent to section 1 of the 1965 Act in company law. Those key differences create important distinctions between the company model and industrial and provident society model, and they provide choice for those looking for the right legal structure to suit their purpose.

A variety of structures give legal expression to the activities and services of organisations rooted in our communities, reflecting the many differences in their motivation, modus operandi, financing, governance and so on. I am not seeking to say that the industrial and provident route represents the best legal structure for every situation—for some scenarios, it would be entirely inappropriate—but our legal structures need to be robust. The industrial and provident society model has not undergone the same reforms as the traditional private sector model over the past 100 years or so, or indeed as the building and friendly society models, which were reformed in 1986 and 1992 respectively.

The Bill contains three key clauses to try to change the current situation. The first clause would ensure that industrial and provident societies could not be dissolved by the vote of a small and unrepresentative group of members. The second clause would enable community benefit societies to include a provision safeguarding their assets in their constitutions. The third clause would enable industrial and provident society rules to be updated by secondary legislation.

Clause 1 deals with the power to convert an industrial and provident society into, or to transfer the entire business to, a company. Such a step can be taken if 75 per cent. of those at a general meeting vote in favour of conversion. No requirement exists for a minimum number of members to be in favour of the resolution, and any attempt to include such a provision in a society's rules would contravene the 1965 Act and would be rejected by the FSA. Conversion to a company is a fundamental change in the nature of an industrial and provident society.

As hon. Members know, a company is a vehicle for generating profits for its shareholders, and the ability to distribute the profits generated from its trade is fundamental to its nature, whereas co-operative societies and bencoms are set up not as vehicles to generate profits for investors but to trade for the benefit of the community. Members of a community benefit society are not permitted to receive any payment by way of a profit distribution. All such profits must be retained in the society and applied to the society's objectives in serving the community. Similarly, on a solvent dissolution, any surplus remaining after all its liabilities have been paid off should pass not to members, but to some other community benefit purpose under the current rules.

A co-operative society also has a fundamentally different purpose from a company. It is set up by its members as a vehicle to pool their transactions and co-operatively to provide goods or services to themselves and/or the wider community. A co-operative is legally permitted to make a distribution to its members or customers from its surplus profits, but that power of distribution originated to reimburse to its customers the amount by which they had, in effect, overpaid for their purchases. The mechanism is intended to ensure that customers are not exploited by paying too much. That is illustrated by the fact that a distribution of profits is based on purchases, not on the size of the shareholding.

Conversion from an industrial and provident society is therefore an event of considerable significance for all the society's members. It involves changing from one corporate body with a particular purpose to another corporate body with a significantly different purpose. Surely such an event should not occur without a substantial body of support from the society's membership and without a substantial section of its membership participating in that decision.

The ability to convert has existed under the legislation since the 19th century, and the provisions that require a 75 per cent. majority of those voting at a meeting of members also has a long history. If a majority of members of a society want to convert, neither I nor anyone else should stand in their way, but the membership's view must be fundamentally clear. A 75 per cent. vote in favour of a conversion resolution by those who turn up at a meeting might involve a mere handful of people turning up to a badly advertised meeting and agreeing a change that might irreversibly alter the nature of a corporation with hundreds of thousands of members.

The building society movement has wrestled with that issue for a number of years, and a significant number of societies have demutualised and paid a windfall gain to their members. There has been only one failed attempt at a hostile dissolution of a co-operative society. In 1997, Andrew Regan, through Lanica, attempted to demutualise the Co-operative Wholesale Society. Notwithstanding the fact that the attempt failed, the threat of demutualisation remains real to many co-operative societies.

Although successful and efficient management of the society's business, together with the cultivation of an active, engaged membership, is the best way to maintain support for a society's mutual status, it is surely right that legislation should ensure that no conversion to a company can take place without a substantial body of the membership participating in that vote.

Since the Lanica affair, a number of societies have adopted rules to introduce a high quorum for resolutions to convert a society into a company. There has not been a legal challenge to such rules yet, but there is concern that it could be made by a predator with a deep pocket, and there is a danger that it might succeed. Doubts about that should not be left to the courts and the lawyers to determine. Surely it is a matter for Parliament to address, and the Bill offers the House the opportunity to do exactly that.

Such a provision has already been introduced for building societies. The Building Societies Act 1986, and the 1997 statutory instrument that updates it, requires 50 per cent. of the membership to participate in any such vote for it to be effective. Another parallel is the takeover code, which sets a 50 per cent. threshold as the key to resolving the success or otherwise of a vote in a public takeover of one company by another. The Bill proposes a similar provision for industrial and provident societies. It does not change the requirement that 75 per cent. of the vote of members attending a meeting is necessary; it simply adds the requirement that 50 per cent. of eligible members would need to vote for that conversion to occur.

The Bill also recognises that the registers of society members are not necessarily up to date and it requires them to take reasonable steps to establish those persons who are entitled to vote under its rules. It also requires 50 per cent. of such people to take part in any vote before the chairman of the relevant meeting can declare the resolution duly passed.

Clause 1 recognises implicitly that co-operatives are designed to serve and to be controlled by their members. For that reason it must be right that they can convert their co-operative society into a different business structure if a large majority is secured in favour of it. Those societies that are registered to operate for the benefit of the community have a different purpose, however. Their function is to benefit people other than their members. Nevertheless, the members of bencoms, often those who serve on the board of a society, could vote to dissolve a society and convert it into a company or to convert it into a co-operative. It is surely inappropriate for a society that has been set up to benefit the community either to re-register as a co-operative, which operates in the interests of its members, or to convert to a company, which operates in the interests of individual shareholders.

The assets in a community benefit society are, as I said, held for the benefit of the community. An important feature of a bencom is that unlike the comparable company model, the commitment to community benefit is subject to a review by the registering authority, so any attempts to change the constitution to water down such a commitment would not be approved by the Financial Services Authority. Those assets may have been built up over many years with generations of people from different families in a community working to develop them. The Bill proposes that those incorporating a new society should be able to elect that no such power to convert should be included in their rules. Subject to obtaining the support of a 75 per cent. majority of those voting at a meeting where not less than 50 per cent. of those qualified to vote participate in the vote, the Bill further provides that an existing society should also have the power to incorporate such a provision in its constitution.

Bencoms and charities have parallel roles. Charities cannot convert into co-operatives or a company. Charitable assets are effectively dedicated permanently to that charitable purpose. The clearest parallel is that they operate for the benefit of communities.

Clause 2 would allow community benefit societies to choose to have similar protection in law as charities and to be free from the possibility that one group of activists in the organisation could attempt to use the organisation's assets for their own benefit rather than for their original established purpose, which is for the benefit of the community.

Ironically, such societies are not supposed to make distributions out of profits or surplus to members, and, on a solvent winding-up, assets should not be distributed to members. However, the ability to convert or transfer engagements to a company under section 52 of the 1965 Act allows such restrictions to be avoided once the society is converted into a company and the shareholders could amend the rules that permit the distribution of assets to themselves. There is clearly a loophole in the legislation, which the Bill attempts to address.

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

Clause 2 specifically permits the constitution of a bencom to include provisions to prohibit the distribution of assets to members and to prohibit the distribution of any of its assets except on its dissolution. Even when it is dissolved, the clause imposes significant restrictions on the way in which the assets are distributed. It also prohibits the transfer of engagements or the conversion to a company and prevents the avoidance of the provisions by a change of rules.

Hon. Members may be concerned about the flexibility of such arrangements. Clause 2 is perhaps deceptive, but it does allow for considerable flexibility. If the bencom were to dissolve, its assets could be transferred to another community benefit society with similar provisions in its rules, or to a charity. Furthermore, it does not prevent the sale of assets—or, indeed, the entire business in appropriate circumstances—by the bencom and the subsequent distribution of the cash surplus to another community benefit society or to a charity.

Clause 2 also allows a bencom to convert to a company or another body if that company contains similar provisions in its constitution to protect the assets for the benefit of the community. If a bencom needs, for some reason, to convert to a different legal entity, such conversion is permitted. What is not permitted is the liberation of those assets from their original purpose—the commitment to community benefit. Those provisions will apply only if a society adopts them in its constitution by resolution of its members and approval of the FSA is secured in the usual way.

The final operative clause, clause 3, attempts to provide a mechanism to allow Parliament to consider sensible reforms to the corporate governance of industrial and provident societies when those same reforms have been introduced for companies after parliamentary debate. The reality is that there have been very limited opportunities, both under the Conservative party and the Labour party, to update the rules and regulations by which industrial and provident societies operate.

There are precedents for such a measure. Some change to industrial and provident society rules is possible under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, even though the original discussions focused on deregulation of company law. One of the joys of preparing for today's debate was that I got to read the Second Reading debate and the Committee stage of that Act, and I could find no mention of industrial and provident societies. Nevertheless, two sensible amendments to the rules of industrial and provident societies have been made under its provisions.

As well as being limited to the purpose of assimilating industrial and provident society law and company law, the power to modify is further limited because it does not extend to those sections of the 1965 Act that are essential to the very nature of such societies. For example, the provisions that set out which societies can be registered and those that deal with amalgamation, transfer of engagements and conversions are specifically excluded from the power in clause 3.

Sensible reforms that are in place for companies but not for industrial and provident societies include a rule proscribing loans by the organisation to one of their directors. Another basic sensible rule in place under the Companies Act 1985 is that substantial property sales or transactions with directors require shareholder approval. There is no similar requirement for the directors or chief executives of an industrial and provident society. Indeed, the 1985 Act sensibly sets out what transactions can and cannot happen between company directors and their companies. The power of a court, on application by the Department of Trade and Industry, to disqualify directors who are unfit to hold office does not apply to society directors. Clause 3 offers a sensible solution to those defects.

Company legislation also prohibits provisions in the constitution of companies that prevent claims against directors for breaches of statutory or common law. Societies still have such provisions in their constitutions. Clause 3 holds out the possibility that such changes to industrial and provident society rules could occur if Parliament were so minded.

Such a change would provide additional protection for the societies' consumers and members, and is surely a sensible, relatively minor amendment for which secondary legislation would be an appropriate mechanism. Parliament has already considered the substance of the issues during the various debates on companies law reform and it has discussed many of the changes in debates on the reform of building and friendly societies.

Other sensible reforms that may be instigated under this procedure include changes to the ultra vires law for companies and to the accounting and auditing requirements for societies, for insolvency rescue procedures and for receivership procedures, all of which are now significantly out of step with companies. That combination of problems reduces confidence in the industrial and provident society model. In the case of insolvency, it makes rescue of a society much more difficult. I remind the House that a further safeguard in the Bill is the use of the affirmative resolution procedure for any changes made under clause 3.

My interest in co-ops and mutuals is not new. I have highlighted the potential of social enterprises and new mutuals in Adjournment debates and under the ten-minute Bill procedure. I hope that the co-op and mutual sector will continue to develop and expand, offering, where appropriate, sensible, level-headed alternatives to exclusively private sector options and other approaches and structures.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): As a fellow co-operator, I think that my hon. Friend is making an excellent case. Does he agree that the Curry commission, which will report on food and farming shortly, is likely to recommend that we bolster co-operatives in agriculture to bring us into line with Europe, and that the introduction of the Bill is particularly opportune because it could provide that bolster?

Mr. Thomas: I do agree. Interestingly, the National Farmers Union, which I consulted about the Bill, supports it. It took some delight in giving me the example of the United Pig Marketing co-operative, which I am told is the largest pig marketing co-operative. Its members benefit from savings of 25 per cent. off breeding stock, 15 per cent. off compound feeding stuffs, 30 per cent. off the cost of power supply and, for those Members who are interested, 33 per cent. off the cost of artificial insemination. I am sure that all hon. Members have an interest in reducing the long-term costs of the great British breakfast, and United Pig Marketing and, I am sure, other agriculture co-operatives will help to do that.

If the mutual sector is to develop, further sensible protection and reform of the rules will be needed. The Bill does not solve all the problems of the industrial and provident society model, but it does, I hope, provide an opportunity to make significant progress. One of the genuine joys of preparing for the Bill has been to understand and be impressed by the sheer range and diversity of organisations—and the considerable commitment of their members—which are rooted in our communities and use the industrial and provident society model.

I have consulted the various parent bodies of industrial and provident societies, and I am grateful for the time and support of the National Housing Federation, the Rugby Football Union, the Co-operative Union, the National Farmers Union, the Village Retail Services Association, the Community Transport Association, the Committee of Registered Clubs, the Women's Institute country markets, the Abbeyfield Society and the Association of British Credit Unions.

Surely the continuing strength of industrial and provident societies is the defining proof, if there is any doubt, that there is such a thing as society. The Bill seeks to strengthen our industrial and provident societies, and I hope that the House will give it a Second Reading.

10.4 am

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on introducing the Bill. It is somewhat ironic, and probably against the expectations of many outside the House, that a Bill on this subject should be promoted by the Member for Harrow, West and immediately supported by the Member for Epsom and Ewell because the traditional image of industrial and provident societies is very different from the reality. The hon. Gentleman has rightly highlighted, by making clear the range of organisations from which he has secured support for the Bill, how diverse those societies are and in how many parts of our society, and indeed how many of our constituencies, they have a presence.

My constituency has industrial and provident society representation, most particularly in the form of the successful and hospitable Epsom Conservative club, which is in a prime location and has assets that could be exploited by a carpetbagger—a danger that the hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out. I pay credit to the Bill because it will protect such societies, as well as other organisations throughout our society, and I encourage the House to give it a Second Reading, subject to caveats and provisos that will need to be dealt with in Committee to ensure that the final legislation is a proper and fit response to the needs of the sector.

The hon. Gentleman introduces his Bill in a turbulent time for mutual organisations which began with changes in the building society sector, which I appreciate is not covered by the Bill. What happened in that sector, and more recently in the mutual sector of the financial services industry, has set a precedent that could now be followed by those looking to exploit the value and assets of mutual and provident societies of all kinds.

That process began with conscious business decisions in the 1980s by organisations such as Abbey National to move from a mutual status to being fully commercial listed companies. They took those decisions for straightforward commercial and strategic reasons. Many organisations have followed suit in the past 10 or 15 years. No legislation should seek to prevent that from happening in future.

At the same time, we saw in that sector the emergence of carpetbagging. Groups of people who had joined the boards of building societies, including Nationwide, Britannia and others, proposed at annual general meetings a ballot of the entire membership on the proposal to sell the society's assets and generate a windfall for members of the public. In some cases, the organisations' members may want to pursue that route, but they must proceed with the utmost caution because nothing comes without a price, and such organisations often secure a short-term payment at the expense of the long-term growth of their financial portfolio. Such decisions must be made in the full knowledge of the implications of the action.

More recently, we have seen different types of organisations, such as clubs, begin to dispose of their assets. The highest profile example was the RAC's decision to sell its assets, generating a substantial windfall for members. The same route has been taken by smaller clubs, such as the St. Stephen's Constitutional club, just up the road from this place. All that highlights the fact that industrial and provident societies and other mutual organisations have assets that can be exploited by those who seek to make a quick return.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the attack on the Co-operative Wholesale Society by Andrew Regan a few years ago. That was clearly an attempt to extract commercial and financial value. That may be in the interests of members on some occasions, but in that case there was great hostility within the movement, and the proposal was rejected. That underlines the need for societies of the kind covered by the Bill to be given the same level of protection as building societies from anyone who seeks to exploit their assets.

The principle of mutuality epitomised by the societies has been an important part of our business and social life in this country since Victorian times. It began with the friendly societies, which were the first kind of organisation to bring financial services to the poorer areas of the country, and indeed in many areas they still do so. With the loss from some areas, both rural and inner-city, of financial services institutions such as local banks, we are seeing a resurgence of mutuality.

The friendly societies were followed by the building societies, which encouraged home ownership through mutuality, and the co-operative societies, not only the Co-op itself, the visible presence in our high street, but several smaller co-operative organisations that served individual neighbourhoods. In a previous guise, I did quite a bit of local history work in the north-west of England; the role that co-operative societies played in the development of society in Liverpool, Manchester and elsewhere is evident.

As I said, it is not just in areas such as the north-west that those organisations play an important role. In my constituency there are two branches of the Co-op which make a significant social contribution, as well as a business contribution, to the area. One branch is in

[Chris Grayling]

Stoneleigh, a 1930s suburban area with a sizeable shopping centre which, typically of many smaller retail centres on the fringes of major cities such as London, has lost ground in recent years to a few principal shopping centres in my area such as Kingston and out-of-town supermarkets. We must not allow those smaller centres to disappear. In my constituency, the Co-op is a linchpin of Stoneleigh broadway and probably does more than any other shop to ensure that that shopping centre thrives and continues to attract people. It is therefore fundamentally important that it should remain and flourish.

Such outlets are particularly important to the elderly. I received a letter from an elderly lady in my constituency who said:

> "As a long standing member of the Co-op, I am happy to write to & ask you to vote for Gareth Thomas's Bill on Friday 25th January 2002.
>
> I hope I am not the only person making this request from our area.
>
> You are well aware that Stoneleigh has a large percentage of retired and elderly people among its residents, not all have transport or are able to use public transport easily, the Co-op shop on Stoneleigh Broadway is our only supermarket, we no longer have butchers or general stores to buy edible goods from, the Co-op to most people is a Godsend.
>
> The Co-operative Society does not flourish in the South as it does in the North, but it does such good work monitoring the quality of the food and items it sells."

I echo that. The two branches in my constituency do an excellent job of serving the community.

The branch at Tattenham Corner, at the top of Epsom Downs, is a community centre in its own right. The beat police officer in the area uses it almost as a stopping-off point or a local branch office while on the beat. The shop owners have given tremendous support, both to him and community activities in the area. It is a central point in an area that does not otherwise have shops nearby for the elderly. It therefore makes sense to give those organisations the same protection as building societies, so it is important that the Bill goes into Committee and receives the depth of study that it deserves.

When the Bill was introduced, naturally I thought that it applied to friendly societies and organisations such as the Co-op, but I have been surprised by the breadth of organisations covered by it. They include not just retail societies and wholesale and productive societies but, as the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) said, agricultural societies, as well as fishing societies, clubs, general service societies and, importantly, housing societies. There is no doubt that registered social landlords play an increasingly important role in our society. Many of them would be covered by the Bill; my points about giving protection to co-operative societies apply equally to RSLs categorised as industrial and mutual building societies.

In the past decade, there has been a significant transition from predominantly council-owned and controlled housing to much greater control of our social housing stock by RSLs. That is a very positive step indeed, which began under the Conservative Government. In general, RSLs make an important contribution to that housing sector; they upgrade stock effectively and manage it better than most local authorities. On the whole, tenants receive a more responsive service from RSLs. In my constituency, the Rosebery Housing Association does an excellent job of managing its staff. Such organisations should receive encouragement and should able to develop to the benefit of all their tenants.

More and more local authorities are taking the decision to dispose of stock, and pass council houses into the control of RSLs. Epsom and Ewell borough council in my constituency has done so; Reigate and Banstead borough council is in the process of doing so; Merton borough council, on which I remain a councillor for a few weeks, is looking at transferring its stock into the hands of an RSL. Ironically, in my area, that transition is making a difference; the biggest council housing estates in my constituency, for odd historical reasons, were divided between three different boroughs, which has caused great confusion for the residents and made it harder to maintain the area properly. I hope that, at the end of the process, we shall have a single RSL able to control the whole area, develop it properly and provide a much better service to the people who live there.

I do not want housing societies of the kind encompassed by the Bill, including RSLs, to be vulnerable to carpetbaggers. RSLs have a major asset base; indeed, it is substantial. There are circumstances in which, conceivably, they could be exploited by people wishing to realise some of the value of their asset base. RSLs play an essential social role, which should be protected; if nothing else, the extra protection that the Bill gives them is extremely important. Organisations with a significant asset base that come into the ambit of the Bill are particularly vulnerable, and protection is particularly appropriate for them.

It is easy to target an organisation with significant assets; it is easy to sell them and raise money; often, it is easy to make a case to members of the organisation that they can get a quick windfall from what is being proposed. We should not prevent that from happening, as the hon. Member for Harrow, West rightly said, but it should happen only with overwhelming support from the membership. The hon. Gentleman's selection of 75 per cent., to match the building societies' figure, is right. Everyone will never be brought on board, but 75 per cent. is an overwhelming vote, and can be said to represent the views of a society if it takes the decision to change its status, the nature of its asset base and so on. Reading about the Bill, it is surprising that it has taken four years from the launch of the Treasury's consultation paper for anything to happen. When something did happen, it took a Back Bencher to introduce the measure; I am sure that that is a disappointment for the hon. Gentleman.

I should like to discuss a couple of areas about which the Committee will need to think carefully, if the Bill completes its Second Reading, as I hope it will. I have a problem with the hon. Gentleman's comments about provisions for the future use of assets and, in effect, the ability to set in stone the way in which they will be used. I understand the nature of his concern, but we have to be cautious about constraining future developments by organisations in a society that can change rapidly. I hope that, in Committee, that aspect of the Bill will be given careful consideration to try to ensure that there is a balance; organisations should be allowed to determine their core purpose, but should not be forced it into an environment where, if they need to change in future, they do not have the legal option to do so. The hon. Gentleman, and Members who serve on the Committee with him, need to be extremely careful about that.

In his original speech on the issue to the House 12 months ago, the hon. Gentleman referred to the benefits that some mutual organisations have secured from debt finance. That may be true in some cases, but the hon. Gentleman should not forget that equity finance can often be much cheaper than debt finance and provides a much more solid, long-term foundation for organisations, which is one reason why building societies have chosen to move away from mutuality. That needs to be borne in mind when framing specific provisions for the sector.

In that speech, the hon. Gentleman mentioned regulation and argued that it has sometimes forced organisations away from their core business to the detriment of their customers; he mentioned the water industry in particular. I do not necessarily share his analysis on that issue, but he made an important point about appropriate regulation. Whatever happens in terms of the status, legal rights and provisions that are associated with these organisations, the one caveat should always be that one should not compromise on regulation where it is appropriate. I am not a great regulator. I do not believe in regulation for its own sake, but minimum standards need to be met, especially in financial services, housing and so on. I would not want any change to be made in respect of regulation on organisations that enjoy such status, as opposed to their counterparts that do not. We must be careful to ensure that that does not happen.

As I said, I am impressed by the range of organisations that support the Bill. Clearly, there is a need to address the issue. Clubs, leisure and housing organisations and the traditional organisations in the sector—the friendly societies and co-operatives—all have realisable assets and could be vulnerable to carpetbaggers. I have no doubt that their members should be free to dispose of those assets if they choose to do so. They should also be free to move beyond mutuality and to change their purpose and the nature of their operation in order to meet changing circumstances in society. We should be careful to bear that in mind when we consider the Bill, but at the same time, it is right and proper that these organisations should make such changes only with the support of a substantial majority of their members, and that they should do so with the same sort of safeguards that protect their counterparts in the building society sector.

Given the impressive backing that the hon. Gentleman has secured for the Bill, and as it represents a sensible step for the sector, I am happy to offer to him my support for its Second Reading. I hope that detailed work in Committee will shape a measure that the Government will help on to the statute book and that will deliver significant improvement for the sector.

10.22 am

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): As one of the Bill's sponsors, I am very grateful to have an early opportunity to contribute to the debate. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) not only on introducing the Bill, but on his campaigning in Westminster and in the country for the changes that he proposes. I remember that he received a very warm Mancunian welcome back in November when he came to speak to the UK Co-operative Council at its meeting in Manchester.

My hon. Friend has spoken clearly and powerfully about the need to modernise the law in order to make it easier to ensure that legislation governing industrial and provident societies remains in line with company law generally. He has also spoken wisely about the need to align industrial and provident societies to the rules that now apply to building societies in respect of turnout and majority when votes are taken on proposed constitutional changes—especially proposals to demutualise.

I noted from the Library research paper on the Bill that the UK currently has 9,000 industrial and provident societies with assets worth £56 billion. It is essential that those assets and the people who own them are given adequate protection by the law. We saw what happened in the 1990s, when in only four years, nine building societies demutualised, completely removing two thirds of all the assets in the sector. My hon. Friend may not have convinced the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), but I think that he spoke persuasively about the need to give people who plan, develop and invest in new community benefit societies the power to put in place rules to ensure that those who establish such enterprises can do so without fear that the community assets that they create will be stripped away.

As we have heard, mutuals and co-operatives are not a new idea. Indeed, E. P. Thompson reckoned that in 1815, one in 10 people in this country belonged to a friendly society. In his book, "The Making of the English Working Class", he put his finger on the essential strength of such organisations when he said:

> "The fact that each brother had funds deposited in the society made for stability in membership and watchful participation in self-governance."

The Rochdale pioneers took that principle a stage further 150 years ago by creating the co-operative movement, including several organisations that remain with us today. The movement helped to create new aspirations and the confidence to demand the sort of social and economic reforms that gave people real security and freedom from want. Indeed, those aspirations and the political pressure that built up ultimately gave birth to the post-war welfare state, with the goals of decent housing and education, a universal health service and social insurance to provide protection for people when they are ill or in old age.

We all know how that Beveridge vision was undermined in the 1970s. First, it was undermined by economic changes and the mass unemployment that they caused. Apart from the poverty and exclusion that was created, millions of people lost all sense of being contributors to the welfare society. Secondly, the Beveridge vision was undermined by those who believed that market forces, consumer choice and the accumulation of personal wealth were the answer to all our needs—values that were exactly the opposite of those held by the people who created the friendly societies and the co-operative movement.

I would be the first to argue that the welfare state involved many good things such as access to health and education and the opportunity to escape poverty, but it also brought with it the expectation that all our problems can be solved from above. People might have argued for more money or different policies, but Governments were expected to find and deliver all the answers. Today, much of the political and media debate still reflects that mentality of wanting top-down answers. One of the most amazing experiences for me in my political lifetime was seeing among those who had suffered most in the 1970s and 1980s—those who had been excluded and were

[Paul Goggins]

without work or hope of work—the first signs of the rediscovery of the spirit of mutuality, solidarity and co-operation that we are debating.

I remember visiting the Meadowell estate on Tyneside at the end of the 1980s, when I was director of Church Action on Poverty. I met a group of women who had formed a credit union and established the Cedarwood centre with a co-op shop and shared community facilities. No one gave those achievements to them, but with a little help and encouragement from some local churches, they had started to organise in order to meet their needs. I have seen that many times since, not least in my constituency, where three small community credit unions have now formed into one credit union for the whole of Wythenshawe. It has an office in the town-centre Co-op store, where it is easily accessible to people throughout the community.

Phil Hope (Corby): My hon. Friend mentioned the importance of community involvement and participation, especially among people who are socially excluded. Will he comment on the recent initiatives taken by the Government through the new deal for communities to establish new forms of local partnership between communities and statutory organisations to regenerate local communities? They use the same principles which date back so far and which we are now rediscovering as we try to tackle deep-rooted poverty and exclusion.

Paul Goggins: My hon. Friend reads my mind, as I intend to make a few comments along those lines. The most important thing is to recognise that poverty is not only about cash, although lack of money is clearly at its heart, but about powerlessness. It is always welcome when the Government seek to involve people in decision making and ensure that they have a greater stake and more power; indeed, it should be part of the strategy for defeating poverty.

It is impressive when we see in our communities organisations that have grown from the bottom up linking with Government initiatives and the serious investment of cash that that can often bring. In my constituency, Family Action Benchill was a small, church-based community project that is now at the heart of sure start in Benchill. Indeed, the credit union has been able to benefit from single regeneration funding, helping to create the new premises in the Co-op store, to provide training for staff and so on.

Too often in the past, regeneration has been too short term and too professionally led. To be successful, it must build up people's capacity to fend and organise for themselves, and to develop what is now called social capital—something that is really quite simple. It is a mix of resources and talent that exists in any community and can underpin its sustainability and stability.

On Wednesday, my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) and I attended a meeting of the all-party group on poverty, at which the Deputy Prime Minister talked about financial redistribution and the need to give people more power to make decisions that affect their communities. That is welcome.

The Bill is important, and its significance will go beyond its specific provisions and contribute to many of the key debates of our generation about the need to reduce the gap between rich and poor, to reduce crime, to renew civil society and to modernise our public services. I believe that our schools and hospitals have improved in the past five years and that they will continue to do so in future. However, if we keep in mind only the traditional, top-down model of change, services will not improve as quickly or as fully as they otherwise could, and our constituents will not feel the difference. Local people must be engaged, and their ideas and energies must contribute to the process of reform.

Organisations that benefit the community play a crucial part in change. The Bill will give community leaders the confidence to build up substantial and significant organisations without fearing that their value will be snatched away. We all know the gaps in our communities that such societies and organisations could fill. They include financial services, shopping, social activity, housing, health and social care and transport. All those needs can be fulfilled not only by initiatives that are top down and large scale but by those that are small scale and bottom up.

In the end, such organisations have the potential to improve the provision of services to our constituents and to renew civil society and people's engagement in decision making. When people have assets to protect that they own together, they are more likely to be involved in policy and decision making.

10.32 am

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on introducing the Bill, which is important because it strengthens the mutual sector, which has been under attack for the past 15 years. It may be considered surprising that the Bill is supported by the Scottish National party and the Conservative party as well as the Labour party, but the mutual and co-operative movement combines the best aspects of collectivism and self-help, so in fact the cross-party support is not surprising.

The co-operative movement and the mutual sector have a long history in Scotland. Life assurance was a big sector there, and small co-operatives grew to be large companies. Since the Building Societies Act 1986, the mutual principle in building societies and life assurance has been under continual attack. In the late 1980s, mutuality was regarded as old fashioned and Victorian—as something that should be done away with in the bright new world of entrepreneurialism.

Many traditional life assurance companies in Scotland have disappeared or been swallowed up by public limited companies. Standard Life, which has recently survived a brutal and expensive fight to retain its mutual status, is the last major mutual life assurer in Scotland. All the others, such as Scottish Amicable, have gone. I had a pension policy with that company, but I now find that I have a pension with the Prudential. I did not intend that.

Although the Bill does not cover life assurance, it strengthens the mutual sector. We need to get away from the position whereby mutuals and co-operatives are perceived as a means of making money through demutualisation and asset sales. Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I was a solicitor for many years. In the late 1980s, I regularly received phone calls or letters from finance advisers, tipping me off about the building societies that would next be ripe for demutualisation, and telling me which insurance companies to take out a policy with to generate a windfall. That atmosphere destroyed much mutuality.

In his opening speech, the hon. Member for Harrow, West showed the huge breadth of organisations that are involved in the co-operative and industrial and provident sector. It is important to remember that it is expanding. In Scotland, many people and communities are coming together to set up new co-operatives and mutual societies. I am sure that that also applies to the rest of the United Kingdom. In many deprived areas, food co-operatives are increasing as a counterbalance to huge supermarkets such as Tesco and Sainsbury's. Existing co-operative societies play an important role. There are still Co-operative stores or supermarkets in many small or deprived communities where Tesco and Sainsbury's will not go. Such stores are important and must be supported.

In Scotland, there is increasing interest in community land buy-outs among people who have traditionally worked for the estate and almost been bought and sold with it. The co-operative and mutual model can be important in ensuring that people who want to buy land and estates for community ownership and a stake in their future can do that. However, as many speakers have hinted, that will work only when there is clarity and certainty that when people invest in co-ops and set up organisations, they can control their assets to ensure that they are not attacked by carpetbaggers, and that their hard work is not sold from under them.

The Bill may not tackle all the problems, but it is an important step forward, and I offer it unreserved support.

10.37 am

Phil Hope (Corby): As a long-standing supporter of the co-operative movement, I am pleased to have the opportunity to support the Bill. I join my colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on promoting the measure. His presentation was clear, persuasive and educative for those of us who are learning about the movement, and it was rooted in a proud track record of campaigning.

I welcome the cross-party support. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) is worried about preventing carpetbaggers from taking over his Conservative club. Some Labour Members might believe that that has happened already. We hope that we can deal with his problem at the next general election.

The Bill is an important contribution to the Government's co-operative agenda, which is championed by many co-operators in Parliament. Like many other hon. Members who support the Bill, I have been a co-operator all my life. I am a member of the Co-operative group of Members of Parliament and I was elected as a Labour and Co-operative MP. It therefore gives me genuine pleasure to be here today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) talked about tackling poverty through local community endeavour. I believe that we are all beginning to realise the necessity for that. Money is crucial, but we must involve local people in their communities, and devolve power so that the people who are most directly affected make the decisions.

The Bill could be described as a technical measure. It includes technical provisions to protect specific forms of societies that benefit the community. However, it is much more significant; it is about waking the sleeping giant and acknowledging the vital role of the co-operative movement, industrial and provident societies and so many other community organisations. The Bill will lead to genuine changes to benefit our communities.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): In my constituency, new credit unions are being set up—the Derwentside credit union, for example. They tackle the genuine poverty and misery that loan sharks cause. Does my hon. Friend agree that although the Bill is technical, it will help the people in most need in poor communities and on council estates throughout the country?

Phil Hope: I shall talk specifically about credit unions later, because—particularly in the poorest communities—the impact of debt on people's lives, and their vulnerability to loan sharks, can be devastating. The growth of credit unions in this country over the last 10 years has been spectacular. They provide a real way of providing people with access to finance and the ability to save, which they have not had in the past because of the behaviour of the financial institutions that have overlooked, ignored or rejected them.

The whole co-operative movement supports the Bill, because the values of the movement go hand in hand with the values of the Labour party. I want to remind hon. Members of the party's constitution, which states:

> "By the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential, and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many not the few."

That is what the industrial and provident society movement, the co-operative movement and the credit union movement are all about: social justice. The Bill will strengthen the institutions that provide the means for creating that social justice. Those values are reflected in the support that the Government and the Prime Minister have given to the co-operative movement, not least in establishing the Co-operative Commission to consider how to ensure that the movement prospers in this century.

The Bill, which has been so eloquently introduced today by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West, incorporates a number of the recommendations made by the Co-operative Commission, and it has been widely welcomed both by co-operators and by members of the commission. It will strengthen an already strong and growing movement. Recent figures show that Britain's retail co-operatives have revenues of about £8.5 billion a year and employ 120,000 people.

In banking and insurance, co-operators employ another 15,000 people, and hold assets in excess of £23 billion. More than 500 farm co-ops play a valuable role in supporting agriculture. There are also about 1,500 worker co-operatives, and about 1,500 community co-operatives, credit unions and housing co-operatives. The source for those details of the strength of the co-operative movement comes from an excellent publication, "New Mutualism", published two years ago.

The new mutual movement is growing daily, with massive support from co-operators in the House. Indeed, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell expressed his surprise that the assets of the industrial and provident society movement totalled £56.5 billion. He was right to point out how diverse the movement is, comprising not only retail societies, agricultural and fishing societies, but all the clubs as well.

[Phil Hope]

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West mentioned a rugby club in the north of his constituency. I do not know whether he plays for that club, but if he does, it has real problems. I have seen him play for the all-party rugby team, and all I can say is that he is spectacular on the wing—mind you, we never gave him the ball.

The Bill will provide support for small clubs such as that one, and for similar societies, in our constituencies throughout the country.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): There are 200 members, drawn from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, of the all-party parliamentary group on non-profit-making members' clubs. They represent something like 6 million members throughout the country in about 5,000 clubs. Those people have a vested interest in our debate. Conservative clubs, Labour clubs, Liberal clubs and ex-servicemen's clubs are all part of this great movement. I ask my hon. Friend to reflect on that large number of people in those institutions who are looking to us to make a positive decision on behalf of their organisations today.

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend has identified a central purpose of our being here today. The Bill is far more than a technical matter. There are thousands of clubs, with a great many volunteers. In my constituency, 2,000 children go out to play football regularly at the weekend, in small leagues and clubs, with coaches and parents all getting involved. That represents society working with children and young people, and providing them with opportunities. Each of those clubs will have the opportunity, through the Bill, to be strengthened and to find a stronger role to play in the community.

We must do all we can to recognise the role that they play, and to reinforce that role through technical measures, such as strengthening their constitutional support, and through funding—the sure start programme has been mentioned today. So much is going on to provide new community enrichment and enhancement, and we should never overlook the hours of contribution made to the community by volunteers in those clubs and societies. That is what makes our community the wonderful place that it is today.

Such clubs encounter some grief, however, when they try to sign up to become industrial and provident societies with the Financial Services Authority, and it costs a bit. The Bill does not tackle the issue of charges, but we should put down a marker about the level of charges for clubs that register in that way. It creates a barrier, and we are trying to remove barriers for small clubs and societies.

Mr. Drew: Does my hon. Friend agree that that process is not only expensive but very complicated? One of the problems is that it takes an undue amount of time to register as an industrial or provident society.

Phil Hope: That is absolutely right. A review of charitable law is being undertaken by the performance and innovation unit at the moment, although I am not certain how wide-ranging it is, or when the report will appear. Perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us that. We must try to remove the bureaucracy, barriers and regulations that prevent organisations from forming themselves into such institutions and gaining protection so that they can carry out their good works in the community. The more we can do to reduce that burden of bureaucracy—such as paying expensive solicitors' fees or going through a process that takes months, registering with the Charity Commission, or registering with the FSA—the better it will be. Part of our role is to ensure that that regulation is kept to a minimum. I am sure that we have cross-party support on the importance of removing those burdens.

Having said that the co-operative movement is so strong, I must add that it has, of course, been a mixed story over the last century. It has had to adapt to survive and remain strong. The battle between mutually owned building societies and their demutualised rivals is a case in point. We have seen how building societies have to maintain a first-class service to customers and high quality communication with their members, if they are to resist damaging takeovers, which are often led by carpetbaggers seeking to make a quick buck.

Those carpetbaggers abuse the democracy at the heart of the co-operative movement by offering the promise of share windfalls. It was not pointed out during the bad years when these battles were at their height that the long-term effect would be to remove from members the democratic right to control the capital of the co-operative—and, indeed, its policies—based on values of self-help, fairness and social responsibility.

It is encouraging that when a mutual society has performed well and put its case strongly, members have chosen to reject the short-termism of the carpetbaggers. The largest building society, Nationwide, provides one example of a demutualisation attempt being resisted; the defeat at Standard Life gives us another. I hope that we have now turned the corner in relation to that matter, not only because of the regulation that we are trying to introduce today but because of the positive way in which the building societies are now putting across those values. They were values that we took for granted; we thought that we did not need to repeat them because we all knew what they were. This is our opportunity to ensure that everyone knows what they are, and that such moves are resisted as much as possible in future.

We must protect the democratic principle so that people have the right to decide the future of their societies, which is the point of clause 1. All the Bill seeks to do is to bring protection for co-ops in line with that for the building society sector by ensuring that a decision to convert to registered company status is made by more than half a society's members. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West made the crucial point that a minority or small group must not be able to turn up, vote and overturn a society's status. Clause 1 would prevent that.

Why use 75 per cent. and 25 per cent. as the figures? There is no generally accepted mathematical basis for saying, "This is a legitimate democratic process and that is not." However, the co-operators who support the Bill believe that clause 1 strikes the right balance between protecting co-operatives from carpetbaggers and preserving members' rights to make democratic informed choices. That is a difficult balance to strike, but the Bill gets it right.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) referred to credit unions. Although the co-operative movement has been successful in the financial sector—

the growth of credit unions is an example of that—people have still suffered. Credit unions are protected by the Credit Unions Act 1979, which in effect prevents their demutualisation, and they are an important means of tackling financial exclusion.

I know from my constituency experience that some people cannot borrow money at an acceptable rate or even hold a bank account. If they cannot get access to a bank account but live in the cash economy, gaining access to credit is so much harder. People excluded from the financial services that we all take for granted usually have only one option—a loan shark. They find themselves in huge debt and unable to pay, then the situation goes from bad to worse until they cannot cope with the burden.

Many Members will have met, as I have, constituents who have fallen into the trap and the exploitation that goes with it, but there is an alternative—the credit union. The number of members has grown to about 220,000 from about 70,000 only a decade ago, and there are 450 members of the Association of British Credit Unions, which is a huge step forward. As well as having an attractive savings option—people can get up to 8 per cent. in a good credit union—members receive low-interest loans, which is why they do not have to rely on the loan sharks.

A successful credit union operates in my constituency of Corby. It is run by volunteers based at Corby's volunteer bureau and it has 400 members, 80 of whom are under 16. As young people enter adulthood, do they understand finance and budgets and how to open a bank account? They do not. It is important that we provide youngsters, particularly those in school, with that information, and joining a credit union is a safe and reliable way to find out how to manage money.

I am sure that hon. Members will join me in welcoming the growth of credit unions and congratulating all those throughout the country, including Corby credit union, on their success. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West said, the Bill has the full backing of the Association of British Credit Unions. Indeed, the range of support that he has managed to drum up is particularly impressive, and it is important for what we want to achieve.

Other Members have referred to housing, and I want to mention housing co-operatives. This week many Members will have read *The Guardian* obituary of Harold Campbell, written by Lord Graham. It is an excellent tribute to a co-operator who played an important role in the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the Co-operative Development Agency. Most significantly, he was a champion of housing co-operatives and the role of tenants in housing management.

The Bill is important because it would support and raise the profile of new ways of working—the new mutualism—not least in the housing sector. About 5 per cent. of tenants live in co-operatively managed homes and more live in homes managed by housing associations, which have grown considerably in recent years. Co-operative housing ownership gives tenants more responsibility for their living conditions and helps them to acquire a greater sense of control over their own lives, homes and neighbourhoods.

Tackling the problems of the most run-down estates and providing more control and ownership to the people who live there, which are core elements of regeneration, will be important in the next four years of this Parliament. The co-operative movement and the housing co-operative movement have a vital role to play in that, so legislation such as this, which would provide greater security for community assets, is essential if we are to pursue that approach.

We have not mentioned the health sector, but there is a model in my constituency, as general practitioners have formed a co-operative to share medical services and work together. Every sector—housing, finance and health—is open to such development and all the advantages it brings.

I must mention charitable law, which the performance and innovation unit is reviewing. There are parallels between the legal protections for charities and for industrial and provident societies, and there are models that we can use. I hope that the PIU report recognises the value of those protections for the wider voluntary sector, and that the model in the Bill, but not necessarily the charitable model, has wider application.

I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West on introducing this welcome Bill. He is a committed co-operator and we all pay tribute to his work as an MP and chair of the Co-operative party. I am enjoying the debate. We are learning a lot, and I wish his Bill every success.

10.57 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I want to add to the weight of all-party consensus on this useful and important Bill, which would strengthen mutuality and the co-operative principle. I have become involved in the past few years through the Save Our Building Societies campaign, and my colleagues on the Liberal Democrat Benches would strongly endorse the thrust of the Bill. As we were reminded by the helpful intervention of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), we are dealing with not only ideologically driven bodies, but practical grass-roots organisations. I am a member of my local British Legion club, which falls within the industrial and provident societies structure, as do political clubs and allotments.

I was intrigued by the reference to the Rugby Football Union, as my constituency hosts it. Whenever I get involved in disputes with the RFU, as I do because my constituents are often inconvenienced by it, I am always told that it is running a business. When I next speak to the RFU, I shall remind it that it is covered by the common bond and that it should perhaps take more account of my constituents' interests.

I must take up an important point made by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on taking the issue up for his private Member's Bill, but there is a question about why such important legislative change has to be dealt with in this way. Our approach to legislation for companies and for the mutual sector is not balanced. The last major companies legislation review was in the mid-1980s, but a new one is under way and no doubt flagship legislation will be introduced when it comes to fruition. However, it has been much more difficult to change mutuals legislation.

Building societies are the most important sector. The Government have helpfully introduced secondary legislation, but the all-party building societies group and the Treasury Committee, of which I was a member, recommended stronger primary legislation, for which time

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

has never been found. A lot of encouragement is being given to credit unions, but if they are to take off, as they have in Ireland and the United States, major legislation is needed.

Friendly societies were reformed accidentally. When the Financial Services Bill was going through Parliament, they urged me to table amendments to modernise their rules in the way that this Bill does. Initially, my amendments were rejected, but I am pleased to say that Treasury Ministers got the point and made the necessary changes—which, although it was an afterthought, gave the friendly societies a fillip. It is, however, unfortunate that a private Member's Bill should be seen as the only means of achieving modernisation of this kind.

There is something of a paradox here, in that although we pay lip service to—or, in some cases, genuinely believe in—the importance of mutuality, it has become a bit like motherhood and apple pie. The brutal reality is that the key parts of the mutual movement have been in serious decline for a long time. Members have mentioned building societies, whose share of the market has fallen from about 75 per cent. to 25 per cent. in the last six or seven years. Much of the mutual insurance sector has disappeared very quickly, and only a few companies remain. Equitable Life has not exactly covered itself in glory, and the co-operative movement has been in decline for some time, quite apart from the Lanica takeover. The friendly societies are but a relic of what used to be a major lending movement.

We can, however, view the situation in a slightly more positive way. Mutual organisations of a different kind are bubbling up all over the place, although they are often not recognised. I did not know until recently that the after-school kids' clubs that have sprouted all over the country were mutual organisations. The Workers Educational Association, a very creative force, operates through mutuality, as does the University of the Third Age. Like that of the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope), my constituency contains doctors' co-ops, which have sprung up to provide after-hours care. Mutuality can be found even in high-tech business: the Linux computer software outfit is a mutual. We are talking not just about additional structures, but about modern organisations.

Why do we see this paradox, whereby some of the traditional mutuals are seemingly in decline while others are bubbling up and growing? Provident societies, and mutuals in general, have a problem, in that while there are strong arguments for mutuality, it has its weaknesses, because unless the system of legislation and regulation is pitched just right negative forces will take over.

Let me summarise the positive aspects. First, mutual organisations—including industrial and provident societies—provide diversity. It would be undesirable if profit-seeking plcs or private companies formed the only basis of organisation; the banking sector gave us an effective reminder of that. The only real opposition to banking charges for cashpoint machines came from the Co-op bank and the Nationwide building society. Those are also the only two organisations that have argued for ethical standards in banking, thus resisting a trend in the rest of the sector. That positive development would not have occurred without mutuality.

Secondly, the mutuals provide a sense of social cohesion and community. Such things are enormously important. In many instances, moreover, this is simply the sensible way in which to organise. People organising a social club or allotment are not in the profit-making business. They merely want a formal, businesslike structure enabling them to organise but also to co-operate. That structure is not driven by ideology; it just happens to be the most sensible option.

Such organisations, however, have some fundamental weaknesses. Their main weakness is that they often become inward looking and complacent. When I was involved in the democratic side of the co-op movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was blindingly obvious to many people that they were being hit by supermarket competition; but because so many in the movement did not want change or amalgamation, the movement withered.

Often, in mutual organisations, the sense of drive comes from enthusiastic professional managers who want to grow—but in fact they grow away from their roots, or, because they are enthusiastic and entrepreneurial, they want a share of the profits and therefore move away from the mutuality principle. There is an inbuilt tension in such organisations, which is why the regulations must be pitched absolutely right.

Clauses 1 and 2 in particular provide the right combination of answers. I see clause 1 as a guarantee against carpetbagging, and clause 2 as a guarantee against asset stripping. The two are related, but separate measures are needed.

Clause 1 deals with carpetbagging very neatly by bringing the law into line with that governing building societies, but, I ask the hon. Member for Harrow, West, does it go far enough? Those of us who have been involved with building societies are apprehensive, feeling that, even following the Government's two regulatory changes, they do not have enough protection at present. We fear that there may be fresh assaults on the remaining building societies.

I wonder whether this is, in fact, the best model. The Nationwide building society, rather cleverly, has introduced the principle that if building societies convert, the money should go to a charity. That not only protects societies, but preserves the spirit of mutuality—that you are not in it for the money. Would the Nationwide model be applicable under clause 1?

As for clause 2, the hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the problem of asset stripping. There are many examples, but I will give just one. I was brought up in York, and as a kid I was an avid supporter of York City football club. I used to follow the team around the country. Some Members may recall the famous semi-final against Newcastle. York City is now in danger of extinction, however—possibly within weeks.

Like most football clubs, York City relies on the support of a few business people who have put in a lot of money. In York, as in other cities, most of those business people treated their involvement as a mutual arrangement, and honoured the spirit of mutuality. One did not, however. He spotted a loophole in the law enabling him to sell off the club and the ground, and make millions. There is not enough of a safeguard in the legislation to stop that. I think it is a problem relating to industrial and provident societies, in fact, which is why the hon. Gentleman's proposals are so important.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I am delighted that I seem to have provoked a rapprochement between the hon. Gentleman and the Rugby Football Union.

I have met representatives of the Building Societies Association, which, although not a parent body sponsoring industrial and provident societies, supports the Bill. It, like the hon. Gentleman, stressed the fact that the recommendations in the Treasury Select Committee report on demutualisation, produced back in 1999, still had not been given legislative time in the House. I am sympathetic to the proposed changes, but private Members' Bills must be seen to be modest. I have not sought to change the world; I have merely tried to make positive changes for industrial and provident societies. I realise that there are defects in other parts of the mutual movement, which I hope will be dealt with in the future.

Dr. Cable: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention. I certainly was not criticising his Bill; I was simply suggesting how we might look forward.

May I return to the subject of asset stripping? There is a legal problem, reflected in, for instance, inheritance legislation. There are dangers in locking up assets for long periods so that they become unproductive. It has been recognised in regard to mutuals, certainly in the case of credit unions, that entrenchment preventing asset stripping should exist in law, and I think that there are precedents for clause 2. There are precedents elsewhere for clause 2.

We can certainly draw encouragement from precedents created in continental Europe. The co-operative movement is far more successful in France and Germany than it is here. The movement has a far larger market share of the European retail sector, precisely because European legislation governing co-operation provides the protection against asset stripping that the hon. Gentleman is trying to build into the law here. Such moves are to be commended. I add my support to this important and useful Bill.

11.10 am

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I do not intend to make a long speech, but this is an extremely important Bill. I have been a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for almost 10 years and a co-operator for 30 years. I have seen worrying attacks on the principles of co-operation as a result of demutualisation, but I have seen the beginnings of a new debate.

That debate was mentioned in passing by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) when he quoted a sentence from the new Labour party constitution. The words are on the membership card in my pocket too, but I will not pull it out and read what it says. The Labour party constitution now specifically and explicitly emphasises the importance of co-operation. That was not part of the old clause IV, but it is on the cards that Labour party members now carry with them. However, co-operation is not just supported by members of the Labour party, and I welcome the fact that Members from other parties have spoken in support of the Bill.

There is a growing recognition and desire in society generally to move away from the selfish "me" values that so damaged our country from the late 1970s onwards. If we are looking for new approaches to what could be called a modern social democracy, we need to take account of practices in other parts of the world and learn from best practice in this country.

This Bill is about a complex and diverse range of organisations that have one common feature: they belong to their members. They do not belong to shareholders and they are not owned by an individual or a few individuals. They belong to their members, who have a right to have their assets protected. However, many attempts have been made—the internet makes this easier—to foster carpetbagging and asset-stripping operations.

Andrew Regan was mentioned earlier and I do not wish to refer to matters that might be sub judice. However, there are such people and they may not even be from this country. We have heard reports that Australians and people from other parts of the world have trawled around to find others to join them in carpetbagging and asset-stripping operations against mutual organisations.

Some of the reports involve high-profile cases and we have seen the effective way in which the Nationwide building society has fought to defend the mutual principle. Those of us who are members of the all-party group on building societies and financial mutuals have been pleased to give our support to the work that the Nationwide has done. I declare an interest: my mortgage is with the Nationwide and it gives me a good rate, much better than the one I would get from the demutualised societies.

We all know that the Nationwide has the resources, the calibre of management, the staff and the financial and technological base to be able to mount an effective defence against the attempts made by those who wish to demutualise it. However, some of the 9,000 smaller organisations that are in the industrial and provident society sector do not have such resources. They may be run entirely by volunteers and be entirely dependent on a few individuals. The vast majority of their membership may be happy because the organisations function well and have built up assets over time, but they may have no conception—or the expertise to help them—of how to resist when a malicious, determined, self-seeking, unrepresentative, carpetbagging and extreme capitalist comes into their midst to try to destroy the mutual organisation for his own interests.

We must provide a framework to assist such organisations. We need to find a way, through legislation, of shifting the balance in the interests of the ordinary members of those organisations. That is what the Bill is about. It is long overdue and very welcome.

Mention has been made of the variety of co-operative and mutual organisations. They can be found in my constituency and almost all Members could provide examples. In the medical sector, doctors' co-operatives provide out-of-hours services attached to accident and emergency departments. The doctors involved have other roles as members of the British Medical Association or in primary care trusts, but, at certain levels, they work within a co-operative framework. In time, that movement will grow. Similarly, people working in the employment industry have set up co-operatives for people with particular skills. They work together to provide work for their members in other sectors of the economy. That movement will also grow.

The more traditional co-operatives in my constituency include the Co-operative Funeral Service, co-operative chemists and the one remaining co-operative store. I say

[Mike Gapes]

"one" but, when I was first active in politics in Ilford many years ago, there were several co-operative stores. However, that has changed in London. Several Members have mentioned the attack that the big retail companies, such as Sainsbury's, Asda and Tesco, mounted to gain a greater market share.

At one time, the public perception was that the co-operatives were found only in the retail sector. However, Co-operative Retail Services in London got into terrible financial problems that went on for many years and there was a resistance to change. Only now under the new structure involving the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the new Co-operative Group does the organisation have an invigorated and, I hope, more effective retail side. Co-operation and mutuality, however, are about much more than that. Many aspects have been mentioned already and I shall not repeat them.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman is making some good and interesting points. He talks about empowerment—disadvantaged people being able to take control of their lives—and about co-operative stores, one of the weaknesses of which was that they competed head to head with the supermarkets. Will not the Bill help co-operatives in the agriculture sector to start at the lower end, so that people get a fair deal and can protect themselves from what some people would call the abuse of power by the supermarkets?

Mike Gapes: I do not wish to get into a big discussion about the retail sector, and I suspect that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not allow me to do so, but I agree that it is essential that an organisation is democratic and accountable. If an organisation is not democratic because of neglect or because that suits the people who control it, problems arise. That is when organisations become vulnerable to takeovers by unrepresentative groups.

The same applies to other organisations in society. I believe that this Bill is about democracy, accountability and revitalisation of democracy. If people want to bring about change, they will have to gain the wholehearted consent of the overwhelming majority of the members. That principle is valid not just here but in a general sense.

In my misspent teenage years and early 20s, I was involved in the student movement. At meetings that purported to represent 10,000 students, the quorum could have fit into four telephone boxes. Totally unrepresentative decisions were made with no contact whatever with the vast majority. They did not even know about the decisions taken in their name.

I hope that we have gone beyond that in that area and in trade union operations, because we must ensure that unrepresentative decisions cannot be taken by small groups of people with a dedicated, almost entryist agenda, such as the Trotskyists and fascists who joined political parties to pursue their own agendas. We must protect the mutual sector and all the organisations that are encompassed by the Bill by enacting the safeguards that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) has ably introduced.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on the way in which he introduced the Bill. As one of the sponsors, I have already expressed support for it. I hope that the House can unite behind its very sensible proposals and get it on to the statute book as soon as possible.

11.23 am

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on introducing the Bill, which emphasises the importance and value of mutuality and at the same time proposes practical measures to protect mutuality and co-operation from the asset strippers and carpetbaggers.

I remind the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). and other hon. Members that the Government have taken measures to support co-operation and credit unions. They have ensured that the remit of the regional development agencies includes specific reference to the need to support co-operative enterprises. In promoting and supporting the Co-operative Commission, they ensure that co-operation is seen as an essential part of our economy and society. The commission has made recommendations of great practical value, some of which are being put forward today.

Hon. Members have already indicated the wide scope of the co-operative movement: it is involved in retailing, banking—both conventional and community—insurance, housing, production, farming, leisure and many other aspects of life. It is also an international movement. The International Co-operative Alliance plays an essential role in bringing together co-operatives and mutual societies across the world, making it clear that co-operation and mutuality have value in all ranges of economies: in poor economies, in developing countries and equally in highly developed countries such as the United Kingdom which are struggling to redefine the value of community.

There is something special about co-operation and mutuality, and that is what makes the Bill so important. Co-operation and mutuality are about the economy and being efficient but they are also about ethics and quality: quality of life and valuing individuals.

In 1844, the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers set up its Rochdale store to provide a service to the community. At the centre of that service was an identification of the importance of providing unadulterated, good-quality food and a service that gave value to the customer, did not cheat and promoted high quality and high ethics.

More recently, in the 1990s, it was the Co-operative bank under the leadership of its then chief executive Lord Terry Thomas which pioneered ethical banking, which has now been taken up across the banking sector. It was first in the field and led the way. In the same way, it pioneered the recognition of the importance to business of environmental concerns. It sponsored and supported the first environmental business centre, which opened in Manchester in the mid 1990s, showing that business too had a responsibility to the environment and that that responsibility could be met in giving economic benefits to banking and to business, as well as to the community. Throughout, co-operation and mutuality have shown not only that they were efficient and had economic benefits but that they were about ethics, showing initiative and taking the lead.

Co-operatives are important at a local level. They often take the initiative, develop pioneering projects and take the lead in a way that no other organisation is willing to do. In that respect, I pay particular tribute to the work of the Eldonians in Vauxhall, Liverpool They began in 1978 as a community response to local authority plans to clear tenement blocks and disperse tenants far away from where they identified their community to be. The Eldonian housing co-operative was set up. It comprised local people who came together with a common need, and designed and built new homes on what was then the derelict Tate and Lyle site in Liverpool.

The Eldonian co-operative has never stopped innovating, showing the way and meeting the needs of its local community. It moved from building and designing houses to building a village hall, a residential home for the frail elderly, a day nursery and a sports centre. It takes the lead in economic regeneration in its area and elsewhere. It pioneered a neighbourhood community warden scheme supported by Merseyside police and the Home Office: a pilot scheme to show how neighbourhood wardens working in co-operation with the police and community could enhance the security of local people.

The example of the Eldonians in Liverpool shows the value of co-operation and of local people coming together, identifying a need and working to meet that need. They use the large-scale resources that are available through European funding, single regeneration budgets and objective 1 funding. They also put small amounts of money together with initiative and determination to improve the lot of the local community. That is an example that could be emulated throughout the country. I know that the Eldonians have inspired other groups, as they have inspired people in Liverpool.

A number of hon. Friends have drawn attention to the increasing popularity of mutuality and the increasing importance attached to the significance of community and of collective action. I believe that much of what has been dubbed "the third way" in recent years has simply been a recognition, long lost, of the importance of collective action, community and individual self-help, all working together.

For the co-operative movement and mutuality to reach their full potential for the benefit of the whole community in the future, it is important to have support at all levels. There needs to be support through enterprise from the regional development agencies and local initiatives. We need to ensure that new funding made available by the Government, such as the Phoenix fund, is used to support the development of local co-operatives. For co-operation to develop, it needs support organisations. The Lancashire Co-operative Development Agency was set up by Lancashire county council more than 17 years ago. That excellent organisation, set up because a local authority believed in co-operation as it believed in enterprise and economic development, has supported a wide range of co-operative organisations, bringing employment and benefit to hundreds of people in the Lancashire area and more in the north-west as a whole.

For co-operation to flourish, it also needs the support of the Government. The Government have already given much of that support in encouraging co-operation, backing changes in regulations on credit unions and looking at financial regulations. They can give more support by supporting the Bill today so that co-operation and mutuality move forward as an ever-growing third sector in our economy, meeting the needs of local communities, supporting initiative, and showing the true value of collective action.

11.33 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am delighted to be called to speak and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman). My hon. Friend gave a very clear exposition of the benefits of co-operation, mutuality and community benefit, which all of us, in a way, were elected to this place to represent. However, some of us see it more formally, and here I declare my interest, as a proud Member of the Co-operative party. It is pleasing to know that we are the biggest representative group in the history of the Co-operative party. I see many colleagues smiling, so I think I am among friends.

I do not want to reiterate the arguments that have already been made. The case for the Bill is strong, although no doubt we will tease out the details in Committee. I was pleased to receive a letter from my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary saying that in principle the Government support the Bill. They have some problems with clause 2, but I hope that those can be dealt with in Committee. I hope that the Bill will be given godspeed and go on to the statute book.

I want to discuss the need to encourage co-operatives in the rural economy, particularly in agricultural production. In my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), I highlighted the fact that this is a particularly opportune moment at which to discuss the matter. The Curry commission, which will report next week or the week after, will deal with the problems of the agricultural economy post-foot and mouth. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked the commission to look very carefully at how to revitalise, if not completely restore confidence in, the agricultural sector.

I have no reason to believe that the leaks we have heard are right or wrong, although I suspect that they are more right than wrong. It seems that the commission will recommend looking carefully at encouraging co-operation in this important sector. Critics will point out that one of the main co-operatives that previously existed, Milk Marque, was not helped by the Government. However, we need to study the history so that we do not always look at the bad side of the co-operative sector. If we can learn from that experience, we can take forward what needs to happen. I make no apology for concentrating on that aspect.

The Bill brings together two important features which we ignore at our peril. First, there is a crying need for co-operation among farmers so that they can take on other elements upstream in the food chain—the processors and retailers. I do not use the phrase "take on" in a confrontational way; I am merely referring to the way in which business, by co-operating at an appropriate level, can be more effective through synergy, and to the fact that people can do more collectively than individually. In response to my intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West gave the example of the pig sector, which already has many large co-operatives.

Secondly, we must realise that we are competing not only within this country but within Europe and other large agricultural economies, such as those in Australasia, where co-operatives are an important fact of life. If we do not take that into account we miss an opportunity, and risk finding out in the future that they are much more effective than we are. I am not usually a great pro-European—I see that my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. David Drew]

Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) has just come into the Chamber—but we can learn things from the European Union and from mainland Europe, such as how co-operation has allowed other countries to keep the agricultural sector more intact and how we can develop that in the appropriate way. The Bill gives us the opportunity to do that.

I work with many farmers in my constituency, and it is sometimes hard to recognise the benefits of co-operation. However, where such a system is in operation, farmers are its greatest defenders. Machinery co-operatives allow farmers to buy and share machinery. They also share veterinary costs and their most likely venture is to share marketing costs. Once all those things are established, farmers become great defenders of them. It is sometimes hard work to instil that interest, but once it is there it grows and it could enhance the agriculture sector, which is in desperate need of an uplift.

Co-operation in the rural economy is not limited to farming. Many of us are proud to have farmers markets operating in our constituencies. I have an important one—one of the initial ones—in Stroud. It certainly set the trend. It is pleasing that, even though the organisation is not registered as an industrial and provident society, it works as a co-operative and mutual organisation. There are many other examples. Cirencester was set up after Stroud, and works successfully. All the evidence that has been put to me shows that people want to develop it further. The Bill allows us not only to ensure that such organisations continue but to encourage many other organisations.

Co-operative organisations are active in the arts and in work with people who have particular difficulties such as disabilities. I use as an example the Arts Factory, set up 1990 in Ferndale in the Rhondda Valley. People are co-operating in the arts and using that to develop their skills and market their produce effectively. Another organisation called ADAPT in the Tynedale area of Northumberland works with people with disabilities, enabling them to work on a co-operative basis—employment that otherwise would not be available to them. The co-operative support to provide transport, advisers and so on is a good example of co-operation at its most effective. Other hon. Members, especially my hon. Friend and fellow co-operator the Member for Corby (Phil Hope), have mentioned credit unions, which are a vital part of our social fabric.

The Bill shows what we need to do to regenerate rural areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West mentioned the Village Retail Services Association—ViRSA—which is a voluntary shop movement. That is not unimportant. One of the ways in which we can bring facilities that have closed back into use is through the voluntary shop movement. Such shops are often combined with a post office. At Port Appin near Oban a community co-operative has re-established a shop.

The shop is the centre of the village. Once villages lose their shop, they can begin to decline. I shall not get into the argument that has recently raged in certain regional newspapers about what is a vibrant village. I support the notion that the Countryside Agency should look at such things, but if my postbag and my local press are anything to go by, I am not sure whether the way in which it has approached the matter and labelled some communities has been helpful. We have upset an awful lot of villages by referring to them as less than vibrant.

If the Bill can help bring shops back into use and get communities behind them, and if the co-operative way is the best way of doing that, it is a jolly good thing that the Bill has come at this time. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, who is back on the Front Bench, will understand that the Government have a key role to play not just by standing aside and watching the legislation go through but by actively encouraging it and ensuring that we get the best and strongest Bill possible. I hope that I will be able to help that process so that the Bill can lift the co-operative and mutual sector.

11.44 am

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): First, I had better make it clear that I am a co-operator of long standing. Like others in the House today, I must declare that I am a member of the Labour and Co-operative group of Members of Parliament. Before I entered the House, I was an employee of the co-operative movement for 18 years, during which I had an opportunity to meet representatives of many of the traditional co-operative societies, the mutual organisations and the huge range of new and emerging co-operatives.

In the debate so far, it has been interesting to note that each new speaker has mentioned a new sort of co-operative. I have worked within the movement all this time, and still I hear about new forms of co-operative endeavour of which I was hitherto unaware. That is a reflection of the way in which society now looks on that form of endeavour as a means of fulfilling social objectives which it would not have considered appropriate a few years ago.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on introducing the Bill. I know that it has been long demanded by the traditional co-operative and mutual movement, but it is also recognised by the new emerging forms of co-operative and mutual organisation as relevant to their aspirations. Above all, the Bill recognises that different types of businesses require different structures. It does not pretend that the same thing is relevant for all sorts of economic organisations.

It is clear that certain sorts of traditional shareholding companies are inappropriate for community-based businesses. They are good for certain types of entrepreneurs; they have been successful historically in creating wealth. However, companies legislation constrains them to put their shareholders' interest first. The Bill would strengthen organisations that put service before shareholders.

The hon. Member Twickenham (Dr. Cable) mentioned some of the difficulties that the co-operative and mutual movement has faced in the past few years. I concede that it has faced difficulties, but one must also recognise that many co-operatives and mutual organisations that have survived until now have their origins in the previous century. It would be interesting to compare the longevity of co-operative and mutual organisations with that of private shareholding companies.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to a co-operative that he and I know well—Wortley Hall, in the constituency of my hon.

Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), which is also used by many of my constituents and many other people in South Yorkshire? It is a co-operative holiday and conference centre which was taken over 50 years ago, and celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. It became known, not surprisingly, as the people's stately home.

Wortley Hall provides conference facilities for much of the trade union movement, and holidays. It has been used for the benefit of local people for more than 50 years, yet how often do we go to a hotel or similar establishment in the private sector and find that it is now owned by someone different?

Mr. Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. Yes, I will pay tribute to Wortley Hall. I have spent many happy weekends there, and my hon. Friend's intervention reminded me that in addition to all its other achievements it has one above all: it is the place where my wife agreed to marry me, which I think everyone would agree makes it even more remarkable.

It is a testimony to the relevance and resilience of mutual and co-operative organisations that they have survived so long in a not very friendly legislative climate.

As the hon. Member for Twickenham said, mutuals and some co-operative societies have not always sold themselves very well. They have been happy to do their business, in some cases very successfully, but they have not conveyed to their members or the wider world the fact that they are a different type of business, and the merits of surviving as a different type of business. That omission was one of the factors that made them vulnerable to the predatory efforts of the carpetbaggers about whom we have heard so much this morning.

When the attacks on mutual societies were at their height, I read the financial pages of many newspapers, some of which should have known better, and I felt that the debate that went on failed to give a balanced perspective on the relevance and significance of the mutual sector in our financial set-up. All too often, many financial commentators were happy to go along with the tide of self-interest that dominated the debate.

That attack on the mutual sector highlights the need for the Bill, but I emphasise that it is not just a defensive Bill, designed to protect societies. It is a recognition that today's economy is more complex. The economy is no longer divided purely into the private sector and the public sector. The social economy is ever more important. In an increasing number of areas, although companies have to survive in the market, profit is not their main motive or driving force. Attempts to deliver many vital services by private shareholding companies have not worked. I could mention the water utilities and—dare I say it—Railtrack as classic examples.

Different forms of community-based business have proliferated. This morning we have heard about housing co-operatives, care co-operatives, football trusts, food co-operatives, credit unions, societies, clubs, and even the Women's Institute. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) has said that although those are different in so many ways, they all have one thing in common: they are owned by their members. For the most part, they also have other things in common. First, there is a degree of education in participation. Secondly, their success is measured by the quality of the service that they perform. Thirdly, the assets that they build up are available to the community rather than going into the pockets of the shareholders.

When I look around my constituency of West Bromwich, West, I see traditional and new co-operative and mutual endeavours. There is the West Midlands co-operative society, which still has many vital trading outlets, often in places where other multiples would not go. There is the Tipton and Coseley building society, which has survived the predatory instincts of certain people. It has not only provided many years of valuable service to the local community and the local economy, but been a linchpin in initiatives to regenerate the Tipton area.

There is also a housing co-operative at Cotterills Farm in Tipton, which works with the local authority and provides an excellent service to its tenants. We have a food co-operative, Sandwell Community Foods, which provides much needed healthy foods to people who otherwise would not have access to shops. It concentrates on delivering fresh fruit and vegetables at competitive prices to private homes, schools and nursing homes. It is funded partly by the national lottery board, partly by income that it generates itself and partly by the health authority through the health action zone. It is a clear demonstration of a community business complementing Government initiatives in the realisation of agreed social objectives.

These community-based companies are growing because the dividing line between the traditional public and private sectors is becoming blurred. Many services provided by national and local government have lacked flexibility and sensitivity to consumer needs. However, those services would suffer if they were delivered by private companies, where scarce resources would be diverted into shareholders' pockets. The co-operative or mutual alternative provides a solution that is as sensitive to consumer demand as the private sector, but which does not divert those much needed revenues into private shareholders' pockets.

However, under existing legislation there is a problem. The irony is that the more successful a mutual or co-operative becomes, the more vulnerable it is to privatisation. The richer it becomes in assets, the more likely it is to become a target for carpetbaggers.

Once privatisation takes place, the assets that have been built up by individuals on behalf of the community are lost, the service that the mutual or co-operative has delivered to the community is all too often lost—and, perhaps most worryingly, it provides a tangible disincentive for the other organisations that seek to do that work to organise on a mutual or co-operative basis. The fear of having the assets built up by a co-operative initiative taken over and privatised is still a definite disincentive in some areas.

The provisions in the Bill to ensure that any privatisation of a society will require a higher threshold of membership support should act as a deterrent; I welcome them. The clauses are designed to ensure that the society's assets continue to be used for community or other benefits will remove that incentive for carpetbaggers.

I recognise the point made by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), who is not in his place at the moment, that the provisions could present difficulties in certain circumstances. I believe that most of

[Mr. Bailey]

us who have been local authority representatives have come across that problem when trying to realise the aspirations of charitable trusts that were designed in previous centuries. However, I do not regard that as an insurmountable obstacle; I simply think that it requires an appropriate level of legislative flexibility.

The clauses that would provide for the updating of society legislation in line with other forms of company law are very welcome. They are welcome, above all, because they represent a recognition that industrial and provident society law is as important and significant as other forms of company law—that it is not just an archaic relic left over from the Victorian era, but a living and dynamic form of corporate legislation that plays, and will continue to play, a vital role in a modern, socially sensitive market economy. I therefore ask all hon. Members to support the Bill.

Mrs. Ellman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I note that several of my hon. Friends, as Labour and Co-operative Members of Parliament, have declared their membership of the co-operative group. I was not aware that that was a requirement in this debate. If it is a requirement, I wish to declare my membership of that group, as a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament, and I apologise for not doing so when I made my speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): That is not really a point of order for the occupant of the Chair, but the hon. Lady has made her point, and it is now on the record.

12 noon

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): May I say from the outset that I am not a member of the Co-operative party, but that I will still endeavour to co-operate and keep my contribution brief?

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on introducing the Bill. It is a breath of fresh air for me that the Bill contains social values that are consistent with my own values, when this society is one of personal gain and personal greed. The values in the Bill are consistent with those that brought me and a number of my colleagues into politics—social responsibility, accountability and the fundamental recognition that the more vulnerable people in our society depend on such organisations to enhance the quality of their lives.

I can think of no other recognised organisations—other than the Labour party and the trade union movement—that have the absolute commitment to democratic member control and participation that is apparent in the constitution of the co-operative societies. They have one member, one vote—as opposed to registered companies, where each share has a vote.

Co-operatives work for the benefit of their communities in a way that other financial institutions choose to ignore. Likewise, I also want to mention the good work done by credit unions, which has been mentioned already. A number of local credit unions in my constituency do sterling work day in, day out.

I am fortunate to represent a constituency that is diverse and somewhat complicated. In West Renfrewshire, many people live comfortable lives and operate within the established financial institutions, but there are those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to do so, or are uncomfortable in that environment. That is why the Bill is important. It would protect the interests—and, more importantly, the assets—of the societies from the carpetbaggers, whose only interest is self-interest; they have no interest in our communities. There is clear evidence that the financial predators are in the vicinity. That is why we must get the wagons in a circle now and legislate to protect those valuable and socially inclusive societies.

Industrial and provident societies have a crucial role in monitoring and delivering our public services—an issue of particular interest to me. Trying to deliver good quality transport is a particular problem in the rural communities in my constituency, and such societies could play a role in solving that problem.

We often refer to those societies as friendly societies, which is exactly what they are. They are user-friendly and their members feel comfortable participating in their structure, which strikes a proper balance between prudence and the needs of the community. On that basis, I am absolutely delighted—as a non-member of the Co-operative party—to support the Bill, which offers tangible legislative protection to those who have a social conscience in our society.

12.4 pm

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on introducing the Bill. It has at its heart the values of the co-operative movement that were established by the 28 weavers more than 150 years ago. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) talked about that cold December night when the weavers opened their half-empty warehouse, selling only four items—flour, oatmeal, sugar and butter. Who would have thought then what a movement they were unleashing?

The Bill is about safeguarding and refreshing the values that led to the establishment of those early co-operatives. Hon. Members have highlighted the fact that many organisations in our constituencies remain true to those principles and are looking to Parliament to provide them with a modern framework within which they can thrive for the benefit of future generations. It is a classic example of traditional values in a modern setting.

The co-operative movement is on the brink of a renaissance. If my hon. Friend's Bill does one thing, it puts the co-operative movement and mutuals firmly on the political agenda, at the heart of debate in this country. I must pay tribute to Peter Hunt and his team at the Co-operative party, who have done so much to ensure that co-operators have an amplified voice not just in the Chamber, but in the newspaper columns.

The Rochdale pioneers were committed to economic democracy—to operate their co-operatives collectively. They ensured that each member had only one share and one vote. Every member family had a say in the decisions that they made for the business. It is no surprise that all such organisations support the Bill. I pay tribute in particular to the members of social clubs—the Labour, Liberal and Conservative clubs. This morning I talked to the treasurer of the National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs, Mr. Bill Thomas, who told me to let hon. Members know that clubs up and down the land and their thousands of members will drink a toast to Parliament if we pass the Bill. I apologise to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), but I do not know whether there are any Scottish nationalist clubs. If there are, I am sure that they will drink a wee dram, too.

Co-operatives are not only economic entities, but community entities. They foster a great social awareness and build communities. John Williams, the president of my club, West Bromwich Labour club, is an electrician by trade. He leads a band of artisans who have been maintaining the club for many years. They are Pete Lowbridge the plumber, John the glazier and Geoff the builder—[HON. MEMBERS: "Bob the builder?"] No, Geoff the builder. In their own time they not only enjoy the club's provisions, but maintain it—notably, they have rewired the entire second floor on Sunday mornings over the past six months.

Co-operatives also foster a cultural spirit in a community. There are many youth music groups and arts groups. I am not sure whether members of the band Hear'Say formed a co-operative when they won the television show, but—this is hot off the press—one of its singers, Kym, has left it, and I am sure that the House will want to wish her all the best with her solo career.

I am sure that Kym would agree that the attack on mutuals and co-operatives has a corrosive effect on community building. *The Mirror* encapsulated it best when it said in 1999 that carpetbaggers were

> "trying to destroy institutions for which our fathers sweated blood. The despicable greed at the root of all this is a shameful reflection on the values of Britain today. Carpet-bagging is not a freebie but is asset-stripping and legalised theft from future generations."

By increasing the threshold of votes needed for demutualisation and by giving societies the opportunity to change their rules so that any assets from demutualisation will transfer to a charity or another society that works on behalf of the community, those greedy windfall hunters will be deterred.

As hon. Members have said, the Co-operative Wholesale Society recently fought off a carpetbagging attempt. When Andrew Regan was defeated, a co-operator said:

> "Members of the Co-operative Movement are not cans of beans to be bought and sold by the City. The Co-ops constitute a social and economic movement clustered around distinct principles which it has recently been reviving."

The Bill is part of that revival.

That threat has helped to rally co-op members throughout the country to a degree not seen for generations. The Co-op is now well prepared to fight any future carpetbaggers, but it is incumbent on us to protect others who are less fortunate, so I am pleased that we are aiming to give all co-operatives the same degree of protection that we gave building societies in 1997.

West Bromwich, East is home to one of the best examples of a mutual, which works for the long-term benefit of its members and the surrounding community. West Bromwich building society is one of the largest employers in my constituency, and works at the heart of the community. Some 200 of my constituents who are employed by the society have written to me, urging me to support the Bill, which I enthusiastically do today. They know that the benefits of membership of a mutual such as the West Bromwich are clear.

Last year, the society was able to pass on to its members its biggest ever mutuality benefit, which was worth £15 million, and its mortgage rates were 0.8 per cent. lower than those of most high street banks. In a constituency such as mine, affordable mortgages are particularly important because they give people who may not ordinarily have the opportunity the option of reaching the first rung on the property ladder.

The society is more than just a financial institution; it plays a leading role in the social life of my community. It sponsors the West Bromwich Albion football club and the Duke of Edinburgh award programme. By looking after its staff, the society has won the business in the community award, the black business in Birmingham corporate responsibility award and, last year, the equal opportunities employer of the year award. It also delivers £500,000 of investment every year through its community programme, to the benefit of more than 500 charities in the midlands and beyond.

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend is talking about the importance of local community trusts. That new form of organisation, which is growing and is supported by the Government through the community network fund, provides new opportunities for local communities to have an endowment that generates interest, which is spent in the interests of those communities. That is another example of a way in which the industrial, provident and co-operative society movement is contributing to the regeneration of communities.

Mr. Watson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and the West Bromwich building society is a classic example of that. In the past six months, in partnership with the new deal, the building society has had discussions with the police and allowed them to open a local community headquarters on its site. That is a perfect example of a mutual putting something back into the community. Crime figures are already falling in that area because the police are now right on top of a crime hotspot.

The House should do all that it can to promote and protect the invaluable role played by mutuals. We must establish a new and secure environment for the development of new mutualism and existing societies. The Bill will safeguard the very values that led to the establishment of the early co-operatives. Today, many organisations remain true to those principles, but they now need us to provide them with a modern framework within which they can thrive for the benefit of future generations. The Bill will do that, and I hope that all hon. Members will unite in supporting it today.

12.14 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Even someone as new to the House as I am is old enough to know that no ideas are new, not even the third way. In 1844, just a few miles from my constituency and, my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) may be interested to hear, not far from Wigan, where Kym from Hear'Say grew up, the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers realised that to protect the interests of its people, it needed an alternative to the sterile choice of state control versus

[Andy Burnham]

private ownership, to paraphrase a Member of the House. One hundred and fifty-eight years later, and following two decades during which we were told there was no such thing as society, those concepts are re-emerging as the solution to the inheritance of individualism from the 1980s and 1990s—the decline in civic participation and the deterioration of the fabric of public life.

The Bill will help that process and create a stronger legal framework for mutualism and community ownership that will enable them to continue to flourish in Britain. I offer my warm congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on a speech full of knowledge, humour and conviction and on his choice of subject for his private Member's Bill. The benefits of community benefit societies are clear; they provide for the wider public good, rather than narrow private interest; they are democratically controlled by their members; and their proceeds are ploughed back into extending their activities, as contributors to our debate have made clear.

As my hon. Friend said, the free market works and serves parts of society well, but that is not true across the board. In some areas, including, as we have all experienced in our local constituencies, train and bus services, it fails communities. It is in areas where we have a common interest in comprehensive and responsive services that mutualism can have a growing role.

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend mentions transport. A new wave of community transport schemes is being developed throughout the country. Sometimes, especially in rural areas, they are funded from Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions budgets and serve estates that private bus companies have abandoned. Elderly and disabled people rely on community transport schemes. Will my hon. Friend comment on the importance of those schemes in the wider mutual network and the way in which the Bill accelerates the growth and support of such services in local communities?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is right. Deprived housing estates in my constituency are no longer served by local bus companies, which unilaterally decided to withdraw services. I hasten to add that there is no longer a service to Leigh infirmary, presumably because the companies did not make enough money from that route. The community has a crucial interest in retaining bus services for those estates and the local hospital; mutuals and community benefit societies can plug that gap in provision.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Has my hon. Friend come across the urban bus challenge fund? Indeed, today, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), made a further announcement of funding for the rural bus challenge fund. Some money will go to buses in Devon, and no doubt some will go to areas represented by Members attending our debate. Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to draw attention to that.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. She is right—the urban bus challenge fund is benefiting my constituency. It supports existing operators and will help them to provide services that they are not currently providing. I should certainly be interested if that funding could be extended to help start-up or community organisations that want to run their own transport services. Labour Members would certainly wish to explore that valid longer-term solution.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): As we are looking at new ways of introducing mutuality to our communities, particularly our estates, does my hon. Friend agree that the police reform White Paper offers several opportunities to do so, especially with accredited community safety organisations? The Home Secretary is talking about accrediting private organisations. Does my hon. Friend agree that the mutual model would best suit those private organisations?

Andy Burnham: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The point about community benefit societies is that one can always have full confidence that they exist to serve the whole community and not only part of it, and that there is no inherent conflict in their articles of association. Communities throughout the country are becoming increasingly anxious about rising crime and they want to do something about it and to reclaim their estates and streets. I strongly endorse his suggestion.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been extremely generous in giving way. While he is on the subject of new mutuals and transport in particular, may I flag up the Community Transport Association, which is one of the sponsors of industrial and provident societies? One of its members—Ealing Community Transport—is active in my constituency. That reinforces some of the points that he and other hon. Friends have been making.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. There is a big gap in our constituencies, in that community transport is not properly catered for. None the less, he, like me, will represent people who are out of work and who want to contribute to society. Surely initiatives could be taken to enable them to do so. It is to be hoped that community transport will generate a new wave of projects. I hope that the Community Transport Association will help to secure such a development.

I do not want to be naive, but I feel that community ownership may be to this decade and the next what privatisation was to the 1980s and 1990s. While its benefits are known to enthusiasts such as us—this point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey)—there is a problem with wider public awareness. That might be changing. We have heard today about the breadth of areas with which the Bill deals and have touched on some of them, but I should like to focus on one that I feel is especially relevant: football.

Football is Britain's biggest outlet for the expression of collective endeavour. It is no coincidence that it is one of the sectors experiencing the fastest expansion of community and supporter ownership. Millions of people support football clubs in this country—not to make money, but because of a love of the game and the sense of belonging and civic pride that it gives. Many of them, however, have become embittered by the profiteering and excessive commercialism in the game today. I have always believed that the moral owners of football clubs are their supporters and communities. My family has poured tens of thousands of pounds into Everton football club over four generations—a very wise decision, as I am sure all hon. Members will agree—but we do not own a single share in it.

In explaining the full relevance of the Bill to football, I hope that the House will allow me to spend a moment or two on the history of professional football in Britain. The preamble to the Industrial and Provident Societies Partnership Act 1852 describes such societies as

"various Associations of Working Men formed for the mutual relief, maintenance, education and endowment of the members."

If recreation were added to the list, it would be an accurate description of the origins of the leading and most prestigious football clubs in this country. My own club began its life as St. Domingo football club—a humble church club from Everton valley in Liverpool. At the same time, over in Manchester, a works team from the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company called Newton Heath had been formed and in time would become the world's most famous club. That happened in 1878—26 years after the 1852 Act took effect.

The new clubs could and perhaps should have been established as industrial and provident societies, but as interest in the new game grew in the industrial north and payments to players became prevalent they took another route. To limit the liabilities of those who ran them, they began to incorporate as limited companies. Although we were not to know it until many years later, that decision was to have a crucial bearing on professional football in Britain, especially in the 1990s. Despite their business organisation, however, they remained sporting clubs first and foremost. Shares were issued, but they were few in number and difficult to transfer, and in some cases re-sale values were capped—all to protect the club from speculators.

In many cases, majority ownership of clubs fell into the hands of wealthy local families who more often than not owned the major local employers. I am thinking of the Moores family in Liverpool and the Edwards family in Manchester. They saw themselves as the custodians of the local club whose role was to ensure their safe keeping and to pass them on for the enjoyment of future generations.

Aware of the potential conflict between clubs as businesses and as sporting and community organisations, the Football Association of the time showed foresight and decisiveness. Nowadays, some people might say that that was uncharacteristic. It amended its rule book to try to reconcile the competing interests. Rule 34 of the Football Association's articles sought to prevent profiteering and asset stripping of football grounds. It required all FA-affiliated clubs to incorporate provisions in their articles to protect the ground for local sporting purposes and for the benefit of the wider community if they were wound up.

For many years, the company model served football and its clubs well. That changed with three key developments in as many years: the Hillsborough disaster in 1989, Italia '90 and Gazza's tears and the breakaway of the premier league. Almost overnight, the old methods of running football clubs were gone. The new-found mass interest in the televised game, the financing from the public purse of wholesale ground improvements and changes to football's redistribution mechanisms attracted a new breed of director to the boardroom: someone who understood how proud community organisations—now some of the country's leading brands—were ripe for cashing in.

Not only the top clubs were subject to such threats. Small-time business men entered the boardrooms of smaller clubs to sell off grounds and burn down stands in insurance scams. Clubs that were built on generations of support from families and communities were and are under threat. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) made that point strongly and coherently in his remarks about the current threat to York City football club. Rule 34 has been put to a vigorous test, and its enforcers have been found wanting.

Those developments in football and the conflict between clubs as public limited companies and community entities was brilliantly exposed by a columnist for *The Independent*, David Conn, in his seminal book, "The Football Business". At the end, he calls for a full reassessment of the game's policy direction by its authorities and anticipates two possible outcomes. His words go to the heart of our debate:

"It may be that people will decide that in fact they like the free market model of football. They may decide that human beings must not stand in the way of market forces and that cherished institutions should be allowed to die. Or they might decide the opposite. That making money is an important activity for football, but only if it is to be put to constructive use. People may decide that it has all been a strangely paralysing dream, this handing everything to the rich, and remember that human beings can organise their own societies and institutions. They may decide that football should be run in a business-like manner, to guard against shame and tragedy of the past, but that business alone does not preserve history, magic, soul. They might, after proper reflection, decide that football is a greater, more wonderful thing than merely a business. And that it needs to be reclaimed, before it is too late."

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman may have inadvertently emphasised a point that I made earlier about the need for caution before setting the rules for such societies in stone. He and the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) will know about the change from Meadowbank to Livingston and the success that the club has subsequently enjoyed. If the provident model were set in stone, there would be a danger that a provident organisation in football might not be able to make such a decision, and thereby enhance rather than detract from the quality of the contribution that the club makes to the game. We might not always want such transitions to occur, but perhaps the option should be available.

Andy Burnham: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. However, I believe that the Bill is as relevant to football as it is to some of the other sectors that we have discussed because football clubs belong where they were founded and nurtured by generations of local people. I do not understand why Wimbledon should be given permission to move to Milton Keynes. That goes against the grain. If Wimbledon's articles contained provisions such as we are considering, that possibility would already have been ruled out. If the members of a football club trust wanted to vote for such a move, a three quarters majority would be required, but it is important that football clubs are anchored in their communities. The Bill would help to achieve that.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: May I draw attention to clause 2(1)(c)? It provides flexibility for community

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

benefit societies, should they vote for protection against having their assets demutualised. It provides protection for organisations that need flexibility. It will prevent any liberation of assets from community benefit societies, although how exactly those assets are used is not prescribed in the provision. Perhaps my hon. Friend will endorse that point.

Andy Burnham: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has brought that to my attention. He clearly has a much more detailed knowledge of the Bill than I do, and I am glad that he was on hand to point that out. It is helpful that that flexibility is in the Bill. There is a strong recognition that the communities that have set up these organisations will want them to be there for future generations, although the Bill does not rule out the possibility of future change.

Mr. Weir: Mention was made of Livingston football club. In the Scottish league, there are, unusually, still some clubs controlled by their local members. As I understand it, there is nothing in the Bill to stop such a club selling its stadium and building a new one, provided that it remains part of the assets of the association. There would, therefore, be nothing to stop clubs selling outdated stadiums and upgrading to new ones for safety and other reasons. The Bill would, however, prevent them from selling off their assets, disbanding, or—as often happens in America—moving across the continent.

Andy Burnham: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has made that point. I am trying to articulate—and perhaps not getting it over as explicitly as I should—that these mechanisms for supporters trusts and football clubs will step in where the English Football Association has failed to enforce its own rule that clubs should not be asset stripped. The Bill gives supporters the mechanism to deal with such matters for themselves if there is a failure to protect the club at that level. The hon. Gentleman is also right to say that if the members choose a different future for their club, there is nothing in the Bill to stop them doing so.

David Conn's words about greater community ownership anticipated a movement in football and I am pleased to say that, five years on, that movement is well under way. His book prompted the Government's football taskforce—for which I was the administrator—being set up to consider how the rising commercialism in football could be reconciled with the wider public good. The taskforce recommended that the Government should consider how the community and supporter ownership model could be expanded throughout football.

The model that the taskforce took was Northampton Town. A financial crisis caused by boardroom mismanagement had led to the birth of the Northampton Town supporters trust. Fans had raised money to save their beloved club but were simply no longer prepared to throw it into a black hole without knowing where it was going or having any say in return, so they set up as an industrial and provident society.

The trust's chairman, Brian Lomax, went on to become the first director of an English football club to be democratically elected by the fans. Through his position of influence, he ensured that the reborn Northampton Town was run not for the interests of a few but for all its fans and the local population. It is no coincidence that the club currently has the best facilities for disabled people of almost any in the English league, and that is has led the way with its work on anti-racism initiatives. Northampton Town stands as an antidote to the ills at other clubs in the country and shows what can be achieved when fans get together to determine their own future.

It is to the great credit of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), that he understood the potency of co-operative principles and ideas in football and, as a result, accepted the taskforce's recommendation and agreed funding to set up a new organisation to encourage the development of other supporters trusts at clubs across the country.

Supporters Direct has now been working for 18 months. It was set up with the help of the Co-operative party—to whose general secretary, Peter Hunt, I pay tribute for his unstinting support for this initiative—the Co-operative bank and Cobbetts solicitors, all of whom deserve great credit for having had the foresight to back this ground-breaking initiative. The Supporters Direct model is right because it does not impose anything from the centre, but is instead a facilitating resource for groups of supporters who have got together and want to build a better future for their clubs. Crucially, it also makes available standard legal advice and articles. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) made the point that the cost of such services can be prohibitive when groups start out.

In its first year, Supporters Direct has helped fans at 40 football clubs—from Celtic, Tottenham and Swansea to Leyton Orient, Bournemouth and Manchester United—to establish trusts. All are community-focused mutual organisations and most are industrial and provident societies based on model rules developed by Mutuo and Cobbetts solicitors in Manchester. Another eight are in the pipeline and fans of 143 clubs have contacted Supporters Direct.

For many trusts, majority outright ownership of the club is not a realistic short-term goal. Nevertheless, they exercise real influence. At Tottenham Hotspur, the supporters trust has been recognised by the new owners as the genuinely democratic voice of the supporters and it regularly consults the chairman on matters such as ground expansion and ticket pricing. There are no limits to what supporters trusts can achieve. At Lincoln City and Chesterfield, they have taken over and run the clubs as community-owned mutual organisations.

Those stories give hope to others. As we worry about low turnout at elections and young people's lack of engagement in society, what better vehicle to kindle a sense of citizenship and community among those young people than a football supporters trust through which they can have direct ownership, influence a club's direction and become involved in its day-to-day running?

Phil Hope: I am listening with fascination to my hon. Friend's description of the encouraging changes in the football world. He has described several initiatives. I am not a Sunderland fan—I support Rushden and Diamonds in my constituency, which is doing well in the third division—but Niall Quinn is to donate the money from his testimonial to the local community. Would not it make a difference to football if the initiatives that my hon. Friend is describing moved forward and achieved community support and if many other footballers who earn extremely high salaries provided a model for young people and made a contribution to the community?

Andy Burnham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point, and he is absolutely right. Some people may think football trivial and wonder why I am going on about it, but my point is that it is an entry point to those values for young people. They understand support for a football club and they like the sense of belonging. Through that gateway, they may see that they can gain by being part of a wider movement that embodies more than narrow self-interest and is about community involvement. I, too, pay tribute to Niall Quinn for his gesture, which is entirely consistent with what we are discussing.

For all those reasons, Supporters Direct is important and there is no reason whatever for it not to extend to other sports. Indeed, many county cricket clubs are already incorporated as industrial and provident societies. Although cricket clubs are often considered to be stuck in the past, they have led the way in democracy in sport and given members votes on key issues over the years. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) mentioned regional development agencies and they could play a key role in promoting mutualism.

In particular, I want the services of Supporters Direct to be extended to rugby league and I ask the Government to consider giving the modest funding needed to provide them. Interest in rugby league in towns such as Leigh is as strong as ever, yet in some newspapers it appears to be as popular as synchronised swimming and gains only an inch or two in the "sport in brief" column. Rugby league does not get the attention of the London-based media, but that does not mean that the sport and its supporters have not suffered those same abuses at the hands of corrupt directors over the years. Although the future of some clubs is more fragile than that of many football clubs, there is great potential in the heartland of the co-operative movement for helping communities to protect their clubs for future generations.

We are only scratching the surface of mutualism in sport and its potential, but I do not expect a revolution. Instead, there will be an organic process. As more football and rugby league clubs struggle due to the inequitable distribution of resources in their sports, more and more supporters' groups will stop waiting for the mysterious wealthy benefactor to turn up and start to shape the future themselves. I hope that, for many years to come, Supporters Direct is there to help and guide them and that this important Bill gives those trusts the protection and stability they need.

Chris Grayling: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) for interrupting the debate, but Members will be extremely concerned about the matter that I wish to raise.

You may be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, of reports in today's newspapers that the bankers supporting National Air Traffic Services have asked the Government for emergency aid to prevent the collapse of the business. They also say that last summer the Civil Aviation Authority told the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions that the business plan proposed for NATS was not sufficient for it to withstand a major shock such as that experienced on 11 September.

May I ask, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether you have received any information that Ministers intend to come to the House either today or early next week to deal with this important issue, which will be of concern to Members throughout the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): No, I have not been made aware of any Minister's intention to deal with that in the House next week.

12.40 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak. As another member of the Labour co-operative group in the House and a member of the Scottish Midland Co-operative Society, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on his choice of subject. As well as recording my membership of those organisations, I declare an interest, namely the support I have received from the Co-operative party in connection with a private Member's Bill of my own.

As a number of speakers have said, the Bill is designed primarily to prevent the asset stripping of co-operative societies and other industrial and provident societies by those who might wish to manipulate them for short-term gain. The gain to be made from asset stripping could be substantial. The co-operative movement may be more than 150 years old, but it is a substantial economic force with substantial assets that may be attractive to those wishing to engage in such activities.

We heard earlier of the failed Lanica bid led by Andrew Regan, who sought to take over the Co-operative Wholesale Society at a price of £1.2 billion—big money. Given that it was an apparent asset-stripping exercise, he presumably thought that the break-up value would be much higher. In fact, the total assets of the nearly 9,000 registered industrial and provident societies—not all co-operatives in the traditional sense—amount to more than £60 billion. As the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) pointed out, in many communities the small co-operative store is a vital link; but the co-operative retail sector in general, although it has declined, is still an important force. Indeed, the Scotmid is now Scotland's biggest independent retailer, serving not just my area but much of east and central Scotland.

The Bill is especially valuable in giving added long-term security to what is termed the community benefit co-operative—or, somewhat inelegantly, the bencom co-operative. It provides strong underpinning for such co-operatives, which I believe can play a vital role in strengthening our communities.

It is a commonplace that the fabric of community life is now weak, and I think that that is true. A few days ago, Members may have seen media coverage of preparations for the Golden Jubilee later this year, and heard expressions of concern about the apparent lack of community preparations. They, and members of the public, may well have different degrees of enthusiasm for the event and different explanations for their level of enthusiasm, but I shall not dwell on that. What I found interesting was that it was said that one reason for the failure to arrange events to mark the jubilee was people's view that "no-one knows anyone around here now" or that "there is no community feeling nowadays."

[Mr. Mark Lazarowicz]

I am aware that it is always easy to look back to a golden age when communities were perfect and everyone knew everyone. I know that not everywhere had a wonderful, vibrant community back in 1977. And at the time when the co-operative movement was growing there may have been stronger communities, but they certainly faced many problems that we do not face today.

Nevertheless, for a whole host of reasons, there has in many cases been a weakening of community links over the past few decades. The reasons include smaller households; television and other leisure interests; more people working and undertaking their leisure activity away from their local community; dependence on the car; and fear of crime. However, whatever the reason, it is widely recognised that the weakening of community links can result in major social problems.

Rebuilding the sense of community is an essential step in tackling many of the problems that affect society today. As several hon. Members have pointed out, the co-operative movement and community-based co-operatives can play a vital role in the rebuilding of our communities.

Many Members have referred to housing co-operatives. The strong housing co-operative in my constituency—the West Granton housing co-operative—has played an important role in the regeneration of what was once probably the most rundown area of public sector housing in Edinburgh. It is successful not just as a housing co-operative, but as a foundation for other community activities in that area.

The housing co-operative movement provides an efficient mechanism for delivering public service precisely because the people who ultimately control the co-operatives have an intimate knowledge about how the service is delivered on the ground. However, in addition to that, the movement also brings people together. It builds communities by involving people in community activities. In that way, it strengthens local links and networks.

Mr. Kevan Jones: In places such as North Durham, housing co-operatives may provide a solution to the problems found in pit villages when landlords buy up whole streets and let both the streets and the fabric of the community go to rack and ruin. Does my hon. Friend agree that housing co-operatives can help to prevent the problems caused by landlords buying up whole streets purely to make a profit?

Mr. Lazarowicz: I agree with my hon. Friend. He makes the valuable point that housing co-operatives are valuable not just in the urban settings with which they are sometimes most associated. They can be particularly important in smaller communities where, as he points out, the whole social fabric can be torn up by people who are more interested in making a short-term profit than in the interests of the community.

By strengthening the foundations of the community benefit co-operative, I hope that the Bill will be used to expand the growing community-controlled sector. Together with the Bill on another aspect of the co-operative and mutual sector that I was fortunate enough to introduce and that received its Second Reading last week, this Bill means that the House has the biggest opportunity for 40 years—perhaps 140—to pass a package of legislation that is designed to encourage the growth of the co-operative and community sector.

I hope that the Bill will receive its Second Reading, that the Government will support it and that it will eventually become law. If it does, the opportunity that it presents should be built on and grasped by both the co-operative movement and the Government. I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said. Notwithstanding the wide variety of activity in the co-operative movement and the mutual sector—we have heard many examples in the debate—we lag behind our many European neighbours that have a strong and vibrant co-operative and community-controlled sector. In many ways, they have encouraged and developed that sector.

I am pleased that the co-operative and mutual sector is working much more effectively together to proselytise its ideas. I pay particular tribute to the work of Mutuo, the trading name of Communicate Mutuality—a new think tank for the co-operative and mutual sector. That organisation brings together the co-operative movement through the Co-operative Union, the Building Societies Association, the Association of Friendly Societies and the Mutual Insurance Companies Association. All work together to conduct research, to campaign for better understanding of the benefits of mutual businesses and to develop new mutual businesses. I pay tribute to the excellent range of publications that Mutuo has already produced to publicise the case for the extension of mutuality.

I am pleased that the Government have taken a much more active interest, both in word and in deed. They have given much more active support to the promotion of the social economy and the co-operative sector than many Governments have for many years. However, there is still some way to go. At the grass roots, for example, notwithstanding the lead that is given at national level, many of the public or quasi-public organisations that promote economic development or business start-ups still do not actively promote the co-operative model of business organisation as one of the viable options for business. I have gone into one-stop shops or business start-up centres and seen no information whatever about co-operatives or how to set them up. If one asks for such information, it can be very difficult to find.

In many areas, there is still some political or bureaucratic resistance to community control of public services that would benefit from community control or involvement. In Glasgow, for example, the imaginative plans of Labour Ministers in the Scottish Executive to transfer housing to a community-controlled body are being resisted by an unholy coalition of the Scottish Socialist party, Scotland's version of the militant tendency and the Socialist Workers party; some elements, I am afraid to say, in the Labour party; and the Scottish National party, I understand. I trust that that resistance will not stop what is an exciting initiative for housing in Scotland.

To show that I do not wish to be partial to any party in handing out criticisms, I may say that the Liberal Democrat Minister in Scotland who is responsible for the area concerned seems to be hostile to the idea of transferring Scotland's water industry to a mutual along the lines of that operating in Wales, so everyone needs to look at the way in which they put into practice their commitment to mutuality.

Linda Gilroy: I was astounded at my hon. Friend's report that the Liberal Democrats are resisting mutualisation in the water industry. In its first trading year, Glas Cymru in Wales has been able to return a £41 million surplus to that mutual organisation.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. I cannot be too unkind about Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Executive, for reasons of which she will be well aware but it is disappointing that the excellent record of Glas Cymru has not found favour in Scotland so far.

There is a way to go before the full potential of the new revived and modern co-operative ideal is grasped. I hope that the Minister will support the Bill, but more than that I hope the Government will regard today as a starting point for further work to promote the co-operative, community-controlled and mutual sector. I hope that the Minister will also tell us how she can build on the opportunity presented by the Bill further to promote this now vibrant and vital sector for our society and economy.

12.53 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I declare my interest as a member of the Christchurch Conservative club. I can tell the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) not just that it is a good club for lunches but that it serves full pints and real ale. I hope to hear a speech by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), whom I congratulate on the accolade that he was given the other night by the Campaign for Real Ale. A special ale has been brewed in his honour, which is quite an accolade for an hon. Member. I hope that when he is next in Christchurch he will call in and try some of our ales.

I am a member of the Christchurch branch of the Royal British Legion, which I think is the finest Royal British Legion club in the country. I am also a member of an allotments society. I have a share in a co-op: the International Exhibition Co-operative Wine Society, which was founded in 1875 and which I think is the finest wine society in the country, if not in the world. Indeed, last night I spent a little time looking at its spring list of wine offers, which I recommend.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West on his success in the ballot, his choice of subject and the lucid way in which he introduced the Second Reading debate. He and other speakers have shown the Government up. In 1998, the Government introduced a wide-ranging consultation paper on industrial and provident societies and invited people to send in their comments before 1 May 1998—indicating, thereby, some sense of urgency. Now, almost four years later, we have still not had a formal Government response to the consultation, or even the publication of the responses to the consultation.

That point was emphasised by my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). He raised a number of important issues concerning the virtues of the Bill, including housing stock transfer, the community benefit of his local co-ops and the warm welcome that he gives and receives at his local Conservative club. He also expressed a few reservations about some aspects of the Bill, particularly about the way in which it restricts the future use of assets. I hope that my hon. Friend will be willing to serve in Committee because his knowledge of and interest in the matter will be useful in debate.

There have been many other interesting speeches. It is interesting to see so many Members from Scotland here on a Friday—they are down in England for the weekend, I hope. It shows that the Bill appeals to a wide range of interests.

We do not oppose giving the Bill a Second Reading, but we have some concerns and questions that can be explored further in Committee. When the Government brought out their consultation paper, they bought some time. However, they raised expectations in the consultation paper, and they have failed to deliver. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to explain exactly what Government policy on industrial and provident societies is.

The 1998 consultation paper was sponsored by the Treasury and the Registry of Friendly Societies. Since then, the Financial Services Authority has taken over the role of registrar of industrial and provident societies, and is threatening a sharp increase in fees. The hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) referred to that in passing. It is a serious issue, to which the Minister should respond, and I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Harrow, West, the Bill's promoter, did not raise it in his speech. I know that he has heard from the Village Retail Services Association—ViRSA—which is based in Dorset, about the problem that will be caused by the burden of the new charges to be imposed by the Government, through the FSA, on industrial and provident societies.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: As the hon. Gentleman says, I am aware of the concerns about the charges, and I endorse the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Corby. As to why I did not raise this matter during my speech, I could have raised numerous issues and given numerous examples across the industrial and provident societies area, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to set the record straight.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The theme of his speech, and of the Bill, is creating better opportunities for existing industrial and provident societies and enabling more to be created. The increase in charges is a relevant issue because it is a burden on existing societies and a threat to the establishment of new ones.

It is worth reading from the letter from ViRSA. It says:

> "ViRSA deals with small rural communities who wish to revive or resurrect their retail facilities. Such communities have scant resources but much enthusiasm. Village shop associations that have already registered as IPS did so in the belief that their registration fee was a one-off cost and any changes would be at additional cost. Annual recurring costs were not in the prospectus. Such associations will now be faced with an additional cost which was not in their budgets, nor part of their original plan and the level of which is not yet finally determined. How are associations to plan to meet these periodic costs if they are dependent solely on the derivation of the FSA's forward budget—there may be wide variance each year? Government policy exhorts regeneration and community projects, particularly in rural areas. The imposition of these additional costs on 'benefit of the community—not-for-profit associations' runs contrary to this policy."

[Mr. Chope]

Mr. Peter Jones, the director of ViRSA, then gives some examples of industrial and provident societies that ViRSA has sponsored for registration as shop associations. He says:

> "I have noticed a recent increase in the adoption of this form of association by rural communities but feel that this will tail off with the impact of additional costs."

We are talking about costs that will have a serious impact. As an illustration, if someone wishes to set up and register a shop association using the ViRSA organisation, it might cost them about £450 to register. That is a one-off cost with no recurring annual costs. Obviously, if they wish to change the rules, fees are incurred as a result of that. I understand that the FSA proposes an annual charge of between £300 and £400 per association just for the privilege of being registered.

There are 9,000 industrial and provident societies, and if one takes a mid point between £300 and £400—£350—that would give the FSA an income of £3,150,000 every year. To put it another way, a burden of £3,150,000 is being imposed on industrial and provident societies. That is unhealthy and unacceptable, and it is another example of a Government stealth tax. I hope that the interest in the issue will now be such that the Minister will instruct the FSA to ensure that its proposal, which is so seductive for a self-financing regulatory authority, will be dropped.

Societies that have set out on the basis that they would pay a one-off fee for registration should not have to pay recurring annual charges. *[Interruption.]* I am delighted to see that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) is showing his enthusiastic support for that.

Mr. Dennis Turner: That is because we are talking about 6 million people who are associated with clubs, and 5,000 non-profit-making clubs will be faced with increased charges. That is of great concern to the all-party group. It is on our agenda, and we shall be making representations, as the hon. Gentleman has made them from the Dispatch Box today.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that—and I am delighted to see that the Minister is to get some more briefing, so that she will have the opportunity to respond to the point.

There is no need to make much comment on clause 1; it is a sensible proposal to bring the rules in line with the rules that apply to building societies. I am an enthusiast for mutual organisations. I have a mortgage with the Nationwide and an insurance policy with Standard Life. I practice what I preach, and I can see the benefits of mutual organisations.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) refer to the fact that the Government had had some problems with clause 2. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I noted that in paragraph 44 of the consultation paper issued in March 1998 an issue was raised in response to the suggestion that a special type of co-operative should be created, the undertakings of which could be transferred only to another co-operative and not to a company.

The response was that the suggestion raised concerns:

> "It seems wrong, in principle, to prevent a society transferring to a company under any circumstances. Not only could this go against the wishes of the vast majority—or even all—of the members of the society at some point in the future, but it would appear inequitable to creditors—not all of whom may appreciate the situation—if a society were forced into liquidation when there was a company willing to buy it."

I should be interested to hear from the Minister whether that reservation still applies, and if so, what amendments or proposals she would suggest as a consequence.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I, too, read the 1998 consultation document, and I tried to reflect the concerns expressed in it in the drafting of the Bill. Clause 2(1)(c), which I referred to when I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), gives the flexibility to allow community benefit societies to sell assets and deal in the usual way, but it locks in the value of those assets for community benefit. To take the example of the British Legion club, to which the hon. Gentleman says that he is affiliated, there is nothing in the Bill to prevent the British Legion club or anyone else from selling their building if they want to, but the cash realised by the sale must continue to be used for community benefit. That is the additional protection that the clause offers.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that point.

I have a principled objection to clause 3. It would enable the Government to impose company law provisions that do not currently apply to industrial and provident societies, by means of an unamendable statutory instrument. It would enable not only existing company law, but company law as it might become at any stage in future, to be imposed without effective parliamentary scrutiny. An extensive legislative shake-up of company law is imminent. The effect of the clause would be that company law could be amended in a Bill confined to companies, and later applied to industrial and provident societies without the same scrutiny.

My solution to the problem of the interrelation between certain provisions of company law and industrial and provident society law would be to ensure that industrial and provident societies were brought within the long title of any Bill to amend company law, so that Parliament could properly debate which provisions should apply to industrial and provident societies and which should not.

Such a Bill could cover in its long title all corporate bodies whose liability was limited. As that feature is common to companies and industrial and provident societies, there could be proper consultation beforehand with those who might be affected. It would also enable industrial and provident societies, through their organisations and through Members of Parliament, to table their own amendments and make their own suggestions, and perhaps instigate their own legislation for debate. That option is not open to them if we are dependent on the use of statutory instruments instigated at the behest of the Treasury, which are unamendable.

My concerns about clause 3 are supported by Robin Pooley, the chairman of NFU Corporate. The hon. Member for Harrow, West referred to the National Farmers Union's support for the Bill in general, but Mr. Pooley has grave concerns about clause 3. I understand that he has expressed similar concern to the hon. Gentleman.

The omission of clause 3 would improve the Bill beyond all measure. It would confine it to the limited role that is appropriate for private Member's legislation, by amending law to address a specific and important problem in a defined way. It should be for the Government to legislate to provide for large-scale changes in the law, and the opportunity presented by the need to legislate in the aftermath of the wide-ranging review of company law should provide just such an opportunity.

The hon. Gentleman referred to minor deregulatory changes, which could be made under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. That is fine—deregulatory changes would be made by statutory instrument—but clause 3 suggests that new regulatory burdens would be imposed by statutory instrument.

If the changes were deregulatory, they could be dealt with under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act. So we are talking about increasing regulation on industrial and provident societies by statutory instrument, without the opportunity for proper debate or amendment. That is not the right way to proceed, not least because, as has already been made clear during the debate, industrial and provident societies vary enormously in scale and purpose.

There is a small club in my constituency called the NADSS club, which is part of the National Association of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors. It is the last remaining club founded after the first world war, and it has a very small membership and a relatively small income, but probably quite valuable assets. To impose new regulations on that club would be unduly burdensome, and I should like to allow greater flexibility. A proper debate in the House would allow the legislation to be tailor-made to the needs of different sorts of societies, and I would much prefer that to the blanket power in clause 3.

Linda Gilroy: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Companies Act 1985 has been extensively amended, often using order-making powers? Does he further accept that the Treasury has consulted widely on this issue and that proposals such as those that he mentions would reflect changes made to Government controls on directors' interests that have long been standard in companies?

Mr. Chope: The hon. Lady is right to say that such proposals might be made in statutory instruments, but all sorts of other regulations are envisaged in the Government consultation paper—for example, changes to corporate governance that might be appropriate for very large industrial and provident societies, but not for the smaller societies. For the House to give the Treasury the power to introduce wholesale changes that would impact on all industrial and provident societies by statutory instrument alone would be wrong in principle. If the hon. Lady thinks that some important changes could be made now, she could move amendments to the Bill in Committee.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I heard a hint that the hon. Gentleman was concerned about clause 3, so I have listened extremely carefully to his comments on that clause. I shall try to reassure him by flagging up the fact that the Bill makes it clear that the affirmative procedure must be used, so parliamentary scrutiny would be available in the order-making process.

There has been substantial consideration of the changes in company law that would be appropriate for industrial and provident societies, and there were various attempts to reform company law and building society and friendly society legislation in 1986 and 1992, but if the Bill receives its Second Reading, I shall reflect further on what the hon. Gentleman says before it is debated in Committee.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and the spirit of friendliness and co-operation that he offers is appropriate to the Bill. Indeed, I look forward to co-operating when the Bill is debated in Committee, as I am sure that that will happen, because the Government realise that they would be extremely unpopular if they were to talk it out today.

For the third week running, a private Member's Bill will receive Treasury support in Committee. I hope that the Government business managers will ensure that some extra Standing Committees are set up so that more than one Treasury Minister at a time can discuss those important Bills in Committee. That is enough from me for the moment, but I look forward to having further constructive debates on the Bill in Committee.

1.14 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I speak as a Member who was elected under the designation of Labour and Co-operative candidate. I also declare an interest as a member of the United Norwest co-operative society and of the Co-operative party.

The Bill would amend legislation governing the operation of industrial and provident societies, which has not been addressed by the House since 1965—nearly 40 years. I welcome it with open arms. For too long, co-operatives have operated at a disadvantage compared with other forms of enterprise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) mentioned the Rochdale pioneers who set up the Rochdale co-operative society in the 19th century, the first society of the modern era. We have recently been considering what form the movement should take in the 21st century. The newly formed Co-operative Commission was established by the movement to draft a report on the challenges that it faces. The report has been passed to the Prime Minister. It makes important recommendations, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on including many of them in the Bill. The Prime Minister was sympathetic to the report and promised to consider the commission's recommendations with a view to legislating.

The Bill is aimed at bringing industrial and provident society legislation into line with company and building society legislation. It will also make possible the establishment of, or conversion to, an industrial and provident society for the delivery of services. Many of my hon. Friends referred to the wide range of services provided. My society offers such a breadth of services and is the second largest co-operative in the country. It has a proud history, deriving, as it does, from the original Rochdale co-operative society and the Pendleton co-operative society in my original home town of Salford.

The Bill would give the Chancellor of the Exchequer the power to amend industrial and provident society legislation to bring it into line with company legislation. It would also allow him to update industrial and provident society legislation as changes to company law arise. As

[Mr. Mark Hendrick]

hon. Members said, the voting requirements for demutualisation of the societies would also be brought into line with those that apply to building societies. Those issues have been much researched in the building society sector. Recent legislation now provides that before any such change can take place to a building society, a vote must be carried by at least 75 per cent. of members and at least 50 per cent. of the membership must participate.

Hon. Members also explained that such a provision would mean that a demutualisation resolution would have to be passed by a minimum percentage of the total members rather than a minimum percentage of those attending meetings. That aims to discourage the practice of carpetbagging, which is intended to give large windfall profits to some members and allow some directors of former mutuals to cash in on the accumulated wealth of the wider membership. It is not right that any irreversible changes to their fundamental constitutions should occur without the majority of members participating in the decision.

We need a balance between the original basis on which societies were founded and the need to be able to react to the membership of the mutual, and the market within which it operates. The founders of a mutual business that has been established for the benefit of the community should be able to hold on to the business and its assets for the general benefit of the membership. The Bill would allow the founders of an industrial and provident society set up for the benefit of the community to choose whether to include those private provisions in its rules. The Bill should enable the founders of a society to choose a constitution that cannot be converted. The society should have to specify in its rules the destination of any surplus profit accrued if the society were wound up. That is extremely important, for the reasons that I have already outlined.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) highlighted a good example of a new model that has been established. It is one that touches many interests throughout the country. Setting up football clubs as mutuals is, perhaps, a perfect example to highlight not only the continued relevance of such societies in the modern economy but the ambition and imagination shown by the sector in constantly readapting and reinventing itself. Lincoln City is now a mutually owned football club, and fans in many other clubs throughout the country have been looking to follow its example. Those developments, which, as other hon. Members have said, have been supported by the Government through Supporters Direct and by the Co-operative Commission, would be considerably advanced by the Bill.

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I thank my hon. Friend for referring to Lincoln City, which is indeed a pioneering football club. Is he aware that the student union at the University of Lincoln is the first in the country to be run co-operatively, and does he agree that, as the city also has the Lincoln co-operative society, Lincoln is right up front as the city of co-operation?

Mr. Hendrick: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, but people in Rochdale might have a problem with her last statement. I was not aware that the student union had been set up as a co-operative, but I applaud its efforts in that respect.

Historically, the co-operative movement was a fundamental strand in the establishment of the Labour movement and later the Labour party. Over a century on, the Co-operative party is stronger than ever and it is time that we helped to create a more appropriate framework for our old friend to thrive in our modern economy. The view that communities and customers should be the top priority in business has not dated—it is still widely treasured. There is a realisation that it can survive in a practical business environment, and that is very important. This small Bill would considerably benefit the co-operative movement in its work to secure its aim, so I hope that the House will join me in supporting it.

1.22 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), whose city has a long and distinguished association with the co-operative movement, as indeed does my own city. I add my voice to the congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on giving us all an opportunity to celebrate our rich heritage throughout the country. Other colleagues have contributed interesting stories about their communities, and I am pleased to join fellow Co-operative Members in declaring that I am one of that 29-strong group and, indeed, vice-chair of the group for this year.

In this harmonious debate, we have a chance to celebrate the rich range of industrial, provident and mutual models in this country. Those organisations deserve the protection against carpetbagging offered by the Bill. Much has been said about the important contribution of co-operatives and mutuals. My hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Phil Hope) and for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) described it as a bottom-up approach. It is a model that brings to the fore the important principle, which the Government greatly value, that rights are accompanied by responsibilities. What could demonstrate that better than co-operative and mutual models?

I want to talk about the rich tradition of co-operation in Plymouth and the importance of the Plymouth and South West co-operative society, which has 122,018 members, including me. It is the successor to the Plymouth Mutual co-operative society, which was founded on 27 December 1859 by six shoemakers, two carpenters, one painter and one mason, who were advised by one of the Rochdale pioneers. According to the history of the co-operative society written by one of our members, the late Bob Briscoe, in its first quarter its turnover was £87 15s 4½d. The society has travelled a long way in the intervening years; its current annual turnover is now £150 million.

The society's value is not just in its turnover and the many small retail shops that it has set up in some of the most difficult and deprived communities in my constituency, but in its deep and broad roots in the community. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) spoke about that; he has many concerns about agricultural and rural communities, as well as the interaction between the supermarkets and the supply chain, including the foreign supply of fruit and vegetables, which can be produced in this country. I am pleased that the Plymouth and South West co-operative society demonstrates the value of the virtuous circle that can be created by co-operative enterprise and has a "buy local, eat local" project.

Lucy Carver recently examined that project for buying manager Tony Stoneman; she found that the society had sold 6,731,654 items from 11 local suppliers, excluding greengrocery items, which constituted more than 37 per cent. of fresh food purchases. The society plays an enormously important role in marketing produce from the south-west peninsula. Another important aspect of the society is its support for community organisations and initiatives; last year, it launched a 13 mile, figure-of-eight walkway through the green spaces and urban environment of Plymouth, paid for by its profits. It has also supported the young consumer of the year award.

Since we were elected in 1997, many good things have happened in my constituency, which, as Members will know, included the poorest ward in England in the 1995 index of local deprivation. A lot has been done as a result of regeneration and the new deal, but I am extremely concerned about the Torridge Way shopping centre in Efford; I cannot say that that part of my constituency has yet turned the corner. The Plymouth and South West co-operative society is looking at that shopping centre and seeing what part it can play, based on its retail operation there, to help that part of my constituency turn the corner.

The society played an important role in Mount Wise in my constituency. In an area where there were no shops before, it opened a shop in an old chapel, which is now very much at the heart of the community, providing not only the usual range of reasonably priced goods to the community in the poorest ward in England, but fresh fruit and vegetables, which are important in deprived areas.

The society therefore plays an exceedingly important role. Its chief executive and secretary, Mr. Douglas Fletcher wrote to me:

> "I believe that Co-operatives and Mutuals represent a valuable and ethically responsible part of the UK economy, and it is only right that the level of legal protection that has been afforded to Building Societies since 1997 be extended to the rest of the sector."

The letter goes on to state that

> "not only would Co-operatives and Mutuals be free to devote less time to fending off hostile demutualisation bids and more on developing their business potential, but social entrepreneurs—often the drivers of community regeneration and social responsibility in business—would be given the confidence to develop new and lasting models for the delivery of services."

I want to turn to that social regeneration for the one or two minutes that remain to me. My area not only has a very old tradition of co-operation, but one of the finest and most innovative new forms of co-operative and mutual development. It takes the form of a body that used to operate as the Devon and Cornwall Community Co-operative Development Agency, but now calls itself Co-active. The body seeks to deliver expert support through its business advisers and provides research and development programmes assistance for enterprises such as the Wolsely community economic development trust. I think that the trust is the largest organisation of its kind in Europe. Its site has not only incubator facilities for new businesses, but a co-operative trading shop. It is a mutual that is very well rooted in its community. In 1995, a capacity-building programme was delivered to involve local residents. The people who run the trust must come from the local community and are elected from its different parts to operate the trust and the site.

The Millfields community economic development trust took over buildings in the old Royal Navy hospital in Plymouth for a similar purpose. After the Jaeger factory closed, with the loss of several hundred jobs, the trust took on that building and is using the facilities there to develop incubator space with support from business advisers to help new small businesses to get going. That work has been recognised by the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander), who is responsible for the new social enterprise unit. He paid tribute to the Get Up and Go community nursery, which operates on the Wolsely development trust site, for being very innovative in a recent speech addressed to Social Enterprise London. The Wolsely economic development trust, which is at the very forefront of regeneration work, explained to London its track record and expressed its hope that others could share and learn from some of the lessons that it had learned in the past 10 years.

In conclusion, I commend the Bill to the House. I hope that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will recognise in co-operatives and our desire to protect them in the ways outlined in the Bill the virtuous economic circle that can be created in our communities and cities. In the far south-west peninsula, that circle plays a very important part in recycling money within the area, rather than, like some plcs, syphoning it off to who knows where. She will probably remember the Chancellor posing the principles of post neo-classic endogenous growth theory with symbiotic relationships. I can tell her that in Plymouth, we have, through Co-active, the [illegible] community version of those principles: the integrated community economic development strategy. I look forward to hearing what she has to say and wish the Bill a fair wind.

1.34 pm

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): As a long-serving member of the Co-operative parliamentary group, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) for taking the opportunity to promote this important Bill having won the ballot for private Members' Bills.

You will know the old song "This is My Lovely Day", Madam Deputy Speaker. For me, today is our lovely day. We have tried for many years to introduce a reforming, modernising measure that will go to the hearts of millions of people in this country and many ethical, mutual, co-operative organisations. Many people will be influenced and affected by our actions today.

Hundreds and thousands of people travel from Birmingham International, East Midlands and Manchester airports to go on their holidays and find the sun through Travel West Midlands, a wonderful part of our co-operative movement. Staffordshire building society, which is based in the west midlands, provides an excellent service for thousands of people in my area and throughout the west midlands.

I am a member of a co-operative that is based on a sports and social club that we formed 20 years ago. Many people come to the club: senior citizens come for their lunches; others come for the darts, dominoes and crib. They come for presentations, social events and happy events in people's lives in our community.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): As a great non-profit-making members' clubs man, my hon. Friend

[Mr. David Crausby]

will know that three of the finest Labour clubs in the country are based in my constituency, in Breightmet, Tonge and Halliwell. They not only sell the finest ales but provide finest and best community service, as do many other political clubs of all colours. That also applies to services clubs, social clubs, working men's clubs, sports clubs and trade union clubs. They are irreplaceable. Does my hon. Friend agree that their members will rest easier in their beds tonight after the Bill receives its Second Reading?

Mr. Turner: Tonight, they will all drink a glass of cheer to hon. Members who are making a fundamental and historic decision.

I thank the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) for mentioning the fact that I received the beer drinker's champion award this week from the Campaign for Real Ale. I got it not for the number of pints that I drank, although I have drunk quite a few, but on behalf of the fight for the full and fair pint.

In the context of co-operatives, hon. Members who go to the Stranger's Bar after today's proceedings and take a glass of cheer will be supporting the small brewery co-operatives that sell their products there. I chair the Catering Committee, and the Catering Department sells Fairtrade products that are based on co-operatives. We therefore touch the lives of Members of Parliament and millions of people—our constituents—whom we represent.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Does my hon. Friend agree that we should publicise the fact that we support co-operatives not only through measures such as this Bill, which we hope will get its Second Reading, but through products that we buy in the House of Commons and in our constituencies?

Mr. Turner: Yes, indeed. I certainly endorse that. My hon. Friend captures the flavour of what we are essentially doing here today, representing the people of our constituencies who are involved in all these majestic endeavours.

Today is an important day. It is the best day that I have had in Parliament for many years, because we are doing something practical and real on behalf of the people we represent. William Morris said:

"the cause alone is worthy till the good days bring the best."

We want to give the Bill a Second Reading and put it on to the statute book, to give a new renaissance to the co-operative, mutual and community organisations in Britain.

1.40 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I apologise to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) for not being here when he introduced the Bill earlier, but I have been here for much of the debate. I congratulate him on a very worthy Bill, and I am pleased to be able to speak in the debate.

When we talk about co-operatives, I am reminded of the town where I was born, Walton-on-Thames, in the Surrey stockbroker belt. There, if hon. Members remember their history, a gentleman called Winstanley formed a group called the Diggers, who tried to form the first commune—one of the first co-operatives, perhaps—at St. George's Hill. That now has a Weybridge postal address, and it is ironic that it has for some time been one of the wealthiest pieces of real estate in Europe, if not the world.

Sadly, Winstanley was moved away from that first co-operative commune in Walton by the local residents. Perhaps they realised that it would be good real estate at a later date and wanted to move him on. They moved him on to Cobham, and it then took a number of years for the co-operative movement to catch on and take wind, but we should all be pleased that it did. It has a noble and proud history, as all hon. Members appreciate. The question is, where does it go from here?

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) has already mentioned many of the initiatives in the south-west, and I shall not go back over them. I shall mention a few areas that have touched my life, and tell the House why I think that this is an important Bill. We have seen what happened to the building societies. Most of us were dismayed when a number of mutual societies—which were started up so that their members could help each other—went off to become banks, and to join the other side in the battle and make profits for their shareholders rather than for the mutual benefit of all their members. I bitterly remember the day that we lost the battle for my building society. Luckily, I was able to move to another one which has remained a mutual, but I was distressed that something was eating away at a common good, at something that was a power against profit and greed. It was sad to see that power eroded during the 1980s, a period in which greed seemed to dominate.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the well-known social aspects of the mutuals. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) talked about Conservative clubs closing, and about carpetbaggers. I am sure that parties have seen clubs close in all areas—they certainly have in my constituency—and the assets being sold off. It is sad, when people have come together over a period of history, to see that history come to an end. Things roll on, however, and I hope that the Bill will help to resurrect and shore up the co-operative movement and the mutual societies.

I hope that people who wish to come together to share profits, and to work together towards a co-operative aim, will benefit from the Bill. I see a battle in society between those who wish to work for the common good and those who wish to work for profit. With globalisation, more and more companies are becoming part of multinationals and fewer and fewer appear to be working for the benefit of their members, so sometimes we seem to be losing that battle. If we are to win and if we are to stop those who aim only for profit, people must come together and we must encourage them to form new co-operative ventures. I hope that they do so when we pass the Bill. It will make them feel more sure that their efforts will not be plundered—I use that word because it is appropriate—by those who come after or even during their tenure.

In particular, I hope that people in agriculture, food production and other forms of manufacturing come together to speak out with a united voice against those who wish to gain great power and profit. The Bill should be considered as a means to help redistribute profits. As I promised to be brief, I shall finish on that point.

1.46 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): It is a pleasure to respond to the debate. Let me say how much I enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), which was informative, stimulating and entertaining, and congratulate him on his choice of Bill. He has campaigned effectively on these issues and I am sure that he will continue to do so. As several hon. Members made clear, the industrial and provident societies sector is large and diverse—it has more than 10 million members—and the co-operative movement is well represented in the House. Many powerful speeches pointed to the sector's achievements and potential for development.

In particular, the potential for regenerating the rural economy was identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and others. The potential for supporting football's original recreational function through Supporters Direct and supporters clubs was described by my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), whose constituency borders mine, and the sector's potential for providing a venue for marriage proposals was mentioned. I was delighted to hear the anecdote told by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey). Most appropriately, the Bill has been described today as offering traditional values in a modern setting.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Minister has mentioned the excellent work of Supporters Direct. Does she welcome the excellent contribution made by the Swansea City supporters trust, which last night managed to secure the future of league football in Swansea by getting Tony Petty to agree to a sale? Again, an overseas business man with no interest in football was stripping a club of assets. Will the Minister join me in welcoming his agreeing to sell to a consortium led by a former player—not at five to midnight, but at five to eleven—and wish the new owners and the trust every success?

Ruth Kelly: I thank the hon. Gentleman for drawing the matter to my attention and I send my congratulations and support as he requests.

I look forward to sharing a pint with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) and I congratulate him very much on his recent award. In passing, I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) to give my regards to Bolton's Labour clubs, which fulfil a valuable function.

The Government and the mutual movement have a shared interest in an inclusive society in which all have equal access to the means of participating to the best of their ability, in markets as social institutions that confer rights and obligations in equal measure on the participants, and in the exercise of individual liberty in concert with the acknowledgement of mutual responsibilities. That is a powerful position from which to start.

Many Members have referred to the roots of the mutual movement in the work done by the Rochdale pioneers back in 1844. More than 150 years later, those principles still ring true and the mutual movement is still thriving, an important partner as we proceed with our public policy agenda and our drive to root out poverty and disadvantage wherever we find them, especially in deprived communities.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Is my hon. Friend aware of the pain and torment suffered by the Britannia building society, one of the largest remaining mutuals, which does so much for local housing? It is based in north Staffordshire, in the area of my constituency. It has fought off carpetbaggers before, only to find them returning like a particularly virulent form of seasonal blight.

Ruth Kelly: I have regular conversations with the Britannia building society, to which I ask my hon. Friend to pass on my warmest regards. He will, however, recognise the changes the Government have made to protect building societies from carpetbaggers, and to put them in a much better position in future.

The mutual sector is already highly successful. The building society sector alone contains 66 societies with assets worth around £172 billion, which continue to perform well in highly competitive markets that have undergone significant change and faced difficult challenges in recent years. The credit union movement also continues to grow: there are about 700 credit unions, all of which help to promote thrift and self-help among their members. They play a vital role in extending the availability of basic financial services to parts of our society that are often ignored by other financial institutions. They also play a vital role in combating social exclusion, instilling a sense of responsibility, and giving people the means to have more control over their affairs. Moreover, the United Kingdom's largest farmer, one of the largest sellers of cars, and our largest funeral business are all co-operatives.

Because we recognise the valuable contribution that mutual societies can make to the economy and the advancement of social enterprise, we have played an active role in a number of initiatives that we hope will help societies to maximise the benefits they can offer their members and the communities they serve. It is important to provide a level playing field to allow mutuals to make the most of what they see as the mutual advantage—not having external shareholders to satisfy, so they can concentrate on providing their members with goods and services.

We will shortly present legislation allowing building societies to communicate with their members electronically. At first sight that may seem a rather technical change, but the building societies have been calling for it. They believe it will allow them to benefit from the greater efficiency offered by such technologies, and to compete on an equal footing with banks and other PLCs. In October, with the specific intention of strengthening credit unions and allowing them to thrive and prosper, we issued a consultation document containing proposals to reduce the number of restrictions on credit unions' operational powers. Those proposals will allow the sector to offer their members a much wider and more competitive range of services, and to maximise their ability to compete for and attract new deposits by developing the range of products they can offer new and existing members. The consultation period has just ended, and unfortunately is too early for me to give an indication of the results; but I believe that they are very positive, and that the credit unions welcome the proposed changes.

[Ruth Kelly]

We are currently negotiating in Brussels on a statute for a European co-operative society. The Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry jointly issued a consultation document last summer, and we are currently deciding how best to proceed on the basis of the responses we have received. It should be clear to everyone that we are keen to encourage the mutual sector and to allow it to flourish.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) criticised the Government for not taking seriously enough the consultation on industrial and provident society legislation that took place in the summer of 1998. However, I have outlined the range of measures that we have taken to allow the whole mutual sector to thrive. We are in the long process of developing the sector, and the social unit of the Department of Trade and Industry is considering ways of encouraging social enterprises. The performance and innovation unit is also considering issues pertinent to the sector, and I look forward to reading its report. The private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West is an important part of the process of strengthening industrial and provident societies. I welcome it, and the contribution that it makes.

The hon. Member for Christchurch also referred to fees. I point out to him that the fees are not quite as high as those he outlined, but I recognise that they represent an increase on what was in place before. Regulation by the Financial Services Authority has been welcomed by the sector and fees are set on cost-covering basis and after wide consultation with members of the sector.

I shall examine the contents of the Bill directly. I welcome it and I am sympathetic to the changes and reform that it is trying to introduce. It has clearly been motivated by a desire to see the industrial and provident society sector modernise and grow without sacrificing—indeed, by reinforcing—the essential principles of mutuality and being rooted in the community that underpin it.

Much in the Bill could be of real benefit in allowing the sector to develop and in offering even greater benefits to individual members and communities. It chimes well with the concerns expressed to me by people in many quarters, including many hon. Members. Although it needs amendment to be workable, and although we will need to scrutinise it and consult interested parties on the detail of some measures, we can support it.

It is worth outlining the key features of the industrial and provident society sector. Organisations registered as industrial and provident societies can be split into two sub-groups: bona fide co-operatives and benefit of the community societies—bencoms. Co-operatives are generally controlled by their members according to the principle of member, one vote and conduct their business for the mutual benefit of their members, with the benefits members receive deriving mainly from their participation in the business. Bencoms use any surplus that they make to further the aims of the society. They are often set up to serve the community in which they are based.

The Bill has three main objectives. The first is to align the voting requirements for demutualisation with those for building societies. The second is to allow bencoms to lock in capital so that the bencom can be used only to serve the community in which it is based. The third is to allow industrial and provident society legislation to be more easily amended to take account of changes to company law.

I shall briefly consider each clause in turn. Clause 1 is about the voting procedures for all industrial and provident societies in the event of a demutualisation bid. This is a useful modernisation measure that would bring the rules for such votes in industrial and provident societies into line with those for building societies. The Government fully support the clause. Currently, 75 per cent. of those who vote on a demutualisation proposal must vote in favour of conversion for a bid to be successful, and this vote must be confirmed at a subsequent general meeting by at least 50 per cent. of those who vote.

Clause 2 proposes to allow bencoms to vote to include in their constitutions a rule that the members cannot change and that would prohibit distribution of the society's assets to any person or body other than another industrial and provident society with an equivalent rule or a charity. It would also prohibit conversion to a company or other body unless that company or body has an equivalent rule.

I see the potential benefits of this proposal and I am very sympathetic to the thinking behind the measure. If new social enterprises wish to set themselves up using the industrial and provident structure, it might help to attract and reassure investors if they could be sure that the capital they are investing is locked into benefiting the community in perpetuity. Of course, industrial and provident societies can insert such provisions into their constitutions now, but it is thought that that may not be binding. Also in clause 2's favour is that it is a permissive measure and would be taken up only if a society's members were disposed to do so.

However, the clause poses some real difficulties and may need significant amendment. In particular, locking in a society's assets could restrict the flexibility afforded to the bencom if it were struggling. It is conceivable that a society could in good faith choose at its inception to lock in its assets in perpetuity but then run into trouble and not find another industrial and provident society in a fit state or willing to take it over. It is not clear how that dilemma could be resolved under the clause. We need to continue discussions to see if we can come to some agreement.

I am also not convinced that a lock-in needs to apply to all bencoms rather than just some. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, it is extraordinary how diverse the sector is. It covers all sorts of different organisations. I think that it is fair to say that we need to explore those initiatives in great depth before committing ourselves to locking in assets in perpetuity. I give a commitment that my officials will explore the issues in more depth with the Bill's sponsors and other interested parties. We also think that there are certain technical issues, but perhaps I can discuss those at some other date.

I understand that this issue is being looked at elsewhere in government. I look forward, for example, to reading the performance and innovation unit report on the social enterprise sector when it is published.

Clause 3 proposes to introduce a power to modify industrial and provident society law by assimilating it into company law. It closely resembles powers already in place in building society and friendly society legislation, and I strongly support the principle of levelling the playing field between those different classes of mutuals. However, the clause as currently drafted gives significantly broader powers to the Treasury than do corresponding provisions in the other legislation that I have just mentioned, a point recognised by the hon. Member for Christchurch. Therefore, although we are prepared to support the clause in principle, we want it to be amended so that it is brought into line with other legislation, particularly that on building societies. I believe that if we made that sort of amendment we would have an appropriate constraint in place.

Some may argue that the need to update industrial and provident societies legislation is so urgent that that would be too restrictive, but given that a major reform of company law by the Department of Trade and Industry is under way, the scope for amendment of industrial and provident societies legislation based on changes in company law is likely to be considerable in future.

At this stage, I am happy to give Government support to the Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West on introducing it and hope that it reaches the statute book.

2.3 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I am grateful to the Minister for her remarks. I am grateful, too, for the many excellent contributions by Labour Members, for the silent support of so many of my hon. Friends, and for the contributions from Opposition Members, in particular the reference to the Swansea City supporters trust, which I have recently joined.

I recognise the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and by the Minister. I will take those points on board and see whether I can satisfy them. I hope that on that basis the House will be willing to give the Bill a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Commonwealth Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.4 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I had hoped that the House was so crowded on a Friday to support the Second Reading of my Commonwealth Bill. However, the Industrial and Provident Societies Bill seems to have attracted greater interest than my own, and I am pleased that that Bill has secured its Second Reading.

The purpose of my Bill is very modest. Having come 17th in the ballot of private Member's Bills, I had no illusions that I should use my lowly place in the ballot to push forward a controversial measure or tweak the Government's nose. This measure goes back to decisions taken by the Conservative party when it was in government, but I hope that it is supported by both sides of the House. I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), on the Front Bench.

The Bill aims to tackle two practical problems concerning the future of the Commonwealth. My party is strongly committed to that, as are Members on both sides of the House. The Bill essentially tidies up the statute book and severs the Government's statutory link with the Commonwealth Institute, although the Government will continue to support its work. It also makes provision for the recognition in the United Kingdom of the admission to the Commonwealth of Cameroon and Mozambique, which happened in 1995.

Before I briefly describe those two important parts of the measure, let me pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry). He is involved with the Commonwealth Institute and approached me to suggest that I bring forward such a measure when I had secured a place in the ballot for private Member's Bills. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his encouragement and advice.

The first part of the Bill concerns the Commonwealth Institute. I should explain that the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington has nothing to do with the Commonwealth Club in Northumberland avenue, now an outrageously trendy restaurant, which I am sure is the Minister's spiritual home. That is a separate organisation.

A decision has been taken, which we strongly support, to provide that the management of the Commonwealth Institute no longer be under the direct control of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Bill repeals the statutes that provide for the management of the Commonwealth Institute as a Government-supported body. I know from letters that I have received from those at the Commonwealth Institute that they have been pressing for this measure for some time, and strongly welcome it.

The Bill would change the law following the severance of the institute from the FCO's responsibility and its establishment in January 2000 as an independent charitable company. In particular, the Bill would transfer the balance of the institute's trust fund—some £50,000—from the trustees to the institute, and terminate the Government's statutory responsibilities for the institute.

[Mr. David Willetts]

If I called this privatisation, I would be in danger of stirring up controversy, when that is not the Bill's purpose. However, we all welcome the fact that the institute, which has for a long time been under the direct control of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will have a greater independent existence as a free-standing charitable body. It has done great work in the past to promote learning across the Commonwealth. It is an independent agency, and we strongly believe in it in its new form.

As a free-standing charitable body, the institute will be able to flourish and expand. It delivers education programmes to schools and offers exhibitions and events at its centre in London. Its mission is

> "to work with young people across the Commonwealth so that they grow up inquisitive about other cultures as well as their own".

It is aimed particularly at spreading understanding of other cultures around the Commonwealth, which I strongly support.

The second part of the Bill acknowledges in United Kingdom law the admission of Cameroon and Mozambique to the Commonwealth. That decision was taken when my party was in government and Baroness Chalker was the Minister with responsibility for the Commonwealth. That was in 1995, and all the practical steps to ensure full membership of the Commonwealth for Cameroon and Mozambique have been taken, but sadly, various parts of British law have not yet caught up with the new reality. The Bill ensures that all legislation on the Commonwealth fully takes account of the new position. That involves amending and correcting legislation that previously would not have covered those countries' membership.

For example, the Bill amends the Army Act 1955, the Air Force Act 1955 and the Naval Discipline Act 1957 to include Cameroon and Mozambique in the definitions of "Commonwealth force" and "Commonwealth country". Other legislation is amended to ensure that the forces of Mozambique and Cameroon can be treated as visiting forces from a Commonwealth country under those statutes.

It was an entirely correct decision to admit Cameroon and Mozambique to the Commonwealth. It was encouraging to see countries that did not have the same historical links with the Commonwealth as most members asking to be admitted. That shows the strength and power of the Commonwealth. Having taken that decision back in 1995, it is important that we now have the legislation to make a reality of it.

I should explain that citizens of Mozambique and Cameroon already have the status of Commonwealth citizens for the purposes of the British Nationality Act 1981. That Act has already been amended, so the Bill contains no provision on nationality. It ensures that in other respects the legislation for the Commonwealth takes account of the decision that those countries should enter.

I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House to give the Bill a Second Reading. It is intended to be uncontroversial. It is difficult to see how people could oppose two practical measures that ensure that the statute book gives greater freedom to the Commonwealth Institute to conduct its affairs as an independent charitable body, and that legislation governing our affairs fully reflects the decision that Mozambique and Cameroon should join the Commonwealth. I therefore hope that the private Member's Bill that I have great pleasure in bringing to the House today will secure a Second Reading.

2.12 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on choosing this topic for his private Member's Bill. As we have heard, it is a technical measure and it does a job of tidying up the statute book. It will remove the Government's statutory link with the Commonwealth Institute. It makes provisions to acknowledge Cameroon and Mozambique as members of the Commonwealth in several UK Acts of Parliament.

During the 1999 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Durban, the then Foreign Secretary, who is now the Leader of the House, announced the agreement between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the institute that it was to become an independent, pan-Commonwealth agency. At the time, David French, director general of the institute, welcomed the decision, suggesting that it was

> "fantastic news for the institute and the Commonwealth".

In February 2000 the Minister for Europe stated in response to a written question:

> "This development means that the Imperial Institute Act 1925 and the Commonwealth Institute Act 1958 need to be repealed".—[*Official Report*, 1 February 2000; Vol. 343, c. 542W.]

I congratulate my hon. Friend on doing that work for the Government. Although the institute has been operating as an independent agency since January 2000, until today there has been no sign of the legislation to repeal the Acts in question.

I notice from the Bill that my hon. Friend has not stopped at the two Acts referred to in the written answer. A list of Acts will be repealed in part by the Bill, and that list is almost a catalogue of all the countries in the Commonwealth.

The institute's mission is a worthy one, and it plays a valuable role. From the list of successes noted by the chairman David Thompson in the institute's annual review 2000, it is clear that its role is being taken forward with relish. Among those successes, Mr. Thompson states that the education team has secured more than £1 million in new project funding, and that more than 750,000 people have visited the website to browse the information contained on it.

As a consequence of making the institute an independent body, the Bill also deals with the disposal of the endowment fund referred to in the Imperial Institute Act 1925. That is the last remaining asset held by the old trustees for the benefit of the Commonwealth Institute. The capital fund will be transferred, free of restrictions, to the Commonwealth Institute in its reconstituted form. If the Bill becomes law, the old trustees will have no remaining functions and will cease to exist.

The second purpose of the Bill, as we have heard, is to recognise in United Kingdom law the fact that Cameroon and Mozambique were admitted to the Commonwealth in 1995. In particular, the Bill contains a provision—although, as my hon. Friend has said, many measures have already been taken—to allow forces from Cameroon and Mozambique to be treated as Commonwealth forces.

The final provisions, in clause 3, repeal the enactments relating to the Commonwealth Institute, which will cease to have effect under the provisions that I have already highlighted. I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing the Bill and doing some of the work that the Government possibly should have done earlier. I wish him and the Bill well in its passage through Parliament.

2.15 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I add my welcome to the Bill and commend the skill with which my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has steered it thus far. I am delighted that it is getting a proper, if brief, debate today because that is the way that things should always be. I will not use the P-word that my hon. Friend so sensibly avoided, but any move that seeks to give a genuine degree of independence to something as distinguished as the Commonwealth Institute must always be welcomed, and I admit that it particularly pleases me. I am sure that the institute welcomes the fact that it is managing to get out from under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—if I may put it that way—although I know that the relationship between the FCO and the institute has always been of the most harmonious.

I hope that the setting of the final seal of approval on the relationship with Cameroon and Mozambique will carry with it the responsibilities that go with Commonwealth membership. I am sure that we all welcome new countries that, as my hon. Friend said, have expressed a wish to be part of the Commonwealth. However, that must be a two-way process, and I hope that those countries accept—as I am sure they do—the very real responsibilities of Commonwealth membership, which is not always without its difficulties and problems, as we all know in a different context altogether.

In that regard, I was intrigued by my hon. Friend's reference to the implications for visiting forces from a Commonwealth country, which he said were part of the thrust of the Bill. I hope that that reference carries an implication not only that visiting forces will be welcome on appropriate occasions but that the new members of the Commonwealth will be prepared to carry their share of the burden where required, where Commonwealth forces may be involved in completely different contexts.

Mr. Willetts: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising that point; perhaps I may clarify it. In both cases there are powerful historical and geographical reasons for those countries' becoming members of the Commonwealth—full participating members of the Commonwealth, as he is emphasising. Mozambique is, of course, surrounded by Commonwealth countries—South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe—so its membership of the Commonwealth has enabled those countries to form a stronger regional group in southern Africa for mutual assistance and support.

Although I was not aware of the fact until recently, we do have an historical interest in Cameroon, in that for a long period of the 20th century we administered part of it, under a mandate under the original League of Nations. Therefore in both cases there are historical and geographical ties, which I hope and believe will make those countries' membership of the Commonwealth real in exactly the way that my right hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Forth: Ah, I am always glad to hear about the good old days, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding us of them. I have one brief question, which he or the Minister may be able to help me with. As a layman, when I read the list of repeals in schedule 3 and see that the Nigeria Independence Act 1960 and the Sierra Leone Independence Act 1961 are being repealed, I trust that that does not mean that those countries are coming back under our imperial guidance and pleasure. At first glance, the repeal of all those independence Acts would appear to carry with it some intriguing possibilities.

Mr. Willetts: I can assure my right hon. Friend that as we are now in the process of modernising the Conservative party, such a move would be inconsistent with the strategy that our party is now taking, and it is not part of this legislation to reverse the independence of those great states.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I am sure that those countries are equally grateful that their independence is not being prejudiced by the Bill. All in all, I add my welcome to the Bill. I hope that it will safely receive its Second Reading today, and I am sure that it will be properly scrutinised in Committee.

2.19 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on introducing the Bill. He may have drawn a low place in the ballot, but that does not detract from the importance of the subject that he has chosen to promote.

We have an opportunity in this relatively short debate to stress the importance of the Commonwealth to world society. Around the world, there are detractors who say that the Commonwealth is a thing of the past, but the fact that, in this day and age, two African countries are seeking to join the Commonwealth shows that it has an important role to play, especially in developing the continuing dialogue between the developing world and the western world. The hon. Gentleman has done the House and the countries involved a service in introducing the Bill.

I was very interested to hear what he had to say about the Commonwealth Institute, which is an important organisation. I have visited it on many occasions, and it serves an important and continuing purpose, particularly in relation to some of my younger constituents who were born in the United Kingdom, but whose parents, grandparents and, these days, even older generations may have come from far-flung corners of the world in the days that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) perhaps still hankers after in his inimitable way.

Those places were far-flung parts of the empire and later the Commonwealth but are now independent countries. Those young people have an opportunity to visit the exhibitions and cultural events at the Commonwealth Institute and to learn not only about their heritage but about the relationship of those countries to the United Kingdom—the country of their birth.

I very much agree with the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst when he talks about the countries that have joined the Commonwealth accepting the responsibilities of Commonwealth membership. Membership involves rights as well as responsibilities—the time-honoured phrase of new Labour. Cameroon and

[Mr. Andrew Dismore]

Mozambique are contrasting countries, and the Commonwealth can offer them, and they can offer the Commonwealth, different things in their different ways.

In preparing for today's debate, I read about the problems in Cameroon, where the human rights record is poor. Its approach to democracy is a little lacking. However, I was pleased to hear that a new electoral commission was established at the end of last year, although whether it will be able to play a role in the forthcoming elections remains to be seen. When one reads of detention without trial, torture and extra-judicial executions, one wonders whether that is in the long-standing tradition of the Commonwealth. Although that might be the case in one or two countries, it is certainly not what the Commonwealth is about, and I hope that a longer membership of the Commonwealth for Cameroon will lead it towards greater participation in democratic principles.

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman touches on an important point. Of course, membership of the Commonwealth requires participation in basic standards of human rights. He is absolutely right to say that it is important—whether in Cameroon or, dare I say, Zimbabwe—that those standards are upheld, and I am sure that all members of the Commonwealth wish to ensure that they are.

Mr. Dismore: If we contrast the problems in Cameroon with the position in Mozambique, we can see what can be achieved in a relatively short time. Mozambique has suffered from decades of civil war. It was starting to recover economically, but a couple of years ago was hit by terrible floods, which we all saw on television. Despite that, it has still been able to make a very successful transition towards democracy. Mozambique has the fastest-growing economy in Africa; perhaps it is catching up after those years of being held back by the terrible civil war and the troubles of the region. It was knocked back by the floods—nevertheless, it is able to go ahead.

I am very pleased about the role that our Government are playing in developing the economy. The Government are, I think, the biggest bilateral donor of international aid to Mozambique. It is one of the heavily indebted countries, and we are doing an awful lot to try to deal with its long-standing international debts. If we can help to free Mozambique from the shackles of debt, which has held it back for so long, we will have a very important international partner. It is not one of our major trading partners, but I hope that by strengthening its links with the Commonwealth we will develop commercial as well as diplomatic ties and provide a great future for a country that has been held back for so long, for the reasons given by the hon. Member for Havant. I support the Bill, which I believe has all-party support, and congratulate him on raising such an important subject for debate.

2.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on his success in the ballot. The Government warmly welcome it. It has our full support and we hope that the House will also support it.

As we have heard, until January 2000 the Commonwealth Institute was a non-departmental public body under the direction of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that I have not even heard of, let alone visited, the restaurant of a similar name to which he referred.

The chairman of the Commonwealth Institute approached the previous Government back in the mid-1990s with a proposal to change the institute's status. We examined the initiative and agreed to support its bid for greater independence. As the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said, that independence has been extremely successful. The progress has been encouraging and the institute has transformed itself into a pan-Commonwealth educational resource centre. It will be a major player in the jubilee weekend events in highlighting the Queen's role as head of the Commonwealth. It has also successfully built new relationships with new funding partners.

The severance and the institute's continued co-operation with the Government have been successful. The only outstanding issue that needed to be resolved was the repeal of legislation that linked it to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is one reason why we welcome the Bill.

The second part of the Bill ensures that the admission of Cameroon and Mozambique into the Commonwealth is properly recognised on the statute book. As hon. Members said, the applications of those two countries reflect once again the recognition of the value of the Commonwealth as an international organisation. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) said how important it is that the relationship is a two-way process. They also mentioned human rights. I agree with everything that they said.

Cameroon joined because President Biya wanted it to be part of an association committed to good governance and to development, and to extend his country's international links. We firmly believe that membership of the Commonwealth can help to address some of the problems and challenges raised by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon.

Mozambique also joined in 1995. Although it has no traditional links with the Commonwealth, as the hon. Member for Havant said, it attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings for many years because it was surrounded by Commonwealth countries. Its membership arose in large part from its status and special relationship as one of the front-line states and its active engagement with the problems in what was then Rhodesia and in South Africa. I can reassure the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst that schedule 3 does not mean that all former members of the empire who have won independence will again be subject to direct rule; it merely repeals legislation in small ways.

With the advent of majority rule in both countries, Mozambique sought a formal role in the Commonwealth, of which it has been, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon said, a constructive and enthusiastic member. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Health (Air Travellers Bill)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 November], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

2.29 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): On a previous occasion—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 10 May.

Remaining Private Member's Bill

PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (CARRIAGE OF GUIDE DOGS etc) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 15 March.

Multi-modal Study (Manchester)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.30 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I am delighted to have secured this debate on the south-east Manchester multi-modal study, which affords me an opportunity to request that the Minister make a statement. The study was announced at the same time as a Government decision to detrunk, or refuse trunk status to, a number of roads in south-east Manchester. Thus, in 1998, the A6 was detrunked and it was decided not to make the A555 a trunk road, in spite of the levels and type of traffic on each road. The anticipated road network in the study area has not been completed.

With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) will discuss the impact of road traffic in his constituency. I shall confine my remarks to Cheadle and Macclesfield. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) is unable to be here today, and has asked me to make several comments on his behalf. There has been cross-party campaigning in the House by politicians from the area and a recognition that all are affected and need to work together.

For well over half a century, the Manchester airport eastern link route has had a route protected in anticipation of its development. As the suburbs that make up my constituency were built, space for the road, which would link Poynton and Hazel Grove in the east, and the developing Manchester airport and the M56 in the west, was kept clear.

In the late 1980s and 1990s it became obvious that road traffic was building up throughout the area. Public transport failed to keep abreast of developments and to meet the needs of local people. Bus services were particularly poor, and cycling became ever more difficult as road traffic increased.

In 1991 a public inquiry was held in Bramhall in my constituency on the proposal to build a bypass for the A34 and, linked with it, the central section of the Manchester airport eastern link route. That central section quickly became known as the road to nowhere because it failed to link the airport with anything.

The central section was built in spite of public protest that it would funnel traffic on to the A555 through completely unsuitable and often substandard A roads in district shopping centres and residential roads. The net effect of the incomplete eastern link was to create traffic congestion through Poynton, Woodford, Bramhall and Heald Green. All the local shopping centres were damaged, not just by the new superstores that sprang up around the new A34 but by pollution, noise and the dangers of shopping where there is standing and slow-moving car traffic—often for seven days a week.

There is still no easy route from the motorway and airport to the south-east and Macclesfield areas and beyond into Derbyshire. Car and freight traffic pass through Finney lane in Heald Green, through Woodford road in Bramhall and Woodford and through the centre of Poynton. That has implications for businesses in the area, including BAE Systems and AstraZeneca, to name but two. Poynton, Bramhall and Heald Green are shopping

[Mrs. Patsy Calton]

centres cut in half by heavy traffic, and the superstores draw in traffic through all those areas via the central section of the eastern link route.

I have asked for this debate because the findings of the multi-modal study recognise the transport difficulties of the whole area, and make recommendations that local MPs can welcome almost 100 per cent. One in three people in our area say that traffic congestion is their biggest single problem. We have long recognised that the road network needed to be completed to take through-traffic away from shopping centres. We have also recognised that, with the dramatic predicted increases in car and freight traffic, it is necessary to make bus and rail services more attractive, frequent and reliable; to encourage walking and cycling; and to make extensions to the metrolink light rail network where possible. My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove will no doubt expand on that.

I cannot pretend that I was delighted when the Government announced the multi-modal study in 1998. "What's a multi-modal study?" was the question on everyone's lips. The Minister will accept that my constituents have been waiting for 10 years for even a sniff of the completion of the road network, which is treated as the next item on the agenda at the time of the public inquiry. Some people say, "I'll be dead before it happens," such is their despondency at the time that successive Governments have taken to grapple with the issue and their lack of faith in Government politicians. When they see successive Governments approving bypasses in other parts of the country with lesser problems than ours, their misgivings are confirmed.

However, the time that the study has taken and the opportunities afforded by it have given anyone who did not want the road network to be completed time to say so. The consultation, led by Steer Davies Gleave and managed by the Government office for the north-west, received more than 15,000 responses from the public. There has been astonishing support from residents, businesses and travellers for the completion of the roads and, indeed, the remainder of the proposals in the package. Those proposals will enhance the environment in district shopping centres, return residential areas to pedestrians and reduce greenhouse gases, if carried out in full.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove and I believe that dual carriageways with slower road speeds are appropriate for those roads. The fast speeds produced on the motorway-standard central section of the A555—the eastern link—have led to noise problems for surrounding residential areas. I am pleased that the study consultants have recommended that there should be a presumption of no development around the new roads to ensure they do not become clogged up with development traffic.

I urge the Minister not to delay his response any longer. In a recent letter to me, Stockport chambers of commerce expressed full support for the study's recommendations' but said:

> "How can the region as a whole consider itself to be anywhere approaching levels of national and international competitiveness if we cannot even resolve matters such as the internal infrastructure within the south east Manchester area in a reasonable period of time? One only has to look at the infrastructure developments which the French have put through in north east France with their motorways and rail networks to realize that actually other people are doing things while we sit on our hands".

Stockport chambers of commerce believe that what has been flagged up as a 20-year programme should in fact be only a five-year programme, echoing the comments of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who said:

> "We need a better, simpler, faster, more accessible system that serves both business and the community."

The Secretary of State said that in his foreword to a Green Paper on planning, but it applies to transport too.

The north-west regional assembly has sent a favourable recommendation to the Minister and bids have already been made in the local transport planning process for parts of the programme. Further delay will be interpreted in our area as an indication that the study has simply been a delaying mechanism. As I said, I was unhappy when the study was announced because I thought so too. There have been some positive outcomes, in particular the proposals to do more than simply complete the road network. As has been pointed out by the consultants, the roads and the other measures are all required; to build one or two parts of the three road schemes would simply extend the folly of the incomplete Manchester airport eastern link route.

I urge that further consideration be given to two issues. The hon. Member for Macclesfield has asked me to relay his concerns, which he shares with business, about the intention simply to upgrade the A523 south of Poynton in his constituency, where it links with the dual carriageway of the Silk road to Macclesfield. He and companies such as AstraZeneca at Hurdsfield want this section to be of the same standard as the Silk road and the Poynton bypass that it will join—that is, a dual carriageway.

The Minister may be aware of the recent redundancies announced at BAE Systems in Woodford. The use of dual instead of single carriageway on the south side of the Poynton bypass might well make it easier for planning permission to be awarded for a new access road from the site to the A523, thus facilitating possible new contracts from the MOD.

I have been asked by the Stockport cycling group to request that, when plans are proposed for the new A6 bypass, the A555 Manchester airport link road west and the A555-A523 Poynton bypass, they include adequate provision for cyclists at the design stage.

I should like to finish by paying tribute to the consultants at Steer Davies Gleave, not only because they have made proposals with which the vast majority of my constituents can agree, but because of the thoroughness of their approach and for withstanding rigorous scrutiny of their consultation process with good humour, even if not always with quite the transparency that I requested, at all times.

I hope that the Minister will make an early announcement—today would be appropriate—to bring some cheer to the industry and people of the south-east Manchester area and to provide the funding for work that is long overdue.

2.41 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) for agreeing to share some of her precious time. I am very much in agreement with her and the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) in strongly supporting an integrated transport solution for our area. I should also like to thank the Minister for coming to the Dispatch Box to engage in discussion on this matter for the second time in six months. Our last such meeting occurred on 10 July last year in Westminster Hall on the eve of the study's publication. In that debate, I said:

> "The argument is not only about another bypass. We are also asking the Government to put their heart and their money into a comprehensive attack on pollution and congestion across a wide swathe of Greater Manchester."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 10 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 240WH.]

The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn that a study has now been published that does exactly that, and I am very much hoping that he will respond positively.

The multi-modal study has done a valuable job and has reached some excellent and comprehensive conclusions. In particular, it has proposed an integrated solution that includes extending the Metrolink tram from the centre of Manchester and improving heavy-rail, bus and cycling connections. The latter were, of course, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle. The study also said very clearly and directly that, unless the road network was completed, all that development would be in vain.

We now have a set of recommendations that everybody seems to favour. The study clearly proposes an integrated response. Local people are in favour; indeed, thousands of postcards have been returned from residents to the consultants—the consultation was not political, but was carried out by the consultants themselves—saying that they are in favour. The regional development agency is offering its support, as well as the chamber of commerce. The Greater Manchester passenger transport authority is also on side. At our last meeting, the Minister gave me some hope by saying, with reference to my speech, that the initial work of the report had

> "confirmed many of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman about the adverse impact of congestion on parts of the study area, including Hazel Grove and A6 corridor, and the lack of attractive, sustainable alternatives to the car."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 10 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 245WH.]

This month, we have seen two developments that reinforce the message very strongly as regards the A6. One of them is the study, which made the very clear claim that the A6 in Hazel Grove was the most dangerous road in Greater Manchester. Its record of fatal, injury and non-injury accidents is by far the worst of any road in Greater Manchester. The study is extra ammunition both for the consultants and for me in arguing the case for building the bypass link.

Roadworks on the A6 have completely destabilised local traffic flows and led to massive congestion and waste of time for my constituents. It is ironic that the work was intended to complete the connections to a supermarket and to build the first 200 yards of the Stepping Hill link to the Hazel Grove bypass. It has been done, however at the expense not only of developers but of everybody who uses the A6.

The Minister's last words in the debate in July were:

> "perhaps the heart's desires of his constituents will one day be achieved."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 10 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 246WH.]

I wanted to remind him of that, because today would be a good day to give effect to those words. Will the hon. Gentleman follow up his positive and helpful comments last July with a commitment to support the study and invest in the 10-year integrated transport plan? Will he give a high priority to the Hazel Grove bypass and the Stepping Hill link?

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) on securing an important debate, which follows the debate that the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) obtained in July. I assure him that the words that he and I uttered then are ringing clearly in my ears.

Although the hon. Lady said that she did not understand what a multi-modal study was at the beginning of the process, both hon. Members have made positive contributions to the discussions. I cannot speak for the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)—we appear to have a Liberal Democrat-Conservative alliance today—but he is usually not slow to speak for himself and his constituents. I am sorry that he is not present.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove mentioned hearts and money. I assure him that our hearts were in the schemes that we discussed for improvements in the road structure. I also assure him that the money is there. Both hon. Members who spoke had perhaps too short a time to mention that, so I thought I should. If we consider the amount of money that the Government are providing for the local transport plans, there have been substantial increases in both hon. Members' constituencies. For example, in Greater Manchester in 2000-01, the local transport plan's block allocation was £31.9 million. That increased in this financial year to £63.3 million. The figure has more than doubled, and it will increase to £65.4 million next year.

In Cheshire, the 2000-01 figure was £11.8 million, which rose in this financial year to £18.8 million. Next year, the figure will be £20.7 million. I appreciate that there was probably too little time for hon. Members to welcome those huge increases in money for local transport plans.

Mr. Stunell *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I see that the hon. Gentleman is rising to do precisely that.

Mr. Stunell: Of course that investment is welcome, but I am sure that the Minister would acknowledge that the plans funded by it specifically excluded the multi-modal study's recommendations.

Mr. Jamieson: I raised the matter to show that not only our hearts but money lay behind our ambitions. Once the plan has been through the Department, it will be up to local authorities to identify in their plans the moneys that

[Mr. Jamieson]

they want. The way in which we have dealt with the transport plans should give the hon. Gentleman and his constituents every reason for optimism.

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the fact that I have been able to hear at first hand the impact of the transport problems in both hon. Members' constituencies and in the wider south-east Manchester area. As they both know, my ministerial colleagues are currently considering the recommendations of the south-east Manchester multi-modal study report. The debate is therefore timely and an important input into those considerations. Although the hon. Lady wanted a response today, I assure her that she will not have to wait much longer for decisions on those important matters for her constituency.

We are committed to looking at transport problems in the round. We do not automatically assume that a road problem means a road-based solution. The reality is that seeking to provide a bypass for every place that has a traffic problem would be neither practical nor cost-effective. The result would be a very long wish list and frustrated expectations. Rather, it is necessary to study individual problems and tailor solutions accordingly.

Mrs. Calton *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I will give way to the hon. Lady, although it will probably inhibit my giving some of the answers that she was looking for.

Mrs. Calton: Does the Minister acknowledge that the Department has already agreed to the Shevington bypass in an area with a smaller volume of road traffic but exactly the same environmental problems as we are talking about here? Those proposals have already been passed, but our problems are at least as great as those at Shevington.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Lady has somewhat pre-empted some of the things that I was going to say about the schemes in her area.

In relation to the A6(M) Stockport north-south bypass, the A555-A523 Poynton bypass, and the A555 Manchester airport link road west, there have been longstanding proposals in both the hon. Members' constituencies, and in the wider south-east Manchester area, for a series of bypasses to relieve communities such as Poynton and Hazel Grove on the A523 and the A6. Some development work had been undertaken on these schemes while they were in the trunk road programme. At the time of our 1997-98 roads review, the schemes had not been developed sufficiently for us to consider them as candidates for the targeted programme of trunk road improvements. The schemes were also on a part of the trunk road network which we concluded was not of sufficient strategic national importance to justify its inclusion in the core trunk road network.

Non-core trunk roads, which include the A6 and A523 in Greater Manchester and Cheshire, mainly serve local and regional traffic. We concluded that those routes would be more appropriately managed by local highway authorities, to enable decisions about them to be taken locally and better to integrate them with local transport and land-use issues. In answer to the hon. Lady's question about the multi-modal studies, they are about giving local people and local authorities—those in the locality who know the problems best—the opportunity to identify the priorities in their own area. I hope that, in the light of her considerable involvement in this study, she has been able to take home that message to her constituents.

As a consequence of our decision, the A6 Stockport north-south bypass, the A555-A523 Poynton bypass and the A555 Manchester airport link west were withdrawn from the national trunk road programme and will pass to the local authorities to consider taking them forward as local road schemes within their local transport plans.

Rather than put forward immediate bids for these schemes, it was decided to look at the problems that they were designed to address in the south-east Manchester multi-modal study. That is one of a number of multi-modal studies examining particularly complex problems. These problems can be addressed only by looking at all forms of transport, and seeking balanced solutions that contribute to our integrated transport policy. In recognition of the importance of the problems in south-east Manchester, this was one of the first multi-modal studies to be commissioned.

As the hon. Lady has noted, the study reported in September and made its recommendations to the north-west regional assembly. After consideration, the assembly made its recommendations to Ministers in November last year. If time allows, I will cover some of the recommendations later, but it may be helpful to explain the process that the study has gone through to reach this stage.

A consortium led by Steer Davies Gleave was appointed following the competitive tender, in December 1999. We funded the study, and the Government office of the north-west took the lead in managing it, in partnership with key interested parties in the study area. As in all the multi-modal studies, a steering group was established to take responsibility for its management and direction. Membership was wide and incorporated all the district and county councils directly involved in the study's coverage, the Strategic Rail Authority, the Highways Agency and the regional development agency, together with other business interests including Manchester airport, and a representative of local environmental and community groups.

The recommended strategy is detailed in the final study report and it includes proposals for four local road schemes—the Alderley Edge bypass, the Stockport north-south bypass, the Poynton bypass and the Manchester airport link road west—to alleviate the impact of traffic on local communities; extensions to the metrolink from Hough End to Stockport, Stockport to Rose Hill and Stockport to Manchester airport; an improvement to the M60/M67/A57 Denton interchange; improved rail infrastructure and services in respect of quality and frequency; and possible new orbital services linking Stalybridge and Stockport and, in the longer term, western and eastern links to Manchester airport.

Also included are improved bus services, including more quality corridors and services of enhanced frequency and quality; better management and maintenance of road capacity to deliver benefits to motorists, public transport users, cyclists and pedestrians; better freight management, including establishing freight quality partnerships; and, finally, an intense programme of campaigns to promote transport change and investment to support urban regeneration.

Both hon. Members must agree that that is a full package of measures to assist transport in their area, so I hope that they take heart from my point about local transport plans: not only have we set up those multi-modal studies, but we have shown that we are willing to fund local transport plans. I can assure them that careful consideration will be given when the various authorities put forward their plans to deliver that important programme.

The hon. Member for Cheadle will note that the recommended strategy covers a full range of transport improvements rather than simply the three bypasses previously in the trunk road programme. The study shows that those schemes would not have solved the problems in the study area in isolation and the strategy developed justifies the decision to undertake the study. The problems will be addressed by a multi-modal solution.

I got the feeling that the hon. Lady was a little churlish in welcoming the multi-modal study, but I hope that she has gone through a conversion on the road to Damascus, or perhaps to Poynton, and that she now welcomes it as highly valuable to her area.

The recommended strategy was detailed in a newsletter extensively distributed by the Post Office throughout the study area—I am sure that it appeared in *Focus* in the hon. Lady's constituency—so that local residents and businesses could be consulted on the study's recommendations. If she has a copy of *Focus* that welcomes the Government's proposals and extra money, I would be delighted to see it. If necessary, I shall report from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Stunell: They have all been delivered.

Mr. Jamieson: If the hon. Gentleman can deliver one to me, I shall happily note from the Dispatch Box how much his party welcomes Government involvement in transport in his area.

The hon. Member for Cheadle is aware that consultation has played an important part in the study process. From an early stage, emphasis has been placed on giving people, their elected representatives and interested organisations opportunities to participate in problem identification, strategy formulation and the derivation of solutions.

There have been three newsletters and a number of consultation meetings and briefing sessions, some with local MPs. I know that both hon. Members have attended. They also met the Government office of the north-west and its consultants on a number occasions. Furthermore, the hon. Lady's predecessor, Stephen Day, was not slow to raise in the Chamber matters of interest to his constituents, as she has today. All those views have been considered in the process.

On the way forward, Ministers are considering the final report and the regional assembly's recommendations. The report covers a wide range of issues that are being considered fully before an announcement is made. Delivery of the study outcomes will be predominantly for local authorities and operators, with Government funding and support, through the local transport plan process. That includes construction of the road schemes, which, if agreed to, will be progressed by the local authorities through the statutory and construction phases.

The hon. Lady is aware that supplementary local transport plan bids have been made for Greater Manchester and Cheshire for 2002-03 and for the Alderley Edge bypass. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to put on record the Government's views on this important matter and I thank the hon. Lady for raising—

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 15 January 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Single European Currency

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Dan Norris.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I declare my interest with Commerzbank, which is declared in the Register of Members' Interests, and I took advice on the content of the debate before I sought it. Commerzbank is a German bank that already accounts in euros. The debate therefore does not specifically and directly affect the body in which I have a registered interest, but relates to the Government's policy to change the national currency, which would affect everyone who uses the pound. The Government specified that five tests must be completed before a referendum would be called. Their position used to be that we would join when we had satisfied all five.

In *The Observer* on 6 January 2002, a senior Treasury source said:

> "There can only be a referendum if there's a government recommendation to join. There'll only be a recommendation to join if the five tests are met. If not, there won't be a referendum."

On GMTV's Sunday programme on the same day, however, the Minister for Europe said:

> "The government will form a view on the basis of the economic assessment, so if you like, it's a political judgment on the basis of an economic assessment."

Gus O'Donnell was right when he said in *The Times* on 4 January 2002:

> "Economics can never be clear and unambiguous. Ultimately it will be a political decision."

The waters were muddied further when the Chancellor said that the economic case must be clear and unambiguous. He put his party in an impossible situation that needs clarification. I have included the dates because Gus O'Donnell's statement came before the Chancellor reiterated that there could be a referendum only when the economic case was clear and unambiguous.

Today, we are trying to find out what the Government really mean. The problem is that the five economic tests are flawed and some members of the Government at last recognise that. I do not believe that the case for the euro can be made successfully, that restrictions on free markets will deliver greater economic success, or that the loss of the right to determine our interest rates will deliver greater stability. The loss of our right to make economic decisions is a loss of freedom and responsibility. It can never be dressed up as a long-term economic benefit. The decision is political and it is spin to suggest that the five economic tests could prove otherwise.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): In support of my hon. Friend's contention, if he had nothing better to do on new year's eve, he might have heard the interview on BBC 1 news with the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi. In response to a question about the launch of the euro and whether the project was political, he said with a smile:

> "This is not economic. This is...a pure political process."

Mr. Wiggin: I did not hear Romano Prodi say that, but I agree with the gist of the message. The problem is that the five economic tests no longer make economic sense. The first test is convergence and it should be the most important. Cyclical convergence data suggest that our economy is more in tune with the United States than with the rest of Europe. The correlation of the cycles between the United States and the United Kingdom tends to be higher than between the United Kingdom and Germany.

Clearly, there has been almost no correlation between Britain's economic cycle and that of the eurozone in the past decade. The structural convergence differences are significant and have altered little since October 1997. There are many differences, of which a principal one is trade. The eurozone accounts for only 43 per cent. of British trade, and the figure of 60 per cent. that the Prime Minister mentioned is too optimistic. United Kingdom exports to the far east have grown twice as quickly as those of other EU members. High levels of home ownership make Britain more sensitive to interest rates. Britain's pension situation is the opposite of that of the rest of Europe. As the number of European pensioners grows, the problem gets worse. The economic tools for dealing with the pension debt could have a disastrous effect on Britain.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about different patterns of trade. The Prime Minister is considering the trade of goods: a more favourable comparison. Does my hon. Friend agree that the economic relationship that requires closer co-operation is mutual investment? Mutual investment is in evidence far more with the United States of America: we get little investment from Germany or France.

Mr. Wiggin: I agree with my right hon. Friend and one of the tests deals with investment.

The solutions to the pension debt are either an increase in taxation or higher inflation to erode its value. Either of those solutions would damage Britain. Britain is the only net exporter of oil in the European Union; therefore, its reaction to a shift in the price of oil is the opposite of other EU countries. That emphasises another problem: would including Britain in the euro destabilise the currency further? It may be worse for the euro than it is for us.

The second test is flexibility. Flexibility in the labour market and the tax system are needed, but the eurozone is deficient in both. Without added flexibility or the safety valve of currency movement, the single currency is effectively a straitjacket. Dr. Otmar Issing, the chief economist at the European central bank, described that lack of flexibility as an almost lethal threat to monetary union. The second test would be better if the onus was on the eurozone to make markets more flexible to compensate for the inflexibility of a single monetary policy. The flow of labour is not the same as that of

[Mr. Wiggin]

capital, which can cross borders easily. Social, cultural and economic barriers remain. The *Financial Times* said that the EU has labour markets that are six times less mobile than those of the US.

The other crucial element of flexibility is in fiscal policy. About 45 per cent. of US federal taxes, which are 19 per cent. of GDP, are used to iron out imbalances. The EU budget is only 1.27 per cent. and has no structure for transferring money to compensate for the problems of monetary union, nor the political backing for it. Neither the eurozone nor Britain would be any more flexible than it was in 1997, when the tests were deemed to have been failed.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman mentions fiscal transfers that help iron out problems among different countries in the euro zone. Does he accept that fiscal transfer mechanisms will be retained in sovereign member states, which will help adjustment?

Mr. Wiggin: I hope that that may be the case, but it is not at the moment. It does not seem that it will be the case: there is no will or political backing for it.

The third test is investment, which was touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). Business investment as a share of GDP is higher than at any other time in the past 40 years. It is higher in the United Kingdom than in the US, France or Germany. We should think twice before undertaking a fundamental change in macro-economic policy: strong investment is dependent on macro-economic stability. The Government are forever boasting about the achievements of the independent Bank of England. Do they want to take credit for an independent central bank or its abolition? It would be replaced by a seat on the monetary policy committee in the European central bank.

The fourth test concerns the City, which shows few signs of struggling outside the eurozone. Its interests may be jeopardised by joining the euro. London is the largest centre for foreign exchange trading and the euro presents few problems. The number of EU financial institutions has increased from 238 in 1998 to 350 in 2001: an increase of about 50 per cent. The real threat to the City lies in membership of the euro. The UK position outside the eurozone is its strength, with less pressure for tax harmonisation. If the UK had been inside the eurozone, it might have given way on the withholding tax argument.

The fifth test is the effect on jobs and British prosperity as a whole. If we take the four previous tests together, it is clear that the euro is unlikely to promote higher growth stability and a lasting increase in jobs. It is impossible to make the case that joining the euro would have a clear unambiguous benefit; it would be easier to argue that it would have clear unambiguous costs.

Since the creation of the eurozone, there is no evidence that Britain's decision to remain outside has cost our economy any jobs, even in the manufacturing sector. The Government say that they are proud of our unemployment rate and low interest rates. On 7 March 2001, the Chancellor said:

> "I can also report that manufacturing—despite the euro-sterling exchange rate—grew last year by 1.6 per cent. Manufacturing productivity grew by 4.4 per cent., manufacturing exports by 11.8 per cent., and it is to the credit of thousands of British companies that overall British exports grew by 7.4 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 296.]

That puts in perspective manufacturers' claims that foreign exchange insurance is a significant cost to their competitiveness.

The arguments in favour of joining the euro are speckled with expressions such as "one market, one money" or "Britain will lose jobs and investment". That is clearly not the case. The political argument about lacking influence is probably the weakest. The concept of exchanging total control over our interest rates for a place on the European central bank monetary policy committee seems a bad bargain. The argument about making policy for our European neighbours instead of setting an example for them to follow is weak. It implies that any sensible suggestions will be ignored unless we are a member of that gang and that only by being a gang member will we have respect. What a childish and unworthy gamble to take with our nation's prosperity.

In a meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England, I asked why he did not intervene more in the currency markets to buy euros and sell sterling. He replied that although he was allowed to intervene, he did not feel that that was necessary. I also asked why, when buying the weak euro seemed a bargain and an investment that would make British goods more competitive, he showed a remarkable lack of confidence in the euro, which surprised and worried me. He wanted to know when it would strengthen and he is not alone.

A single currency is, as I said, an economic straitjacket. Although people may say that it is in the country's best economic interests, it cannot compete with free movements and free-floating international markets. The currency is a safety valve, allowing or forcing countries to adjust their economic situation safely. It also acts as a warning light and confidence indicator. The currency price is determined by people who are prepared to consider all the variables and to put their money where their mouth is. Efforts to curtail that activity consistently end in disaster. Every time that a Government try to improve on the free market, they lose, as in Argentina, where people pegged themselves to the US dollar, or in Britain when we were expelled from the ERM. We must learn from our mistakes and emulate countries such as Canada, which can live alongside its trading partners without adopting their currency.

The Government need to tell us the rate at which they want us to join. That would be far more useful than the five economic tests. It would give us a monetary target that would give clear guidance to businesses, letting them know what their longer-term competitiveness would be. Of course, one rate will not suit all businesses because one size never fits everyone. It cannot and will not fit all, whether we are talking about interest rates, exchange rates or even clothing. We should be asking ourselves, with all due diligence, not whether we are good enough to join the euro, but whether the euro is good enough for us to join and, all things considered, whether it would benefit from our joining. The answer is no.

With Germany fast approaching debt levels of about 3 per cent. of gross domestic product, I accept that there may be concern for the euro's long-term stability, so perhaps this is a good moment for the Government to bow out. The purpose of this debate is to get a clear view from the Government about how they intend to proceed with their referendum. As I showed, none of the five economic tests holds up to close inspection, and now that notes and coins have been introduced, what is holding the referendum back?

The criteria for calling the referendum are entirely political. They are based on a socialist dream of one enormous European state, perhaps founded on a natural dislike or distrust of America, or perhaps based on the communist theme of collectivism. The reasons for joining are no longer economic and never will be. As the ulterior motive is exposed, what is holding the Government back, apart from almost certain defeat?

Seriously, let us stop pretending that this single currency is a good idea and let us move on. If the Government will not abandon their determination to join, perhaps now is the time to step up to the plate. Call the referendum now. It is time to let the people have their say. Using a hard-headed assessment of Britain's economic interests, one is bound to conclude that Britain can never be guaranteed a long-term improved economic position through adopting the euro. Therefore, it is time to admit defeat and either call the referendum or throw in the towel and start dealing with the crisis in health and transport.

9.45 am

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on securing this useful debate and on his excellent summary of the case against joining the euro. I was sitting with my head held desperately in my hands just to stop myself from nodding in agreement with most of what he said. The hypothesis on which he based his speech is accurate. Government policy on this issue is absolutely clear. I am, unusually for me, totally in agreement with it. It is a third way between the two extremes. One extreme is that we may go in but on the other hand we may not, and the other extreme is that we may not go in but on the other hand we may. Government policy sits right there in the middle, happily watching what is going on with vacuous good will, saying, "God bless her and all who ail in her."

I see no need to change that policy, particularly since we have now had that so-called great event, the arrival of the notes and coins of the single currency. It demands no great skill to fill thousands and thousands of ATMs with paper currency. I imagine that forgery would be fairly easy with new notes, but I am sure that the details will be kept quiet and we will only know whether prosecutions result after some time. Nor will we know immediately about the price hike that the new currency will obviously allow. People will round up prices. There will be an inflationary effect. It might necessitate an increase in interest rates in euroland, but we will not know that until the figures come out. The immediate consequences are non-existent. We are therefore left with the basic issues of why it may not work and why we should not think about joining it. There are three paramount reasons for that, apart from the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Leominster.

First, there will be clear and strong political tensions in the coming year. Germany desperately needs a reduction in interest rates and perhaps a more competitive, that is to say lower, euro. France and Germany both have elections this year. Both will therefore press Mr. Duisenberg, the great deflator, to reduce interest rates and exude some confidence and happiness to the electorate. That will produce uncertainties and public arguments and pressures that will not be good for confidence in the euro. There is a possibility, therefore, that confidence will be affected and the euro will go down again. We must bear that in mind in the coming months.

Secondly, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the system does not include any machinery of redistribution, which it needs if it is to produce convergence. One interest rate cannot possibly cover the very different circumstances of the Irish, Spanish or German economies. The German economy is now in its third quarter of zero growth. It is technically in a recession. In that situation there has to be some means of redistribution to help the economies that are adversely affected by the single currency.

A nation state can redistribute about 40 per cent. of its gross domestic product to the regions, but that cannot be done in euroland, which suffers from a single economic policy. Only about 1.5 per cent. of Europe's GDP can be redistributed, and in the long term that will produce stresses and strains in the system, or even break it.

Thirdly, there is the problem of Maastricht's requirement and the stability pact. In a recession, Germany will be knocking close to the ceiling of 3 per cent. of GDP in the public sector deficit. It might well break through that ceiling this year, because as unemployment increases there is more social security spending and less tax revenue. The stability pact will therefore require sanctions. Will they be imposed? Germany wanted sanctions to ensure that budgetary integrity was maintained, but they would be a worrying blow to confidence and would affect world confidence in the euro.

We do not yet have solutions to those long-term problems, which I fear will produce difficulties for the euro. We need to sit back and wait and see what happens rather than rush to join the euro now, with the headlong enthusiasm of a bunch of impetuous Liberal Democrats.

The crucial, unspoken, issue is the sixth test—the Chancellor's codicil—or the exchange rates. At what exchange rate can we begin to envisage or talk about going in? It was confidential, but I can now reveal that I have a secret role in Government that is similar to Lord Birt's. I am coming out in support of Lord Birt because he has been unfairly and unnecessarily attacked for his role, which is similar to mine. I send periodic memos to the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Governor of the Bank of England advising them on economic policy. It is not so much blue sky thinking as grey North sea, or sludgy, thinking, which lacks Lord Birt's brilliance. However, my memorandums have much in common with Lord Birt's, in that they are never published and never read. My memos to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor emphasise the importance of the exchange rate issue, and my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has replied to many of them. The replies are beautifully written and make interesting reading; I am having them

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

set to music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. However, they do not respond to the crucial argument about the exchange rate.

Sterling is substantially over-valued, especially against the euro. We came out of the exchange rate mechanism because we could not maintain the relativity of DM2.95; the last exchange rate figure before the deutschmark disappeared was about DM3.20. The Liberal Democrats tell us that we went into the exchange rate mechanism, which they enthusiastically urged us to do, at an over-valued rate. I remember when the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) took large, enthusiastic, Liberal crowds into Downing street, where they chanted, "Move to the narrower bands now." They tell us that the exchange rate then was over-valued, but they wanted to lock us into that over-valuation of DM2.95 by moving to the narrower band.

The pound is over-valued. We can argue about whether that is due to a rise in the pound—in some respects it is—or to the 20 per cent. fall in the euro since it was inaugurated, which it has not yet made good. However, to go in at that exchange rate would damage our shrinking manufacturing base, set it in concrete and make this country permanently uncompetitive.

Therefore, we must know the rate at which we would consider going in and whether we can achieve it. The Government have made it absolutely clear that they will not manage sterling down to a competitive rate. If sterling fell, the Bank of England would be eager to intervene to put up interest rates to stop any further fall. It is a kind of doomsday scenario.

Mr. Redwood: Has the hon. Gentleman seen recent press releases from the Commission—they appear to be authentic—that say that we would have to join the exchange rate mechanism and suffer penal servitude for two years before being admitted to the euro? Is there not an even stronger case that there would be automatic devices for deflating Britain when the Commission thought it right? Under the exchange rate mechanism, 4 million are out of work in Germany. How many will be out of work in Britain?

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention; his comments are correct. I have always assumed that, under treaty requirements, we would go in at the exchange rate and have to sustain relativity for two years before entry.

The exchange rate is far too high. It has been maintained for a long period, and there is no sign that it will come down; there is an insistence on market rates. Unless the other countries are desperate to get us in, it is unlikely—impossible—that they would give us a special deal. The question is insoluble. Until the Government think their way through it, there is no point in even talking about entry, referendums or the benefits and disadvantages of the euro. We cannot go in at the given exchange rate.

A further fact is illustrated by Anatole Kaletsky's article in *The Times* business news today. We are, and have been for some time, doing better outside the euro than those countries that are in it, yet the euro is supposed to bring advantages.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): The strongest economies in the European Union at present are Denmark, Sweden and Britain. Is it a coincidence that they are all outside the euro?

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I hope that his disloyalty does not bring retribution and that his true and irrefutable statement is not seen as criticism of Government policy. We should bear it in mind when we consider going in. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has introduced a Bill to make the euro legal tender in this country, but he has not explained who would pay the exchange rate costs.

There is much fuss and hoo-hah about referendums, going in at an early date and expressing our enthusiasm for Europe. It gives the Liberal Democrats something useful to do, which is a valuable service; it takes them off the streets and away from paving stones. The newspapers have something to write about—I particularly admire the efforts of Polly Toynbee. Every time the euro is mentioned, out comes a huge gush of euro enthusiasm, and the media conspiracy is furthered. All that keeps my hon. Friends and I happily arguing the other side, but it is a total distraction from the real job of governing, which is to shape and build the strength of the British economy and to serve the purpose of the people. Membership of the euro would be deeply damaging to that process.

9.58 am

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): In my usual way, I have some friendly advice for the Government. They are in a hole: they would love to hold a referendum but think that they cannot win it, so they have hesitated to announce a referendum. They now suggest that the issue is one of economics, whereas their advisers occasionally let slip that it is not primarily about economics but big politics.

A single currency is, fundamentally, about who runs the country's economy and sets the rules. It is about which politicians and officials make which decisions. I compare joining the single currency to taking out a bank account with the neighbours. I get on pretty well with my neighbours and our relations are cordial, especially over Christmas and new year, when we exchange gifts and drinks. However, I do not feel that our relationship would be strengthened by pooling sovereignty—as it is inadequately described—and having a joint bank account. I would always be worried about whether they or I were putting more in and whether the overdraft was available when I needed it or they had already used it.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I like the idea.

Mr. Redwood: Uncharacteristically for a shadow Chief Secretary, my hon. Friend is implying that he would be spendthrift and draw out money rather early.

If we had a joint bank account, I would be the mug who would be doing the saving and ensuring that we met the bank's requirements.

Mr. Edward Davey: Would the right hon. Gentleman pool sovereignty with his neighbours on anything?

Mr. Redwood: I would be very careful about pooling sovereignty. It is indivisible, and we either have or do not have it. It is better to keep it and conduct friendly negotiations and relations with people. I want to be friends with our partners in Europe. I want to trade and work jointly with them when it makes sense, but it is better to keep the main decisions in our own hands.

I should have said that I have declared my interests in the register.

Mr. Davey: The right hon. Gentleman is clear that he is not keen on giving away sovereignty on any issue. Would he advocate pulling out of the European Union, NATO or any international institution in which the UK has pooled sovereignty?

Mr. Redwood: No, the hon. Gentleman misunderstands the point about negotiation, agreement and compromise-reaching with treaty proposals that make sense while keeping the right to make our own decisions, which is what NATO implies, and giving away our powers to make important decisions about our future, which is what the Liberal Democrats seem to think life is all about. I suppose that having been out of power for so long, they are casual about the powers that this country has to govern itself. Most of my electors are not casual about that. They elect people to the House and expect us to make decisions in their interest. They do not always get the overall team that they would like, but they know that they can have another go at a subsequent general election. They can hold the Government to account through the electoral process. What is the point of doing that if all the crucial decisions are taken elsewhere by unelected bureaucrats and officials?

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Is not the crucial difference between the single currency and NATO that a country can withdraw from NATO, as the French have done in the past, whereas we could not withdraw from a single currency without the most catastrophic consequences? That fundamental difference totally escapes the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Redwood: That is right. Another powerful distinction is that NATO does not have a supreme court that judges the actions of Her Majesty's Government and this Parliament and tells us whether we are doing things correctly. NATO proceeds by agreement, and we do not have to send our forces to fight if we do not want to. NATO has been an amicable and successful treaty organisation since the second world war, and has done a lot to keep the peace in western Europe and the rest of the world. It has been a singular success story, which the EU has not yet proved to be, and is trying to take ever more power from us. The EU is probably best known for its common fisheries and agricultural policies. Many people in Britain feel that those policies have not worked in our interest and could have been improved.

I want to give the Government some advice. If they are serious that this is an economic issue to be judged by five economic tests, they can prove it with their actions. The Minister today, or the Chancellor shortly when he has prepared the ground, should tell us exactly how the tests will be assessed. Most of them could provide quantitative answers. Using the figures available, we could assess whether our growth rate is getting closer to or more distant from those of Germany and France, how our inflation rates are doing and how our financial services industry is faring outside the euro. We could assess how flexible our labour market is compared with those of Germany and France by examining, for example, unemployment figures and job placement rates.

Will the Government set out exactly how the tests will be judged, stop the pretence that the work is so secret and important that it can be done only by Treasury officials in private and give us a quarterly statement to bring us up to date on whether we are closer to or further away from meeting the five tests? I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), who said in his excellent opening speech that we are moving further away from meeting the tests, and closer in many major respects to the United States economy than to the German or French economies. If the Treasury disagrees, will it set out how the tests are to be judged and publish quarterly figures so we can assess the position?

Mr. Bercow: Is not the need for a continuing assessment underlined by the verdict of PricewaterhouseCoopers that on no fewer than five counts—growth, output, unemployment, short-term interest rates and the current account—convergence is expected to be further away in 2002 than in 2001?

Mr. Redwood: That is very likely: it is my understanding of the position. The European Union is also capable of carrying out the analysis, and has published some good reports that show how the British economy diverges, whereas others in euroland are coming closer together. The Government should explain how the tests are to be assessed and provide regular bulletins on how well we are doing.

The Government should also explain how current economic policy is designed to bring us closer to qualifying under the five economic tests. We have received no statement of principle from the Government. They tell us that their policy is to join the single currency, and that it will be achieved by moving closer to the euroland economies and satisfying the five tests. Will they please make a statement to explain how they are tailoring policy to achieve that?

My worry is that the Government are not doing anything because they are split. Some Ministers want never to join the single currency but are quiet about it in public; some are sceptical about joining; some are desperate to join as soon as possible at any rate and whatever the consequences; and some others, who were brilliantly described by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), will go along with whatever the Chancellor and the Prime Minister agree—if they ever do—and take a different view according to the twists, turns and spinning of the day. A wide spectrum of opinion exists within ministerial ranks, and an even wider one within the ranks of Labour Back Benchers.

[Mr. Redwood]

The Government do not know what to do about the splits, so they pretend to settle the matter in private under the five economic tests in the hope that by some miracle the party will come together and present a political opportunity. My next piece of advice to the Government is that parties do not come together if divisions are allowed to carry on, but only when there is strong leadership, as we proved on the issue of the euro. We had far more difficulties as a party when, like the present Government, we did not take a clear view; we now have no problems because, under the previous and the present leader, we have adopted the clear position that we oppose joining the euro. Our party has come together, and the Government should offer some leadership to their own party and to the country on this crucial issue.

My next piece of advice mirrors what other participants in the debate have said. If we are going to buy something—even a pig in a poke—we should know its price, but we have not been told the price at which the Government want to buy the euro. It is the most crucial matter in the whole scheme. Why cannot the price be named when it is so critical?

When people from both ends of the political spectrum and the business community who urged the Conservative Government to enter the exchange rate mechanism discovered how bad it was, they often argued that it was because the rate was wrong. They did not say so when we entered the ERM: that was left to a minority inside the Government such as myself, but we were overridden by a huge consensus across the parties, in the media, among fashionable commentators and others who thought it was right to go in and did not worry about the price. If those people have learnt any lesson and now understand that the price was crucial, why are they not now saying that we must debate the price of entry into the euro as a first priority before we go any further with the scheme?

I fear that going in at the current rate would be damaging to large chunks of our manufacturing industry, which is already under pressure as a result of current interest rate and currency exchange rate levels and policy. If those conditions became permanent, it would be difficult to offer hope to such businesses. The Government should give us some information on what assessment they have made for a safe entry rate. Assuming that that safe entry rate is considerably lower than the current rate, they should then tell us how they plan to get there, and when they intend to enter the exchange rate mechanism.

It is quite clear that our European partners and the Commission believe that the treaty sets out very clearly that we have to join the exchange rate mechanism. If the Government are not of that view, will they tell Parliament when they intend to negotiate with our European partners and the Commission yet another special deal for Britain to allow us to enter without spending two years in the exchange rate mechanism? Would the Government at the same time negotiate the entry rate, because it would be of considerable interest to our partners? Although many people would like a lower exchange rate, many of our partners want to keep our rate very high, for obvious competitive reasons. When will the Government try to negotiate an entry rate?

I advise the Government, as a long-standing and consistent opponent of the exchange rate mechanism, inside and outside Government, that if they are serious about the euro, they should join the exchange rate mechanism, because it is clearly a very necessary preparation for a single currency. Although I believe that being in the exchange rate mechanism would be damaging, at least we could get out of it. If the Government have still not learnt the lesson, they should spend time in the exchange rate mechanism so that they discover that European currency schemes do not work for Britain. It may be better to do that than to go straight into the single currency and discover over a long period just how much damage it can do.

I do not believe that the Government are serious about holding a referendum. I do not believe that they will hold a referendum in this Parliament. I believe the referendum is entirely about politics. I think that Ministers across the Government are divided and hold a range of different views, which is exactly what happens when there is no consistent and clear leadership in favour of a particular policy.

We need to know the price of entry and when the Government are going into the exchange rate mechanism, and we need some sensible statements on how the economic tests will be judged. If the Government do none of those things, we will be right to conclude that they are not serious about this matter.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): It might be helpful if I announce that wind-ups will commence at 10.30 am. I shall allocate 10 minutes to each speaker.

10.11 am

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on raising this important subject. I would also echo many of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who speaks so much sense. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor takes his advice to heart.

I was encouraged by the tone of caution in the Prime Minister's recent comments, which I draw to the attention of hon. Members. Yesterday, in *The Daily Telegraph*, he said:

> "Membership of the Euro is not inevitable".

That is a very good point. He also said that it would be judged on the economic criteria, which would not be fudged. He has even said that life outside the euro is possible. I would go further and suggest that life inside the euro will be uncertain and difficult. Indeed, I think it is a bus that we would do well to miss, because it is going in the wrong direction.

Another encouraging comment from this side of the political fence was from Commissioner Kinnock, who said that we do not need to make a decision for another five years. I do not mind when the decision is made, as long as we make the right decision.

The story of the eurozone so far is not a happy one. Despite all the europhoria, the euro has depreciated by 30 per cent. against the US dollar, which is hardly indicative of confidence. The eurozone has been performing poorly in economic terms, especially compared with the United Kingdom, which in spite of the relatively high value of our currency, has still been doing remarkably well. That suggests that there is more confidence in Britain than there is in the eurozone.

Let us look at Germany, which is the largest and most powerful economy in the eurozone, and the one that has to work if the eurozone is to succeed. Germany has had something like 1 per cent. growth this year—that is the present rate—and there is very high unemployment there. Chancellor Schroder is facing a difficult general election, which he may well lose as a result of Germany's failure to perform economically during his term of office. Chancellor Schroder initially said:

> "Membership of the Euro will insulate against external economic shocks."

That is an interesting thought. More recently, he blamed Germany's poor economic performance on the US downturn. He cannot have it both ways: either the euro insulates the economy from what happens in the US, or it does not and the US can affect it.

Fixed exchange rates and single currency systems have inherent problems. There are difficulties in entering at the right exchange rate and it is difficult to maintain a single currency if different parts of the zone perform differently. If there is no scope for fiscal transfers and the other features that one would expect of an integrated economy, there will be differential economic growth throughout the eurozone, which will eventually lead to strain between member states.

When considering countries that have tried fixed exchange rate systems, or have tied their currency to another, Argentina springs to mind. This week it elected a president described as "left wing", which is comforting to me. He floated the peso, which devalued by 40 per cent. on the first day of trading. The alignment of the currency to the dollar was mistaken and had a terrible effect on the Argentinean economy. Argentina was one of the strongest economies not only in the Americas, but in the world. It is now on its knees.

Russia experienced serious problems when it fixed its currency at an over-valued rate against a hard currency. It began to recover only when the rouble was floated downwards. It was hardly an advert for capitalism that the Russian economy halved in the 10 years after the failure of communism. That was a disaster for the notion of a fixed exchange rate system.

More recently, Malaysia provided an example of good practice. During the problems in the far east several years ago, Malaysia was told by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank not to devalue its currency. It ignored the IMF, imposed exchange controls, devalued its currency and bounced back in a year. It did what any sensible country would do: it managed its macro-economic criteria according to its economic needs. That did not damage the world economy because the collapse of Malaysia would not have helped the far east.

We have our own experiences of fixed exchange rate systems. One was the gold standard period of 1925 to 1931. It was Churchill's decision, but he was pushed by the economic establishment to appreciate the currency and adopt the gold standard. That led to the 1931 disaster, which had the unexpected effect of destroying the Labour Government. It was not a deep-laid plot, because the Conservatives had not anticipated that Labour Government. The devaluation after 1931 led to gradual recovery throughout the 1930s.

A more recent UK example is the exchange rate mechanism period: 1990 to 1992. Conservative Members may regret that because it was the major factor in destroying the Conservative Government's credibility, which led to Labour's victory in 1997. I was pleased about that, but it was not sensible economics. The significant depreciation after that gave an enormous kick to the economy, which has grown steadily since. The enormous growth that took place after that depreciation allowed us to sustain a high exchange rate. If the UK entered the eurozone at the present exchange rate, we could have a 1931 or 1992 on our hands, but this time there would be no escape route.

Exchange rates are significant. When I was growing up, Germany was cited as the economic miracle of the post-war era. At school, everyone complained of the low value of the deutschmark that gave the Germans an unfair advantage. Germany used that advantage for several decades to build up its economy. That was deliberate because the west wanted to ensure that West Germany succeeded economically so that the communists could not point the finger at a failing economy. The difference in performance compared with East Germany was obvious to everyone, and eventually led to reunification.

Reunification was interesting because again there was an exchange rate problem. One ostmark was exchanged for one deutschmark, which was a massive over-valuation of the East German currency that led to the East German economy being almost annihilated overnight. The problem was overcome by vast fiscal transfers from wealthy West Germany that had built up surpluses during the economic miracle. There was no problem because it was a single country that had the possibility of massive fiscal transfers. The eurozone is not in that position.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned Germany several times. An implication of the single currency is that it will eventually lead to a single taxation system. Only a few weeks ago, Hans Eichel, the German Finance Minister, argued for a single taxation system throughout the eurozone. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that a single European taxation system would be in the interests of the United Kingdom if we were part of it?

Mr. Hopkins: I understand that our Government, and many others, argue that there will be no single taxation system. Only this week, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary said that we would not harmonise duties, let alone income tax or other forms of taxation, and I support her argument. Even if taxes were harmonised, that would not necessarily provide scope for the vast fiscal transfers that would also be needed. Tax can be one way, but we must have a universal tax and benefits system. The McDougal report suggested that regional transfers might have to be multiplied by 14 or 15 before fiscal transfers were sufficient. The question is whether the rich zones will tolerate multiplying regional transfers by 15 and having a universal tax and benefits system so

[Mr. Hopkins]

that rich Germans or French people pay taxes for poor Welsh people. That is not on the cards, but it might cause some political stress in some richer countries.

On 6 January 2002, *The Observer* published an article by Faisal Islam in which he described a worst-case scenario. He also outlined a best-case scenario, which is less credible and which I have not had enough time to read. He wrote:

> "The German economy fails to improve, but Euro-area interest rates cannot be pushed too far down, because of relative buoyancy in the rest of the Eurozone. Pressure mounts on the German government to boost its economy through tax cuts and spending increases funded by increased borrowing. The European Commission and the ECB join together to lobby for a strict application of the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact. German public opinion turns against the idea of Europe."

He went on to suggest that as a result, we might lose a referendum, which would seriously damage the credibility of the euro, and eventually the people of Europe would turn against the idea. I believe that we are in the early stage of that scenario, and I applaud the recent caution of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor towards our possible entry into the eurozone.

10.22 am

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I hope to bring some balance to the debate. I appear to be in a time warp to the 1970s, when the Labour party constantly tore itself apart over whether we should be involved in Europe. The situation is the same today, although there appears to be unity among hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. It is important that we look at where we are and understand that several problems must be addressed. That is why the economic tests must be examined, as they have been this morning, and why a referendum is essential. If we have a referendum, we can have that debate in public. Informed debate is essential. We seem to be forgetting that, on 1 January 2002, 12 countries accepted the euro. They had decided to move into a common currency that they believed was beneficial, and that I also believe would be beneficial, provided that the economic tests are met.

There was not unanimity across Europe, and people were concerned. A young Spanish man is living in my home at the moment, and he was saying before Christmas that his mother and father, who have businesses in a small village in north Spain, were concerned about the transition to the euro. He believed that they would continue to use their national currency. He went home for three weeks and came back with the message that there was no problem because of the preparation that had been done. That is one of my concerns. If we wait and only talk about whether to enter the euro, rather than making the proper preparation, we will be left behind the rest of Europe, and we cannot afford that.

In my brief contribution, I want to emphasis the benefits that exist in Europe. Some of the comments from the official Opposition were a bit rich. They have claimed that every Budget over the past four years was the wrong way to go and would lead to recession and job losses. I have heard that story continually from them, and the opposite is true. We have low interest rates and unemployment levels, and we have growth. We should note also that the *Financial Times* yesterday had the results of a MORI poll, which had surveyed the 500 leading businesses in the UK, showing a one-third increase in support for joining the euro, up to 59 per cent. of those top businesses.

We must have a balanced debate. I do not think that we have had that this morning, and I urge the Government to examine seriously the preparation for the euro, based on the need to move forward. When the arguments are put, we can win a referendum.

10.26 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on securing the debate. Given that this is the first chance that the House has had to debate the subject since the recess and the momentous events of 1 January, it is particularly welcome.

I thank particularly the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) for beginning to restore some balance. As I sat here listening to today's speeches, it was as if 1 January had not happened. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) referred to it, but he dismissed the convergence and changeover as a trivial matter that was just about filling some ATMs throughout the high streets of continental Europe. It was a significant change, showing what can be achieved practically and the change of the climate and psychology around, and the attitude to, the single currency. It is a real and not a virtual currency now and is becoming accepted in wallets and tills throughout continental Europe.

We should celebrate that success in this Parliament and send a message of congratulations to our continental partners. I hear laughter from the Conservative Benches. I thought that the Conservatives were now wishing the project well, and I was pleased to see their leader doing just that, and welcoming the success of the changeover. I hope that Conservative Members will continue that message, because it is in our interest that the process succeeds. I know that some Eurosceptics believe that it is in their interest for it to fail, but 1 January sent a clear message that it will work, because it has a political backing. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was right: this is a political as well as economic project. It has political support in continental Europe, and we should celebrate its success.

This debate focuses on Government policy on the single currency, and there are some interesting issues. As I understand it, the Government have said that they are in favour in principle, and that there are five tests with which they will make an assessment within two years of the last general election. There will then be a referendum and in the meantime, they are making preparations. That is Government policy in a nutshell. It is good that they are in favour in principle—it is nice to see that they have one principle. I just hope to see efforts made towards enacting that principle, which would be a start of sorts.

However, as we all know, the five tests—convergence, flexibility, investment and the effects on the City and on jobs—are a fig leaf to keep the Government and the Labour party together on these rocky political waters until they decide that it is politically right to join.

Mr. Redwood: I believe that the Liberal party, unlike the Government, did some interesting work on entry rates and concluded that we should enter at a considerably lower rate against the euro than the current 62p. What rate has the hon. Gentleman in mind and how would we get there? How would we need to change economic policy to reach an entry rate that the Liberal party would think acceptable?

Mr. Davey: I am grateful for that intervention; I shall deal in some detail during my remarks with the right hon. Gentleman's points. He is right in referring to the report entitled "Britain's Adoption of the Euro" from the expert commission established by my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrats. It had various eminent economists, former members of the MPC and people such as Martin Weale from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, Richard Portes and John Williamson. He is a leading macro-economic expert on exchange rates and the inventor of one of the three main economic theories on exchange rates—fundamental equilibrium exchange rates.

The commission produced a long and detailed report, which dealt with the issue under discussion. It suggested the rate of 1.45 euros to the pound, which is significantly lower than the current rate of 1.62. It also said, however, that if relative productivity trends changed in the meantime, there might be a case for a slightly higher rate. My colleagues and I agree with the substance of the report. I believe that such a rate would be competitive and would enable us to enter the single currency successfully. Clearly, however, the rate has to be negotiated, and I shall come to that point in due course.

Let me focus on the Government's tests, because they are a bit of a smokescreen. Publications from Her Majesty's Treasury will no doubt try to make out that the tests are terribly important, but the reality is that most of them have been met, more or less, and it is difficult to get clear measurements for them anyway. That is why the Government have to set up a process to work out how to make the assessment. If the tests were obvious and easy to quantify, there would not have to be such a long process to work out how to do the assessment. However, as the right hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members have said, the problem with the five tests is that they miss out the key test—the test of the exchange rate.

A debate about what would be a sustainable exchange rate is needed, and the Government have a duty to lead it. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby has been an ardent fan of promoting such a discussion over many years. I have been involved with economic debates in and outside the House in which he has mentioned the exchange rate and the need to devalue. He has argued for devaluation from three or four different exchange rates over that time. It should always go down in the hon. Gentleman's view, but that argument could be valid in particular circumstances. The key is how we go about generating a consensus in the wider economic establishment and the markets about what would be a sustainable long-term exchange rate for the country. We have seen no leadership on that from the Government, which is a huge omission.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I argued for a competitive exchange rate—that was the essence of my argument—not a process of continuous devaluation. The real question is not the Government's position but how the Liberal Democrats propose that we reach their exchange rate of 1.45. Should we intervene in markets or should there be a process of benign neglect? If the country signifies that it wants to enter, will the rate suddenly fall to the requisite level, because the force is with the Liberals?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I have two points in answer. First, if the markets believe that a consensus is emerging in this country and with our European partners about a certain rate, there will be a certain glide path in the markets as they underpin a particular rate with credibility that Britain will join. We saw that with the lira when the Italian Government decided to join in 1996. It was interesting that for a few days after the Labour Government were re-elected, the markets assumed that there would be a greater commitment to joining the single currency and the pound depreciated quite substantially. The Treasury and the Bank of England had to talk up the pound, saying that there was no intention to join within the next few years, that the five tests would be difficult and that the British people must be persuaded. There was a concerted effort to shift the markets back.

That makes my point for me: if the markets think that Britain is going to join they realise that we cannot join at the current rate. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby argued, it is overvalued. The markets will help us do the job if they believe that there is a credible commitment to joining. The hon. Gentleman is also right to say that policy changes are needed. One of this Government's problems is that by not enunciating that key test—the test of the exchange rate—they are not giving any direction to policy to try to bring about convergence to a long-term sustainable exchange rate. That is a huge omission.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman raises some interesting points. He now proposes a devaluation of about 11 per cent. from today's level. Given that about a third of the things we buy in the shops are imported or are influenced by import prices, he is looking at an inflation of 4 per cent. as a direct result of the devaluation. Under the present rules, the Bank of England would have to hike interest rates to stop that happening. Would he want to override the Bank of England rules to allow the inflation?

Mr. Davey: As the right hon. Gentleman would no doubt agree, it is possible to depreciate exchange rates without inflationary consequences, as happened when we left the exchange rate mechanism. It does not follow that depreciation immediately results in higher prices because that is, using the economist's term, ceteris

[Mr. Davey]

paribus. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman said in his opening remarks that the pound was overvalued. It should therefore follow—

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. I call the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

10.37 am

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on securing the debate and on his clinical dissection of the Government's policy. I thank everyone who took part, but I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who made a characteristically coruscating speech, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and to the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins), whose prospects for advancement have not been greatly assisted today, but whose reputation for sound sense and personal integrity now stands at an all-time high.

Ministers in all parts of the Government are arguing like ferrets in a sack not about whether to abolish our national currency—they are agreed about that—but about when to do so and why. The debate got under way early in the new year. On 2 January the Minister for Europe told *The Guardian*—who else?—that he doubted

> "that it is possible to run a sort of parallel currency economy".

The next day his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary disowned him, saying:

> "I just ask people to calm down."

The former Foreign Secretary, who has been feeling somewhat sore of late, obviously could not resist joining the fray. The Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), declared on 6 January on "Breakfast with Frost":

> "If we want to continue with that very strong powerful leading role within the European Union it is going to be more challenging to do that if we are outside the inner club".

He was promptly slapped down by the Prime Minister in an interview in *La Repubblica*, which was reproduced in *The Sun* on 8 January. He said:

> "I am convinced that Great Britain can be an essential partner, if we wish, a leading partner in Europe on fundamental issues such as defence, economic reforms, protecting the environment and other matters."

He said that entry into the euro is "another issue altogether". The internecine conflict raging at the heart of the Government is unedifying to observers and undignified for participants but, above all, it is a betrayal of the people on an issue of vital national importance.

I want to be fair to the Government. Let us start with the Chancellor's declaration of the Government's position on the European single currency:

> "To sum up, we believe that, in principle, British membership of a successful single currency would be beneficial to Britain and Europe; the key factor is whether the economic benefits of joining for business and industry are clear and unambiguous."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1997; Vol. 299, c. 588.]

The problem with the position that he articulated four years and three months ago is that it has been shot to pieces by the head of macro-economics at the Treasury, who is the director of the assessment team charged with determining whether the five criteria have been met. Gus O'Donnell famously—perhaps infamously, depending on one's point of view—said:

> "Economics can never be clear and unambiguous."

In such circumstances, the best and most honourable course for the Prime Minister, who has stuck to the absurd "clear and unambiguous" line for the past four years, would be to give up the unequal struggle. He would earn brownie points by acknowledging that the policy of the past four and a half years is rudderless and that it has been comprehensively discredited; it was based on a false premise. He could drop any further plans to take Britain into the euro. He could apologise for wasting people's time and withdraw from the fray.

An expression springs to mind about pigs flying. Hell would freeze over before the Prime Minister treated us to such a refreshing outburst of candour. However, we must ask why a clear and unambiguous case on economic grounds cannot be made for British membership of the euro. The explanation relates to the essence of the euro. The euro is not only about the seamless, or otherwise, introduction of notes and coins but about who sets the interest rate for members of the eurozone. The Governor of the Bank of England, Sir Eddie George, who is a respected authority, said on the BBC World Service "World Business Report" on 4 January:

> "The risk is that single interest rates, which has to go with the single currency, is not going to be appropriate for all the member countries at the same time."

Two weeks earlier, on 22 December 2001, he said in *The Daily Telegraph* that the one-size-fits-all policy represented

> "a disadvantage and a special risk".

We do not have to gaze into a crystal ball when we can read the book.

Mr. Hopkins: Is it not the case that present interest rates in the eurozone are too low for Ireland and too high for Germany?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is almost always correct, and this occasion is not an exception. He anticipated my comments. The European Commission undertook a report in 2001 on the European economy. Chapter 2 devotes a substantial section to the difficulties. Specifically, it reports on page 69 that no fewer than seven member states have suffered excessive demand pressures. It refers to the particular circumstances of Germany and France and their need for lower interest rates.

We have already heard of the danger that the European Commission will insist on British membership of the exchange rate mechanism as a prerequisite for entry to the single currency. We should listen to and heed the European Commission's report, which states:

> "Monetary conditions in a single member state can be inappropriate considering the cyclical conditions, as the single euro-area interest rate may not be in line with the individual needs."

It then goes on, rather prosaically, but helpfully, to point out that

> "for individual member states, the creation of a single currency area implies the loss of monetary adjustment mechanisms in response to economic shocks."

In straightforward terms, what does that mean? It means that if the economy was in a mess, we could not cut interest rates to reflect the domestic circumstances. We know the desperate damage that can be done because we know about the repossessions, bankruptcies and loss of jobs that occurred in our own economy when we were in the temporary but horrendous straitjacket of the exchange rate mechanism. To go from that to permanent incarceration in what my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) legendarily described as a burning building with no exits does not seem to be indicative of much common sense in the Government.

How can we have the same interest rate policy as Germany with its 4 million people unemployed and Holland with its inflation touching 5 per cent? It is so transparently absurd that only an extraordinarily clever and sophisticated person could fail to see this obvious point. It leads one to the conclusion that the euro is not really about economics but about politics.

I said that the best course was for the Prime Minister to withdraw and not go forward with the project. The other option would be simply to say, "Yes, I am hell-bent on dragging Britain into the euro with a cost I cannot calculate, for a benefit that I cannot enumerate, and at a risk to the self-government of the country that I dare not admit. But I want to get on with my partners, I fancy being President of the European Commission, and I am going to try and cajole, bully, brow-beat and harangue the British people into accepting the project."

It is time that we ceased to have a Government policy mired in contradiction, deception, humbug and superficial thinking. We are owed an explanation of what the Government are really about. The place for that explanation is here, the time for it is now. I look forward, with eager anticipation and bated breath for the response of the Minister.

10.47 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I am delighted to be here again with you, Mr. O'Hara, in the Chair for this very important Adjournment debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on securing the debate. It is interesting to note that the new intake of Conservative Members of Parliament are just as preoccupied with Europe as the older hands. I thought that the public had already made a judgment on the Conservatives' attitudes to Europe not just once, but twice, but it is very useful to have this debate.

I should put on the record, in a nutshell, the Government's policy towards the single currency. The Government's policy on the membership of the single currency remains as set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in October 1997, and as restated by the Prime Minister in February 1999:

> "In principle, the Government are in favour of UK membership of EMU. In practice, the economic conditions must be right. The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest, and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous. If it is, there is no constitutional bar to joining."

As the Chancellor said in his October 1997 statement:

> "the five economic tests will define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made."

The Government are, of course, committed to carrying out a comprehensive and rigorous assessment of those economic tests. We will not, under any circumstances, take any risks with our hard-won economic stability. I note with interest that the hon. Member for Leominster first argued that the economic tests were flawed and then used them as more or less the entire content of his speech. I take that to mean that he agrees with Government policy on the five tests that they are the appropriate tools to carry out an assessment. I am not terribly surprised. The IMF, an independent commentator, stated in its 2001 report on the UK economy that the five tests were

> "consistent with the economic considerations which would be important for the decision to join a monetary union."

Mr. Bercow: My inquiry is simple: how can the Government expect to achieve what the director of the assessment team says can never be achieved?

Ruth Kelly: The IMF made it clear that the five tests were the appropriate way of making the assessment. I am about to explore those tests in greater detail and to explain, in response to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), how we intend to carry them out.

The first of the five tests is sustainable conversion between Britain and the economies of the single currency. The second is whether there is sufficient flexibility to cope with economic change. The third is the effect on investment, the fourth the impact on our financial services industry, and the fifth the effect on employment. The Chancellor has said that the Treasury will complete an assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment has not yet started, but the necessary preliminary analysis—technical work necessary to allow us to undertake the assessment as promised—is under way.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham asked how the tests would be carried out. As he knows, the preliminary work that will underlie and inform the assessment is already under way. The scope of the preliminary technical work was set out in the 1997 assessment. Although new developments have occurred since then, the underlying issues to be analysed remain the same, and the five tests remain unchanged.

Mr. Edward Davey: Can the Minister tell us when she expects the initial work on assessment to be completed?

Ruth Kelly: That would be premature. Important issues have to be gone through to ensure that we have the right framework to underpin any assessment. As I said, the analysis will be comprehensive and rigorous.

Mr. Francois: The Minister has maintained this morning that the Chancellor's policy—that the outcome depends on analysis of the five tests—is paramount. Will she explain the recent comment of the chairman of the Labour party that, as economists rarely agree, the economics do not really matter, so it is ultimately a political decision? Who is correct and what is Labour policy?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister are completely at one about Labour policy on the single currency—we are in favour, in principle, of joining monetary union, but we must, in practice, meet the five economic tests. I am about to explain how we intend to carry out those tests and how our preliminary work will inform our assessment.

Mr. Francois: Will the Minister give way?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman should allow me to expand my point.

The preliminary and technical work will update our analysis of the cyclical behaviour of the UK economy relative to the euro area. It will assess relative responses to economic shocks, the mechanisms by which product, labour and capital markets adjust and how well and quickly they work. Other relevant considerations are the impact of the single currency on the costs and availability of capital, macro-economic stability, the stability of the real effect of exchange rate and the location, quality and quantity of investment. The effect of the single currency on financial services, including the changes in the sector that have occurred in the UK and the euro area since 1997, and its impact on trade, competition and productivity are also relevant.

That list is by no means exhaustive, as preliminary work continues to evolve to take account of the latest technical research and analysis. More detail is provided in the Treasury note issued in November last year, which deals with the content and timing of the preliminary and technical work. Hon. Members will find a copy in the Library.

I can tell the right hon. Member for Wokingham that the Government have no intention of providing a running commentary on either the preliminary work or the five tests. The assessment will be carried out within the first two years of this Parliament, which is what the Government are committed to. It does not make sense to try to update that information daily, weekly or monthly.

Mr. Francois: I am sorry to contradict the Minister, but it is evident that members of the Government are giving a running commentary on the process. Barely a day goes by without members of the Government contradicting each other in public. Perhaps she should have a word with her colleagues. We are greatly amused by their running commentary.

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. No one in the Government has given a running commentary on the five tests. I shall respond to the points made about them, especially about the level of the exchange rate, if hon. Members will allow me to do so.

The Government said that the exchange rate at which sterling would enter the single currency must be consistent with economic fundamentals in the United Kingdom and compatible with sustainable convergence between the UK and other euro area economies. It is not a sixth test; that is the Government's policy, which we have set out. The Government believe, as several European Councils have recognised, that what matters for a stable economic exchange rate, are sound economic fundamentals. The Luxembourg Council stated in December 1997 that

> "in general, exchange rates should be seen as the outcome of all other economic polices."

That is why I fundamentally disagree with the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). The Government should not try artificially to massage down the level of the exchange rate, which is properly the outcome of sound economic fundamentals. That is why we put in place measures such as the new fiscal rules, the monetary framework and the independence of the Bank of England.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Ruth Kelly: It may pre-empt the question that the right hon. Member for Wokingham is about to ask when I say that the Government have no intention of rejoining the exchange rate mechanism—

Mr. Redwood *indicated assent.*

Ruth Kelly: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman assents.

Mr. Redwood: Would the Minister be happy for us to go in at 62p? Is she saying that the economic tests would take place against the background of that fairly stable exchange rate in recent months of 62p to the euro? Is that the preferred entry rate?

Ruth Kelly: I am certainly not going to give a running commentary on the level of the exchange rate, or on any of our economic assessments. As I said, the best and soundest way to determine a strong exchange rate consistent with economic fundamentals is as the outcome of other sound economic policies. I give way for the last time to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bercow: In the light of what the Minister said about there not being a running commentary on the policy on the euro, my sound advice to her is that she should watch her back and reflect on who is now sitting behind her.

Ruth Kelly: I shall not take any notice of the hon. Gentleman on that matter. Our policy is clear.

My hon. Friends the Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) raised the issues of pension liabilities and the stability pact. I greatly enjoyed my hon. Friends' speeches, which I found most entertaining. British taxpayers will not make payments to the Community and to other member states to pay for other countries' pension liabilities, whether or not we join the euro. Rules on excessive deficits and on the stability and growth pact mean that participating member states will not be able to finance their pension liabilities through economic borrowing; they will have to cut spending or raise contributions. There is no bail-out option for countries that do not take the appropriate action to reform their economies and to ensure that they have a sustainable fiscal position. I do not want to start a discussion about the situation of other countries, but we will play our part in the debate in Europe on the sensible interpretation of the stability and growth pact.

As time is short, I shall again set out our position: in principle, we are clearly in favour of joining the euro, but in practice the five economic tests must be met before the Government take a decision. The Cabinet will make a recommendation to Government, who will put the decision to the people. The final decision will be determined in a referendum of the British people.

Middle East

11 am

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the political situation in the middle east. Difficult though it may be at the best of times, I shall take a balanced and bipartisan approach to the debate. I hope that many colleagues from the Labour Friends of Israel and the Labour Middle East Council will participate in the debate. I am a member of both organisations, and I look forward to hearing contributions by Members of equivalent organisations in the Opposition parties. In taking a bipartisan approach, I run the risk of pleasing no one and offending all. I hope that hon. Members will take the opportunity to correct any imbalance that may inadvertently colour my introduction, as well as stating more boldly the case from either side of the Palestine-Israel divide.

One advantage in taking a middle way in discussing the Arab-Israeli conflict is that it is easier to resist the temptation to suggest that we can resolve the conflict by putting pressure on either side. I see no prospect of a return to the peace process unless the consent of both sides is freely given. One purpose of this debate is to explore what possibilities exist for moving Israel and Palestine away from conflict and back on to the path of peace. That will not be achieved by applying external pressure or by pulling levers of influence. The internal dynamic of the relationship must change.

We must recognise however, that the middle east peace process is in crisis. That is not just a matter for the Israelis and the Palestinians but a threat to international security. We must constantly dedicate ourselves to doing what we can to get the middle east peace process back on track. The situation in the middle east is explosive. One need only think of what might happen if there were another terrorist outrage along the lines of 11 September, and the risk of regional spill-over is very real.

We must recognise that relations between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority have deteriorated markedly. Without dialogue, no negotiation is possible. Not just the prospect of a lasting settlement in the middle east is at stake, but the possibility of any kind of peace process at all.

I have called the debate, because I refuse to accept, and I do not believe our Government should accept, a counsel of despair. Despite the temptation to back away from the issue in the face of escalating violence and extremism, I believe that it is imperative for Britain, Europe and the international community to engage constructively with the middle east. I do not wish to focus on how we got to the present impasse or spend time looking at who is to blame. We must try to dissect the true nature and depth of the present crisis and examine the role that Britain, the EU and the international community can play in moving forward the agenda about the future of the middle east.

The elements of the present crisis in the middle east are clear. There is a humanitarian crisis on an unprecedented scale, even for a region where bloodshed has been the constant companion of century-long conflict. Since the start of the second intifada, in September 2000, more than 1,000 people have been

[Roger Casale]

killed, many of them women and children, and 80 per cent. of them Palestinian. The number of Israelis killed in the conflict has increased three times since Ariel Sharon became Prime Minister of Israel. The death rate is higher than at any time in the contemporary period of the conflict.

As the number of deaths increases, so does the record of physical, economic and social damage on both sides. The number of Palestinians who live in absolute poverty on less than $2 a day has more than doubled and, according to the latest World Bank figures, is more than 50 per cent. of the population. Some 100,000 Palestinian jobs have been lost in Israel, and 60,000 jobs have been lost in the West Bank and Gaza strip because of the closures policy. One in five Israelis now live below the poverty line, a figure that has increased by 10 per cent. from last year. Unemployment in Israel has risen to nearly 10 per cent. as the Israeli economy slows down in the face of global recession and as a direct result of the political and security crisis.

The political and security crisis is the most important element of the current crisis. The Israeli deputy head of military intelligence, Brigadier-General Yossi Kuperwasser, visited the House of Commons yesterday with Rear-Admiral Meshita, head of naval intelligence. I asked him whether he had abandoned all hope of peace. He said that he had not, but that no peace could be made with Yasser Arafat. However, Arafat more than anyone symbolises, and even personifies, to the international community Palestinian hopes and dreams for a Palestinian state. He told me that Arafat ordered the Karine A boat directly from Iran in collaboration with Hezbollah. That serious allegation threatens to escalate further the violence and the security crisis in the middle east.

Sadly, I could not attend the meeting, but I received the report, of Shimon Peres's visit to the House of Commons last July. He asked us what Israelis could do in the face of such terrorist atrocities and to stop the suicide bombers. Even before the atrocities of 11 September in America, none of us had a reply. One more Palestinian, Raed Mahmoud Karmi, was killed in a car bomb explosion yesterday. He was accused of having killed six Israelis. Another Israeli was killed yesterday, and so the cycle repeats itself. However, the outcome of the Israeli reprisals is to push Hamas increasingly into the mainstream to the point at which they seem to enjoy support of almost 40 per cent. If the strategy continues, Hamas may become the leading element in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinians fear that that is the Israeli Government's political objective. They believe that Israel knows that the international community will line up against Hamas but will not do so against Arafat. If that is the Israeli agenda, the prospect of a further deterioration in the security situation is great.

The nub of the political crisis is the crisis of leadership and the corresponding crisis of confidence on both sides in each other's leaderships. In the face of this crisis, the European Union External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, said in a statement to the European Parliament on 12 December 2001:

> "We need to focus our efforts on how to prevent the death of the peace process itself".

A pessimistic Palestinian view is that there seems to be no Israeli Government agenda for negotiation and peace. Instead, the agenda seems to be to undermine Arafat and the Palestinian Authority as a precursor to undermining the idea of a Palestinian state. However, it is Arafat himself who embodies the aspiration for a Palestinian state. The existence of a Palestinian authority keeps alive the prospect of achieving that state through negotiation. To lose sight altogether of the dream of a future Palestinian state or to destroy the organisation—the Palestinian Authority—that could negotiate a lasting peace with the Israelis would plunge the Palestinian territories into a permanent state of anarchy, the middle east into a permanent state of war and would massively compromise Israeli security for years to come. If that is where the process is leading, it is leading towards the edge of an abyss.

From the Israeli side, a pessimistic view would say that Arafat has no game plan. Moderate Israelis feel let down; they hold Arafat responsible for encouraging support for extremist groups not just in the Palestinian territories, but in Israel as well. Moderate Israelis have lost faith in Arafat as a leader and potential partner in peace. They insist that he must go and that the international community should apply pressure on him to do so. They accept that Arafat may be under effective house arrest in Ramallah for years. If that pessimistic view prevails, it will be damaging from the point of view of trust. There will be more bombs, and the only people to gain will be the extremists.

I have tried to present the bleakest scenarios from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. I want now to turn to the question of whether it is possible to take a more optimistic view. That is not to take an unrealistic view, but to tell the story with a more optimistic sense of the potentialities that may yet be developed. Can we dare to believe that there is a way of going from a lose-lose situation back to a win-win situation? To put it another way: is there a way back to the peace process?

We can take some heart from the recent example of Pakistan. General Musharraf has impressed the Indians and increased his own credibility not just with what he has said as leader, but with what he has done and how he has behaved. Can we learn from that recent experience in trying to de-escalate a conflict and reduce violence, and apply that lesson to the middle east? A second reason to be optimistic is based on the idea that there is widespread consensus, even in Israel, about what the end point of the peace process should look like. Israel must have complete security guaranteed within its borders, and Palestinians must be able to live in peace and dignity within their own state, which will incorporate most of the West Bank and have shared sovereignty over Jerusalem. Most people agree that security for Israel and justice for all the historic peoples of the middle east are the essential building blocks for stability and peace.

One reason why many people, even on the Israeli left, do not trust Arafat is because they believe that he has talked too often about deals and temporary measures rather than fundamental reform. The Israelis do not believe that Arafat can deliver reform, and now is the time for him to show that he can. That will be difficult to do as he is under effective house arrest in Ramallah and does not have the authority and resources needed to carry out effective action. The little authority and resources that he has are under continuous attack. The Israelis and Sharon must understand that the policy of prevention is not working. Since Sharon has been Prime Minister, three times as many Israelis have been killed in terrorist attacks. Sharon talks again and again about making pacts with leading Palestinian families and producing a village league system, but that will never come about because of the strong and indestructible sense of Palestinian national identity.

Sharon must show flexibility. He must release Arafat from house arrest. Arafat must show that he can restrain the suicide bombers and bring about a cessation of violence and a complete disbanding of all terrorist organisations. He will need to go further. We should examine textbooks and the approach to the curriculum in Palestinian schools, and look to revise history books to accept the existence of the state of Israel. We must monitor Palestinian television and media to ensure that suicide bombers are no longer glorified.

It is not easy to put pressure on either Arafat or Sharon and, in current circumstances, we are right to be cautious of doing so because it might have perverse effects. However, we must encourage Arafat and Sharon to realise that the way forward lies in their hands. Pakistan and India further illustrate the point. It is in the interest of both sides to de-escalate the conflict. Only then can we start to find a way back to the Mitchell process and the road to peace.

One of the most positive aspects of the Mitchell plan was that it linked Israeli security with the idea that Arafat needs a political lever to get out of this mess. The lever in Mitchell was to be the lifting of closures and a freeze on settlement building—in other words, an end to taking any more land. The political levers to de-escalate the conflict are not yet in hand, but we must look for them or try to create them.

In the final part of my speech, I wish to comment on the role that Britain, the EU and the international community can and should play in creating the levers to help resolve the present crisis. Difficult though it is to act, the fundamental case for the international community taking action is clear. As I said, we should be cautious about the pressure that we seek to apply, but we should also resist the temptation to stand back completely.

Since the November suicide bombings, the international community has tended to pull back from engagement. We must resist, for that way lies a counsel of despair. It is not easy to know what we should do in such a crisis, but it is far better to act. The key issue is how, not whether, we should get involved. The crisis in the middle east is a threat to international security, not just an issue between Palestinians and Israelis. Other states—such as Jordan, which has 40 per cent. of the refugee population, and Lebanon—may get sucked into the conflict. If there were another terrorist atrocity in the west, the situation could get much worse.

We should recognise that Britain has not just a humanitarian duty, but a strategic interest. If things go wrong, it may damage, perhaps irreparably, the international coalition against terrorism. We also have historic ties through the former exercise of the British mandate and through our role in the treaties that reshaped the middle east at the end of the first world war.

The Prime Minister has been active in the middle east in the autumn through his shuttle diplomacy. Since the latest waves of suicide bombings in November and early December, it has become more difficult to play that role, but it is important not to give the impression that our middle east policy is being blown off course by contradictory winds that seem to blow from Europe, America or indeed the middle east itself. We must show consistency and coherence. How can we expect Palestinians and Israelis to do so if we are not prepared to do the same?

The Israeli Government would like to see Britain play a bigger role in putting pressure on Arafat. As Foreign Minister Peres has said, speaking on Israeli radio on 6 January:

> "We would like a united front, worldwide, that stands against terror. If instead of choosing terror (as the target), we shall choose Arafat, we shall never have a united front."

A common Israeli complaint about the EU is that Europeans fail to understand Israel's need for a cast-iron security response and a security guarantee before it can act. It is not difficult to see why the Americans are left to play the leading role at the present time, and we should support General Zinni in his mission. However, the engagement of Britain and the European Union is essential to producing a balanced response from the international community and the influence of Britain and Europe could be the key to making the optimistic view that I have outlined prevail.

Part of the difficulty is that the EU is simply not seen as having the clout to influence the peace process or a return to it. It can be the financial backer of the Palestinian Authority, but only the US is seen as able to push things through politically. Despite the EU's economic might, it has not generally been thought to have enough political muscle to pull any levers in the region. Nevertheless, the EU has been trying, through the work of External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten and the EU's High Representative Solana, to play a constructive role in retrieving the achievements of the Oslo process and bringing the parties back to the road to peace as outlined in the Mitchell report. It has sought all the time to take a balanced approach.

The Council of Ministers has called on the Palestinian Authority to dismantle Hamas and Jihad and to bring those who commit terrorist acts to justice. It has also called on Israel to withdraw its military forces, end the extra-judicial killings, lift the closures and restrictions on Palestinian people and end the bombing of property and infrastructure. However, its calls, especially to the pro-Palestinian side of the declaration, fall on deaf Israeli ears. There is nevertheless a lot the EU can do and has done in economic terms. In recent months, more than 108 million euros has been given to the Palestinian Authority, in addition to more than 3 billion euros that was invested in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1994. The EU has also recognised the importance of backing the Palestinian Authority as the only structure capable of providing basic services and a minimum of security guarantees, and the only alternative to anarchy and increasing support for Hamas and Jihad.

The EU has done more than anyone else to promote elections, the fight against corruption and the rule of law in the Palestinian territories. It is right, especially at this time of acute crisis, that it should continue to seek to promote moderation and pluralism, trying not to let the

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Palestinian Authority collapse and to fall into the hands of terrorists and extremists. The EU is a strong and benign influence in the area, but it lacks political clout. EU political influence would be greatly strengthened if Britain took more of a lead in shaping EU policy and initiatives in relation to the middle east. It would help to make the EU a player in middle east affairs and not just the organisation that helps to pay.

I want to leave plenty of time for other speakers to take part in the debate. There may be many points that hon. Members wish to make, both about the EU and Britain's role. I hope that they will also wish to make points about the role of international organisations and the international community. We have seen in the past that international observers and the fact-finding missions that were undertaken by the European Union under the Sharm el-Sheikh fact-finding initiative can play a particularly useful role. They can give a clearer, more objective analysis of what is going on in the middle east. Indeed, while they may not put direct pressure on the parties to the negotiation, they can shape the parameters of that negotiation.

The international agreements that have been made are just that: they are not simply agreements between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Not only do we have a stake in the outcome, but we are deeply involved in the process. The international community cannot walk away from that process. There may be calls for greater respect for international conventions by the Israelis as well as the Palestinians. Indeed, there may be calls for international observers to try to de-escalate the violence and to find the road to peace.

I have concentrated on the enhanced role which I believe the EU can play under British leadership, especially given the key role that Britain can play by linking European and American initiatives. I hope that colleagues will comment on the wider international dimension.

Perhaps I might conclude with the words of Henry Siegman, a respected middle east expert and senior research fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations in New York. In December, he wrote in the *International Herald Tribune*:

> "An Israeli strategy of countering terrorism that relies solely on counter-terrorism and greater repression will not produce greater security for Israel's citizens. To the contrary, such a limited strategy will predictably produce only greater loss of Israeli lives. Policies which reinforce the despair of Palestinians by killing their hope for an end to the occupation will inevitably fuel escalating violence."

The Government must push to keep the present crisis in the middle east at the top of the international agenda; the international community must remain engaged. We must think creatively and for the long term about what we in Britain, in Europe and across the world can do to shape the conditions and parameters that will help the Palestinians and Israelis find the road back to peace. Nothing short of that will secure stability, human rights and justice in the region. Thank you, Mr. O'Hara, for allowing me to initiate the debate.

11.26 am

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on securing the debate and allowing us to discuss an issue that most of us have spent all of our political lives trying to deal with. Listening to my hon. Friend trying to be even-handed, I was reminded of my party, which has always alleged that its position is even-handed and balanced. However, we are dealing not with two rights and two wrongs, but only with one right and one wrong. Israel has occupied the West Bank and Gaza since its invasion in 1967. It is breaking international law. Until Israel ends its occupation, there can be no peace; that is as clear as the nose on anyone's face. All the attempts to try to talk around that fact and find some other way forward are nonsense.

Part of the problem has been that successive Governments, including previous Labour Governments, have tried to be balanced. One cannot be balanced with a country that does not accept the application of international law. We could spend hours reviewing and arguing about various events that have taken place since 1967: assaults, terrorist attacks, resistance to occupation, closures, demolition. However, Israel does not accept that it is breaking international law; therein lies the problem.

Unless and until we have an American Administration that will tell the Israelis in blunt terms that they must end their illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, there will be no peace in the middle east. We all know that; it is time that we said it. The events of the past few months have demonstrated that we will not make progress unless we speak honestly in this place.

The Minister for Europe has more experience than most of us in arguing such a case. He comes from South Africa, a country in which grave injustice existed, and he grew up fighting the apartheid movement. If he were released from the chains that bind him, his comments this morning would be much more helpful to the Israelis and the Palestinians. However, the realities of his office mean that he will attempt to be balanced. There is no way that we can have a balanced debate.

The only occasion on which Israel has ever done what the international community recognised as right was when James Baker, the then United States Secretary of State in the Government of President Bush's father, told it in no uncertain terms what it had to do. He made it clear to an American-Israeli committee that there would be no $10,000 million for a housing programme unless the Israelis entered negotiations with the Palestinians, so we had the Madrid negotiations. The Israeli leadership who went to Madrid had no intention of making them successful, but at least they were forced to go by the American Administration's clear determination not to give that money otherwise. That forced the Israelis to accept some form of reality.

We should be trying today to point the way forward. Can there be peace? Yes, but only if Israel accepts the Palestinians as cultural, political and practical equals. The imbalance in the argument is overwhelming: Israel is the fourth or fifth ranked military power in the world. We see F16s used against a civilian population and the demolition that results. We see the Israelis' capacity to break into zone A areas, which were allegedly under the Palestinian Authority's control, with impunity. They used to roll through the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon—UNIFIL—in southern Lebanon with the same excuse.

The Israeli Prime Minister has a history, which we all know. He was in charge of Israeli defence forces when Israel invaded the Lebanon in June 1982, and it is worth reminding people of what happened. In a debate at the United Nations, Israel claimed that the Palestinians were responsible for 150 infractions or activities against Israel, despite the fact that George Shultz, the then American Secretary of State, had an agreement with the Palestinians that there would be no incursions into Israel from Lebanon. Despite the fact that there had been no incursions, Israel invaded Lebanon. What was the purpose of the invasion? As the leopard has not changed his spots, so the purpose was to try to get rid of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Arafat and to leave the Palestinians, who were living under occupation, without a body that could negotiate on their behalf.

That action did not succeed in 1982 and it will not succeed today. Yasser Arafat is the elected leader of the Palestinian people, whether Ariel Sharon or, indeed, we like it or not. To our credit, we have always made it clear that any attack on Arafat would not have our support, but we are not doing enough to sustain his position. Picking up on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon, how can Arafat exercise control over militants in the Palestinian community if he is locked up in Ramallah? Listening to Foreign Office spokesmen, however, we might imagine that he has a magic wand that he can wave. When the security forces that Arafat employs are attacked and the Israeli defence forces indicate that anyone seen in a uniform will be shot, how can he exercise control over the Palestinian people? The whole idea is nonsense.

If there is to be peace, the Israelis must start treating their Palestinian opposites as equals. They need to sit down seriously and allow them to negotiate. Only then will peace be possible. The minimum action required to bring peace is an end to occupation. We need a clear statement from the Israelis, not one about some mythical land for peace that means that they want to retain large parts of the West Bank. We need a real determination to end occupation in its entirety. If the people who live in the settlements now want to stay there, the Palestinians would be happy for them to live there in a Palestinian state, but the Israeli Government must tell the settlers that either they come back to what we all accept and recognise is the state of Israel, or they will have to live in a Palestinian state, with all its implications.

The Israelis will have to stop the settlement building. Even Colin Powell, in his speech in Kentucky on 19 November, recognised that settlement activity has severely undermined Palestinian trust and hope. He said:

> "Israeli settlement activity has severely undermined Palestinian trust and hope. It pre-empts and prejudges the outcomes of negotiations and, in doing so, cripples chances for real peace and security. The United States has long opposed settlement activity. Consistent with the report of the Committee headed by Senator George Mitchell, settlement activity must stop."

Yet it is not stopping; all sorts of reasons are being found for the existing settlements to be expanded. The settlements must end.

As anyone who is honestly trying to tackle the issue knows, the third and most difficult part for the Israelis is to recognise the right of Palestinian refugees to self-determination as laid down in resolution 194, the right to say that they want to return to the place that they came from. Our side has been trying to help the Israelis to understand that recognising the rights of Palestinian refugees is not such a big threat to them.

I recommend the report "Right of Return" that the joint parliamentary middle east Committees sent to all hon. Members. It quotes verbatim the words of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine; they accept that Israel exists and that some of the homes to which they want to return are in the state of Israel. However, the report also makes it clear that the Palestinians understand their rights as refugees; they want to live in peace but they want Israel to recognise their rights. I recommend the publication to colleagues who are members of the Labour Friends of Israel group and to other hon. Members; I ask them to listen to the voices of Palestinians living in the most abject conditions saying that despite many years as refugees, they want to live in peace with their Israeli counterparts. If an Israeli Government were brave enough to accept that, we could look forward to discussions taking place, and a settlement in the middle east peace process, which many of us have worked for for most of our political lives.

11.38 am

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on securing the debate and on his approach to the subject.

I have been to the part of the world that we are discussing several times in the past few years, most recently in October last year, when Israeli tanks were on the streets of Bethlehem, and I saw the devastation of homes and businesses. In Gaza, where olive groves once stood but which is now wasteland, I saw the contrast with the lush green Israeli settlements beyond. My party was mobbed by children in the town of Khan Yunis, where they lived and played in the wreckage of bullet and shell-scarred buildings that were once Palestinian homes. That never fails to shock me; however often I go there, I am not immune to it. It is strange for a politician to say it, but I was lost for words when people there asked me what we were doing to stop what had been happening to them, not for weeks or months, but for decades. When we come back to this country, we come back to the west. We know that it is important, but strangely the debate changes. The human tragedy, the actual effect on real people seems to diminish in importance, and it suddenly becomes a matter of high diplomacy, of what is possible and what is not possible among leaders. Remembering a Palestinian woman who asked, "What are you actually doing about it?" one becomes very humbled.

My hon. Friend is right when he says that, for an agreement to come out of this, both sides need to want it. I am reminded of the comment of the well-known Israeli peace campaigner, Uri Aunery, who was in

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Parliament a few weeks ago and who said that the trouble was that one either has a monologue or a dialogue. A monologue is where one person talks to himself, and a dialogue is where two people talk to themselves. That is a problem that has often blighted this conflict. We must grasp the issue of balance, which my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) mentioned, and he was right to do so. We have not adopted a balanced approach to the crisis. In trying to adopt a position that is conventionally regarded as balanced, the fundamentally unequal situation is not balanced at all. It allows oppression to go on.

In an article in *The Guardian* in October, Polly Toynbee picked up the matter and compared the different treatments of two brutal and appalling assassinations: one by Israeli security forces of Abu Ali Mustafa, the leader of the PFLP, and one of Israeli Cabinet Minister, Ze'evi. Both were extremists, both were uncompromising and both were prepared to use violence. However, one was described as a human tragedy. Ze'evi may have been an extremist, but he had a family. He was a human being. As Polly Toynbee put it, he had a hinterland. When it came to the PFLP leader, however, he was just a political leader. The focus was not on him—no one knew whether he had a family or a wife—but on the political impact.

Stalin once said that one death is a tragedy, but a million deaths is a statistic. That is the problem with that part of the world: people on both sides have been responsible for appalling levels of violence. Let us work out the scale of that. Since the start of the intifada, 911 Palestinians have died. As a proportion of the population of the West Bank and Gaza, that is the equivalent of 16,000 people dying in the United Kingdom, or 75,000 people dying in the United States.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon rightly says that this issue should not be put on the back burner. But are we honestly saying that if 16,000 people died in this country, or 75,000 people in the United States, we would regard it simply as an issue of high diplomacy rather than as something that needed to be tackled urgently? We must be clear about such matters.

It is right that we call for an end to violence, but we need to say clearly to Israel that it cannot call for an end to violence on one side while continuing with an assassination policy—another assassination occurred yesterday. It is unacceptable and it undermines opportunities for peace. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon said, the actions of Sharon, and all too often the actions of groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, are each other's best recruiting sergeants.

Israel has an unconditional right to live in peace within secure borders. However, the international community must insist that Israel cannot demand that unconditional right for itself while assuming that it has discretion over whether anyone else has rights in that part of the world. Just imagine the outcry if a Palestinian group went into Israeli Government buildings in Jerusalem and took Sharon hostage at gunpoint in his office, and then said that they would not allow him to move out of that office unless he arrested those responsible for the assassination of Palestinian leaders. What would the international response be to that? Yet, is it acceptable, or is it not that Israel holds in virtual house arrest President Arafat with tanks at the door of his Ramallah offices?

International law needs to be respected in that part of the world as elsewhere. My hon. Friend is right to say that that means an end to occupation. It also means that, while occupation is in existence, the provisions of the fourth Geneva convention need to be respected. The convention forbids collective punishment of people, yet the demolition of 58 homes in Rafah last week breaches that convention. Article 49 of the fourth Geneva convention prevents an occupying power from transferring parts of its civilian population to occupied territory. The settlements contravene that convention. The UK is a high contracting party to that convention, and in December some high contracting parties met, although the meeting was boycotted by Israel and the United States. It was good that most parties met and that they said that the breaches of the Geneva convention must end. However, non-governmental organisations were disappointed and argued that there is no enforcement mechanism. We must address that urgently.

I would like to address my last point to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe. Israel has preferential trade relations with the European Union, under the EU-Israel Association agreement. It imports into the EU goods, under preference, produced in settlements in the occupied territories: settlements that are illegal under international law. That breaches the EU agreement, as Ministers have acknowledged several times. When Israel has been questioned about those imports, it has not answered fully requests for information from the EU. I have tabled several questions to my right hon. Friend and other Ministers about that agreement. In November, the EU-Israel Association Council met to consider those matters. I know that my right hon. Friend and the EU are concerned about the matter, but what are we doing about it? If Israel is refusing to answer questions fully, what are we doing to monitor what is coming into the EU that may be illegal under the agreement? If it is not possible to monitor that process properly, and it relies on the co-operation of a state that is prepared to breach the agreement in such a flagrant manner, the EU should consider whether the EU-Israel Association agreement can continue. I hope that my right hon. Friend will address that matter when he sums up.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon on securing the debate. The matter is of huge importance to world peace, and to our credibility in large parts of the world. If we want to bring about a just peace, it is time to move on from simply demanding talks and an end to the violence. We must do that, but we must also call a spade a spade. We must consider the essential elements of peace, and apply to the middle east the sort of standards that we apply to many other parts of the world.

11.48 am

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) began the debate by questioning whether there was a way forward. I agree with the last two speakers. We cannot move forward as long as the Israeli Government have a political agenda to destabilise the Palestinian Authority and Yasser Arafat—they have done that by labelling him as a terrorist and refusing to allow him to visit Bethlehem last Christmas.

In the short term, everyone wants an end to violence and a willingness to return to talks, but that will not happen as long as peace moves are accompanied by impossible demands or artificial timetables—for example, saying that talks will not begin until seven days without violence have passed, in the knowledge that assassinations will continue regardless. If we had taken that approach to Northern Ireland and said that we would not enter into any political discussions as long as there was violence from whatever source, we would still not have started negotiations or made political progress.

Something may be gained in the short term from trying to persuade both sides to accept international observers in the occupied territories. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) was right to say that the United Kingdom must be plain about the possible terms for any long-term settlement. Simply saying that we need to return to the terms of the Oslo agreement is not the basis for a long-term agreement. That long-term agreement would have to be on the basis of UN resolutions and international law, and is not just about an end to settlement building.

We are still at the stage of talking about the need to end the expansion of settlements. However, we need to return to the fundamental fact that every settlement in the West Bank and Gaza is illegal. There are only two options: either those settlements go or, as my hon. Friend said, their inhabitants live in a Palestinian state and under the control of that state rather than that of some occupying army that believes that it can walk in at any time and do what it likes.

Anyone who has visited the region, seen the settlements on the hilltops in the West Bank and the water that is being taken, and has contrasted that with what happens in Gaza and the conditions there, knows that peace will not happen while those conditions prevail. There have been suicide bombings, but much of the fighting and many of the killings over the past few months have occurred around those settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. They are the focus of the problem.

The other big issue that must be addressed in the long term is refugees. My hon. Friend and I were involved in the report to which he referred. People have lived in refugee camps in Lebanon and Gaza for years and see no prospect of getting out of those terrible conditions. It is evident that unless something is done to deal with the problem, there will be no lasting peace. We must recognise the imbalance. It is no good saying that we will be even handed in a situation that is not even handed by its nature. Rather than talking simply about what is needed in the short term to get negotiations going again to achieve a ceasefire—we are doing too much of that—we must speak plainly about what is needed in the long term.

11.53 am

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) for securing the debate at a crucial time. The Government must address the injustices that empower those who use political extremism and violence to advance their cause. The Taliban's defeat does not make the world a safer place. The poverty and injustice that fuel terrorism remain. It beggars belief that at a time when the United States, Britain and the west build alliances to counter terrorism, the Israeli Prime Minister has reacted with brutal force against the Palestinian people.

Since the tragic events of 11 September, there have been widespread violations of basic human rights by Israeli security forces against Palestinians. Settlements continue to be developed on disputed land, while tanks have rolled into Gaza and the West Bank. Since 1967, Israel has continued to contravene the United Nations charter and resolutions, but successive US Administrations have ignored it. It is the single biggest obstacle to peace in Palestine, with American policy causing resentment and fuelling terrorist violence and bloodshed.

In the west, we rightly criticise nations with no respect for human rights, but are reluctant to criticise Israel. Last month, young children died in Israeli missile attacks aimed at a Palestinian extremist wanted by Israel. Ariel Sharon has exercised force with no concern for casualties among the wider population. Innocent bystanders are always the victims, whether they are caught in the latest missile attack on the Gaza strip or trapped by a suicide bomber on a bus or in a café. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary assured us that Britain would remain even handed. To achieve that, our Government must not remain blind to the Israeli abuses exposed in recent weeks.

Amnesty International has shown the clear failure to halt torture of Palestinian prisoners, and the United Nations children fund—UNICEF—has expressed concerns about 160 children held in Israeli jails who regularly suffer violence. I fully support the condemnation of the sickening suicide bombers, but it should not be followed by a grudging acceptance of Sharon's actions. Will the Minister assure me that the Prime Minister's goal of recognition for a Palestinian state existing peacefully alongside Israel remains a genuine aspiration for the Government and not one that has been shelved?

Palestinian leaders are vital allies in the struggle against terrorism. By offering no support at this vital time, Britain and the US help only those who seek to marginalise and weaken Arafat. That is not only Sharon and hardliners in his Administration, but the violent extremists among the Palestinians and wider Arab communities. We are fast losing the trust of the Palestinian people, and rebuilding that trust will require swift action and genuine gestures of support. We must tackle injustice in Palestine and elsewhere. It is patently obvious that sanctions on Iraq have not been successful. The Iraqi people have been weakened, but Saddam Hussein has been strengthened. How can sanctions benefit any of us when their impact bolsters a dictator while children suffer and die in poverty? The continuing dispute over Kashmir presents a real threat to peace and stability. It must be addressed by not only India and Pakistan but the wider world. My hon. Friend the

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Member for Wimbledon commented about the leadership of President Musharraf. He is right; President Musharraf has taken a bold step—

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying far beyond the scope of this debate at the moment.

Mr. Sarwar: Thank you, Mr. O'Hara.

We will never win the hearts and minds of the oppressed people in any of those countries without facing up to our responsibilities as a key partner of the United States and a leading nation in Europe. The Western allies let down people in the middle east after the Gulf war, and they must not be let down again. The consequences will be terrible if Britain and our allies in the west fail to engage fully with nations in the region.

Key allies of the US such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia are growing increasingly frustrated at the United States' failure to exert pressure on Israel to implement UN resolutions 242 and 338. Crown Prince Abdullah stated that Saudi Arabia stood at the side of the US around the globe, but recently told President Bush that he had made no effort to rein in Israel. I welcome the Prime Minister's renewed commitment to tackle terrorism and its causes, but urge our Government to redouble their efforts where injustice fuels violent extremism and threatens us all.

11.59 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Like other hon. Members who have spoken, I congratulate the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on securing this debate on a crucial issue at a crucial time. He made a thoughtful contribution and explained the development over time of the many intricacies of the conflict. We have heard passionate contributions from hon. Members who have taken issue with the notion of even-handedness, and have made powerful arguments about the difficulties that have befallen the Palestinian communities in the middle east. I hope that I shall not depart from an even-handed approach as I develop my brief thoughts and set out the Liberal Democrat position on the current crisis.

We have witnessed a cycle of despair, hope and renewed despair over many years with gruelling regularity. Over the weeks, months and years, the cycle has a familiar ring to it. The latest reports have struck a depressing note. The optimism felt before Christmas when Yasser Arafat's clampdown of 16 December was announced has given way in the past couple of weeks to more killings and revenge. It seems a long way from the hopes expressed by the Mitchell commission and the Oslo agreement before it.

On the face of it, the Mitchell commission did not seek very much. It saw the restoration of trust as essential, and wanted an unconditional cessation of violence and the resumption of security co-operation with cooling-off periods and confidence-building measures. Confidence on either side is now at a low ebb. Even-handedness has taken a pasting in the debate, but it is essential. The Government of Israel should recall that it was agreed at the Mitchell commission that all settlement activity, including the natural growth of existing settlements, should be frozen and that the Israelis should stop destroying homes. Equally, the agreement made it clear that terrorism was reprehensible and that the Palestinian Authority should make a 100 per cent. effort to prevent terrorist operations and to punish perpetrators. As we heard this morning, that has not come without difficulties.

The difficulties facing all sides seeking a peaceful solution to the middle east crisis are not insignificant. We heard earlier about how many deaths have accompanied the crisis: more than 600—some say more than 800—Palestinians and nearly 200 Israelis have died. Those are shocking figures, both proportionately and absolutely. The trust mentioned by Mitchell clearly does not exist.

In recent months the international position has exerted an increasing influence. The cloud of 11 September still lingers, and the events of that day have been used by both sides to exploit middle east politics. The tragedy of 11 September was not the cause of conflict in the middle east, but has been used as an excuse and makes the need for a solution all the more pressing.

Concern remains about the spread of the conflict beyond Afghanistan and the middle east, perhaps to countries such as Iraq. As my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, we must make it clear—especially with our Government standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States—that we would disapprove of any extension of the conflict beyond Afghanistan in the absence of incontrovertible evidence, particularly of the consequences for the middle east.

In the sharp focus of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the prospects for peace might seem blurred. However, for all the worries about it, proper dialogue is the only solution. In seeking peace, we should consider the steps set out by Senator Mitchell. Peace should be based on core principles and United Nations resolutions. We must recognise, as must the combatants, that Israel has the right to live in peace in secure, recognised boundaries, free from threats and acts of force, and that the Palestinians are entitled to justice, land and a viable state.

We have heard requests for plain speaking, which is vital with Israel. Israel must freeze settlement building and desist from armed incursions into Palestinian areas. If we are to resolve the murderous disputes, Israel must not continue to undermine Arafat. For its part, the Palestinian Authority must sustain efforts to root out terrorists in its own areas and put its own house in order. The responsibilities for those outside the middle east are enormous, and the international community must not lose sight of that.

In the past, expectations have been raised, only to be dashed. The primacy of international law has been proclaimed in Afghanistan, but has often been ignored in the middle east. After the Gulf war, significant progress was made. After 11 September, it was hoped that more progress would be made, but in recent days that optimism has faded away. Our Government, acting with EU partners and in alliance with the United States, have a responsibility to ensure a return to dialogue and to keep striving for peace.

12.7 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I thank the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) for securing the debate. It reflects well on the House that Members take an interest in a vital region: the greatest of Gordian knots in foreign affairs. I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said.

I come to the debate having worked for 20 years in the oil trade, conducting extensive business in the Arabian Gulf and Pakistan. Members will find a full list of my past connections in the Register of Members' Interests. More recently, I spent the new year in Oman as a guest of the Government, and I discussed the present middle east situation with many prominent Ministers, catching the end of the Gulf Co-operation Council meeting, which was held in Muscat. My background puts me in the unusual position of being a Front-Bench spokesman at severe risk of knowing what he is talking about.

The deterioration in relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority last December turned the eyes of the world once again to a dispute that is the backdrop to all middle eastern affairs. It is a dispute with energies and passions that we would prefer to see channelled into efforts for peace and stability. Millions of Palestinians feel humiliated and stateless; millions of Israelis feel threatened and insecure. We must address that reality and look across the Arabian peninsula to a groundswell of dangerous resentment against regimes unwilling to adapt to the times. In our attitude towards Israel and Palestine, we must beware of taking up entrenched positions that we refuse to revise subsequently. We must find a way of diluting the polarisation of opinion between pro-Israelis and pro-Arabs. In a world where conflict resolution should be a top priority for us all, it is not nonsense to declare that one is pro both when faced with a choice between Israelis and Arabs. If one is pro peace, there is no alternative. Such a view is in no way incompatible with condemning violence by whichever side against innocent civilians.

In December, the Conservative party and President Bush condemned the sickening suicide bombings in Israel. We called on Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority to act swiftly, not only to detain those directly responsible for terrorist acts, but to ensure that all suspects were immediately brought into custody. We did so because such terrorist actions can only put the peace process at risk. The de-escalation of terrorist attacks after Yasser Arafat's call to militants on 16 December shows that he still has influence, which he must be committed to wielding. The Palestinian Authority must accept its responsibilities and show that it will not hide behind a smokescreen of excuses for inaction. Similarly, there can be no progress without security for Israel within clear and internationally recognised borders, an unreserved recognition of the state of Israel's right to exist, and a Palestinian willingness to place the Palestinian right of return to Israel on the agenda for reconsideration and modification. There can be neither progress nor peace without a halt to the suicide attacks and terrorist outrages or a genuine will to make concessions and build trust.

The events of 11 September were tragic, and the horror echoed around the world. However, we may find some good in that day if we learn the lessons. We must strive to persuade those who feel deeply disillusioned and resentful that radical terrorist groups, such as Islamic Jihad or Hezbollah, are not the answer. They are perversions of Islam, not spokesmen for it. We must address perceived Arab grievances and respect Arab opinion. There can be no lasting prosperity and security in the middle east until a compromise is brokered between Israeli and Arab positions, mutual fears are met with confidence-building measures, and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people are met for a viable Palestinian state. Anthony Zinni and Javier Solana are two respected envoys and able negotiators who are on the ground to press the case for peace. A framework is also embodied in former senator George Mitchell's peace plan that has been agreed by all sides.

I want to make the Conservative party's position clear in relation to the proposals. George Mitchell urges Israel and the Palestinians to

> "reaffirm their commitment to existing agreements".

He calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, for Palestinians to crack down on terrorism and for Israel to freeze all new construction of settlements. The plan has a framework for peace and progress. I have already stressed the vital importance of the guaranteed security of Israel, but in recognising the need for a Palestinian state we must make it clear that the process is two-sided.

All too often, Palestinians feel humiliated and stateless. Israel's frequent incursions into Gaza and the West Bank make them feel powerless and vulnerable. The Palestinians are a proud and historic people, and there can be no long-term peace until that wrong is put right. Self-determination was mentioned earlier, and is often touted as the answer to easing concerns. However, without a clear definition of what a viable Palestinian state would entail, self-determination risks becoming meaningless.

The hope that was evident on 16 October, when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said that he would agree to an independent Palestinian state if Israel's security was guaranteed, has faded. I have no intention of apportioning blame, as that would serve no purpose. Instead, I look forward with hope that such proposals will resurface and that steps will be taken to define such a state. A viable state is one that is sufficiently large to meet the needs of its people, with a guarantee of sufficient resources from its neighbours, if not from within its own borders. Thus, Israel would have to make a commitment to maintain water and power supplies. It also means a state with maritime access, which, in this case, can only be through Gaza. The issue requires careful thought. Similar proposals were proffered at Camp David, and I hope that they are still in the minds of all parties.

However, a debate cannot begin until a full ceasefire is in place. Only that would provide the minimum level of trust needed for a peace process to recommence. The Palestinian Authority cannot renege on its responsibility to rein in terrorists who choose not to recognise Israel's right to exist and who choose not to allow Israel the security from neighbouring states that it has a right to expect.

I commented earlier on the potential instability of the Arabian Gulf. We should remember that the term "middle east" includes the Gulf. The states are all geopolitically linked, and instability in one part

[Mr. Alan Duncan]

destabilises the entire region. The backdrop of Arab-Israeli conflict is fundamental to political opinion in all the states. Regimes across the Arabian peninsula find that their capacity and readiness to change is outpaced by the relentless change in the wider world, which is sowing seeds of perilous instability within their borders. Some are attempting to change, but the process is painful and slow.

Iran is undergoing a transition, but it risks being messily derailed if the United States and the west misinterpret its progress and provoke a retrograde turn of events. We must be critical when necessary and continue to press for human rights, but we must also welcome attempts at modernisation and progress that could lead to Iran's becoming a stable and unthreatening neighbour in the region.

By comparison, Iraq is led by a tyrant who, in addition to subjugating his own people, seems determined to threaten others. We must not flinch from tackling terrorism wherever it exists, but we must be wary of provoking instability and the possible disintegration of Iraq in a post-Saddam Hussein era. We must always be mindful of the strategic balance in the Gulf between a weakened Iraq and a resurgent Iran.

My experience of the Gulf Co-operation Council reveals a growing sense of the need for economic unity and freer markets to access the political and economic benefits of prosperity in the Gulf countries. Economic stability is vital to political stability in the region, and the uneven distribution of economic reward must be addressed, especially for a growing younger generation.

We must recognise Israel's right to exist; we must detail its recognised borders and guarantee its security. For the Palestinians, we must have a proper debate about what would constitute a viable Palestinian state and accept its right to exist. Only when deep-rooted grievances are tackled will the stability that is so vital to every country return to the middle east. It is up to our Government, as much as any other, to do everything that they can to further the process.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): The Minister will reply to this important debate.

12.19 pm

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I very much welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). It is the first time that I have had the pleasure of agreeing with everything that an Opposition spokesman says. Along with my colleagues, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) for initiating the debate. Sadly, we have all seen the cycle of violence and bloodshed in the middle east during the past 16 months, and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) spoke eloquently about its tragic consequences. There have been far too many funerals, broken families and shattered lives. Unfortunately, both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have contributed to the crisis, and both have the responsibility to take steps to end the violence and resume political negotiations towards a permanent settlement. We, our European Union partners, the United States and the United Nations are trying to help them take the steps towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, not least because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon rightly said, the crisis represents a threat to international security.

We are encouraged by the engagement of the US in recent weeks. We support the vision of a two-state solution that was detailed by President Bush and developed further by US Secretary of State Colin Powell on 19 November. We welcome the strenuous diplomacy of US envoy General Anthony Zinni with both parties. His recent mission from 3 to 6 January opened up the opportunity for progress and raised some cautious optimism among those who have been closely involved. We have urged the US to continue its efforts. The Foreign Secretary and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), are urging the parties to do everything possible to prepare for the next stage, which is the implementation of the security plan proposed by CIA director George Tenet, as agreed by both parties. The Foreign Secretary has been in almost constant touch, by telephone and in person, with other Foreign Ministers throughout the world during the past few weeks, including during the Christmas and new year break.

We were concerned by the evidence that Palestinian officials were involved in the smuggling of weapons on the boat, the Karine A. However, it is important that the parties do not allow that affair to deflect them from consolidating the progress of recent weeks. We were concerned also by the recent attack by Hamas on Israeli soldiers on the edge of the Gaza Strip, although it is vital that that act does not lead to the renewal of the cycle of violence that we have seen hold the region in its bloody grip for most of the past 16 months.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): While I accept that we cannot use the activities of Hamas as a reason to retrace our steps, will my right hon. Friend restate our Government's position that the Palestinian Authority should be doing more to clamp down, arrest and detain the extremists who are causing so much terror in the region?

Peter Hain: Yes. I will come to that point in a minute, but I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention.

Israel is entitled to ensure its own security, and Israelis must be able to live their lives without fear. However, Israel's actions must be proportionate to the threat. We urge it to act with restraint and look beyond the desire for revenge to a vision of a region at peace, which can be achieved only through negotiations. We urge Israel to resume such negotiations soon, and—this is the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy)—the Palestinian Authority should at the same time deliver on its promise to end the violence and create the conditions for peace.

I realise that that is difficult. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) spoke about the problems faced by the Palestinian Authority, and he has selflessly promoted justice for the Palestinians over the decades. However, the Palestinian Authority must make a 100 per cent. effort to prevent further instances of violence. It must degrade the terrorist infrastructures of

Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, properly detain suspected terrorists and remove the threat that they pose to the stability of the region. Terrorism is unacceptable and must be rooted out. As the Prime Minister said, our efforts to counter terrorism worldwide must be accompanied by parallel and sustained efforts to reinvigorate the search for peace in the middle east.

There is a recognised route back to the negotiating table, which we and our European Union partners support. Despite all the setbacks of the past eight months since the publication of the Mitchell committee report, it remains the best and, indeed, only option. Both parties have accepted the recommendations of the Tenet security plan and Mitchell committee report, and they should be implemented without delay. Ultimately, peace between Israel and the Palestinians will come only through a political process on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and the principle of land for peace. That would deliver security for Israel within recognised borders, end the occupation and allow the emergence of a viable, democratic and peaceful Palestinian state.

I am happy to give the assurance requested by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar): the British Government remain unequivocally committed to an independent and viable Palestinian state, on which the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) argued.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, we are fully engaged with the United States and our European Union partners in diplomatic efforts to move the peace process forward. The Prime Minister's special envoy, Lord Levy, has been involved in tireless diplomacy. He visited the region in December, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is there now.

European efforts are energetically led by Mr. Solana, the EU High Representative, who followed the Zinni mission with his own visit to the region between 6 and 9 January. He works within the framework of the Laeken European Council declaration, which reaffirms the package approach. It calls on the Palestinians to deliver on their commitments to end the violence and make arrests, and on Israel to cease actions such as the attacks on Palestinian infrastructure, which undermine the Palestinian Authority's ability to deliver.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) called for international observers, and we, the US and our EU partners believe that third-party monitors could help to overcome obstacles to the implementation of the Mitchell committee recommendations. For monitors to be successful, both parties would have to agree to their presence, and we hope that they will do so.

We are under no illusion about the enormously difficult issues that need to be resolved in negotiations. I re-emphasise that we have repeatedly called for a freeze on Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories, including natural growth, under the terms of the Mitchell report. As my hon. Friend said, the settlements are illegal under international law and a real obstacle to peace. We also oppose Israeli closures in the occupied territories, which cause severe economic hardship and unemployment, in turn fuelling hatred and violence and making a comprehensive settlement much more difficult to achieve.

It has been suggested that we should have suspended the EU-Israel Association agreement because of concerns on rules of origin and human rights. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield asked what we were doing. We have repeatedly raised our concerns with the Israeli Government on political, legal and humanitarian grounds. We did so again with our EU partners at the EU-Israel Association council on 20 November in Brussels. There is evidence that goods from settlements are imported as of Israeli origin. With our EU partners and Israel, we have been working for a speedy and comprehensive solution to that issue in a way that is compatible with European Community law.

We have called on Israel to end its policy of incursions and declare an end to its practice of assassinations, which are illegal under international law and promote tension on the ground. I am sure that we all agree that that is not in Israel's long-term interests. Under the terms of the Tenet plan, Israel is required to end proactive security operations in the Palestinian Authority, and we hope that it will do so.

My hon. Friends have raised a number of issues that divide the two parties and that will need to be resolved in the final status negotiations, leading to a settlement that allows the emergence of a viable Palestinian state and that provides security for Israel. As I have said, two states existing peacefully alongside each other are the two pillars of any solution. The issues still to be resolved are many and include the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for refugees, and borders and natural resources.

This has been a sombre and serious debate, befitting the deadly seriousness of the issues. When I listen to or participate in such debates, I think that in our domestic politics we use words such as "emergency" or "crisis" rather too easily, compared with the awful difficulties encountered by people trying to resolve the problems of violence in the middle east. The Palestinian and Israeli people have suffered from violence and fear for far too long. Sooner or later they must return to the negotiating table, as the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) said. That is the only means of creating peace in the region and ending the terrible violence that blights lives and guarantees that generation after generation will grow up with a sense and feeling of hatred.

Landfill

12.30 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I am glad to be able to hold this debate in Westminster Hall. I have applied for it many times. My purpose is to ensure the preservation of a tax credit scheme that has been responsible for improving the lives of people in my constituency in south Oxfordshire in all sorts of unexpected and unsuspected ways and has acted with great sensitivity to local needs and interests. I see that the Annunciator says that Mr. Alan Johnson is speaking. I take no offence. For the purposes of this debate, Mr. Winterton, I am Alan Johnson. You may call me Alan, if you so choose. *[Interruption.]* Oh, there I am now.

The wonderful landfill tax credit scheme dates back to 1996 and those halcyon days when the Conservatives were in power. They set up the scheme, which works broadly as follows: people dumping huge quantities of waste in holes in the ground in Oxfordshire pay £12 per tonne of waste dumped, rising to £15 per tonne in 2004 for what is called putrescible or household waste. The dumper can recover 20 per cent. of that money if it is spent on various worthy environmental projects. There has been a wide interpretation of the schemes that may be so funded.

The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment has been able to scatter plenty o'er a smiling land. Lychgates have been repaired; a Norman church in Crowmarsh Gifford has had its roof fixed; two magnificent play parks have been constructed in Berinsfield; a bridge has been built at an accident black spot; disabled access has been supplied at Sonning Common village hall and at several other village halls. Sometimes the sums involved can be considerable, such as the £50,000 that went to the fabled watercress beds at Ewelme; sometimes it is just a few hundred pounds. In all, TOE has spent £1.2 million in south Oxfordshire on more than 100 projects during the past four years.

It is a testimony to the popularity of the scheme in my constituency and in Oxfordshire generally, and the value that local people attach to it, that my constituents have been alarmed to hear that it might be under threat. I have received a great many letters asking whether TOE can continue to scatter its plenty. That is the question that I should like the Minister to answer.

The Government, I am told, would like 65 per cent. of this money to go towards recycling projects. There is great merit in that. We in Britain have a poor record on recycling. We lag far behind our European friends and partners. We tend to dump far more into tips and holes than them, and some of the statistics are terrifying. Whatever hon. Members may think of the newspapers, which I sometimes write for, they may not know that it takes 50 years for a newspaper to rot away in a landfill site. It takes 500 years for a disposable nappy to disintegrate completely. That statistic is particularly bloodcurdling, when one considers that 4 per cent. of household waste is nappies.

We all support the proposition that the country should recycle much more than it does, but we cannot meet our obligations under the EU landfill directive by plundering the landfill tax credit scheme. Ernst & Young calculates that we would need £7 billion of capital infrastructure investment in new, sophisticated incinerators to cope with the national waste strategies. The landfill tax credit scheme was worth only £109 million last year. There is no reason why 65 per cent. of the scheme's money should not go towards waste management and recycling, given that the total income of the scheme is likely to increase with the increase in the amount of money taken in landfill tax.

I have spoken briefly, but I hope that others will want to speak on this important subject. I hope that the lychgates and water meadows of my Oxfordshire constituency and others will not be sacrificed for the sake of compliance with some European directive—not that I have anything against its being European; perhaps I should refer rather to some bureaucratic desire to comply with the terms of a recycling measure.

The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment has done a good job, as representations from all over my constituency confirm. It would be a great shame if its functions were taken over and subsumed by local authorities; I fear that in that case the money would not be truly additional and that schemes that benefit local people and greatly please many of my constituents would cease to be funded as they have been in the past.

My message to the Minister is, "Do not get rid of the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment." In other words, "Don't step on TOE," if I may feebly go for a soundbite.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) I inform hon. Members that the ownership of the debate lies with the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson). Ownership is normally exchanged between the hon. Member who secured the debate and the Minister. It is the custom of the House that if other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate they clear it with the hon. Member concerned, with the Minister and with the occupant of the Chair. I shall call the hon. Member for Huddersfield because he has done so.

I may use my discretion to call the other hon. Gentlemen who are seeking to catch my eye, but it is important that the Minister should have adequate time to reply. He will let me know in the next moment or two how long he would like to reply, and whether he is happy for hon. Members who have not cleared it with him to participate in the debate.

12.37 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Thank you, Mr. Winterton. I congratulate the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on securing such an interesting debate and I thank him and the Minister for giving me permission to contribute to it.

I declare an interest. I chair an organisation called Urban Minds, which is one of the largest not-for-profit environmental groups in the United Kingdom. We carry out larger projects than those concerned with church roofs, lychgates and the other excellent work that is done with some of the money from the landfill tax credit scheme. We received £500,000 from the scheme for an innovative investigation into how brownfield land can be reused for other purposes. An expert team spent two years finding out how to reclassify brownfield land for reuse, which is an important step in helping the Government and others who want that land to be brought back into use.

Urban Minds also creates new, profit-making businesses in the private sector that use waste as a raw material. Instead of regarding waste as rubbish, Urban Minds sees it as a new raw material that flows from our towns and cities, which should be used as a raw material, rather than digging holes in the earth's crust and using virgin material.

In terms of the history, I have been around from the very beginning. I saw what they called the Brown-Gummer plot, which was used to introduce this taxation. It was a break with the tradition of great hostility in the Treasury to hypothecating taxation. It was innovative, new, creative and very exciting. I agree with the hon. Member for Henley that it would be a great shame if it came to an end. It would in fact be the end of a bold and innovative experiment.

The tax has had enormous positive effects; for example, many community organisations have done wonderful things to enhance the beauty of the environment. As a result of the tax, many new wetland areas for wildfowl and birds have been established, as well as some high-class research and development partnerships with universities. The tax, and the way in which it is distributed, have resulted in people building partnerships. Universities, local authorities, the private sector, and community groups have done so many creative, small and very bold things.

The tax is not only innovative; it is tough. As with all innovative and new things, mistakes have been made and there have been problems. Some landfill operators and landfill tax credit distributors have done the wrong thing—there is no doubt about that. That is true of all legislation and regulation, however. We can learn from those mistakes. I certainly see a strong case for modifying the present administration system—improving it, but not abolishing it.

If we are going to meet the strict EU targets and the Government's statutory targets on local authorities, this tax has to be used wisely and well. It has to be used to help local authorities to meet those targets. I have no objection to having 60 or 65 per cent. targets for recycling—that is good—but I urge the Minister not to put his faith in local authorities. They are notoriously poor at delivering in these innovative areas. Many of the groups that I am talking about today have been at the cutting edge of the innovative work that local authorities have dragged behind in.

We know of the Minister's reputation for being innovative, but we want this tax to be built on. If 20 per cent. of the landfill tax is good enough to be put into environmental purposes, why not have another 20 per cent. go to local authorities, another 20 to research and development for universities and other research institutes, and another 20 to starting up environmental businesses? That would be a bold way of saying that this is a radical Administration and that it is more radical than its predecessor. I believe that that is the way the Government should go.

The crucial point about the landfill tax credit scheme is that if £10,000 is given to my organisation—or any organisation—it becomes £100,000 through landfill tax credit; it is a wonderful accumulator. If one can then get a European resource, the amount can be doubled to £200,000. Through the landfill tax credit, some people can make that original £10,000 into £400,000 or £750,000. That is the accumulator working for the environment.

If the funds available from the scheme become Government money, they cannot be used for such funding. I ask the Minister to think carefully before he makes changes. I ask him to realise that the universal demand from environmentalists, from the waste management companies, and from everyone else, is that he must face the real fact that landfill tax is half of what it should be. It should be boldly and rapidly put up to a decent level that is comparable to that charged by our European neighbours.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I will call all three of the hon. Members who are seeking to catch my eye. They must limit themselves to two minutes.

12.43 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Thank you, Mr. Winterton. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on securing the debate.

I support the landfill tax credit scheme, which has been a great success in my constituency. It has supported the Wychwood way, which is a walk around Wychwood forest, the Rollright stones and countless woodland and other projects. I have been inundated with letters asking me to lobby the Minister, which I have done on countless occasions through letters, to keep the scheme. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Henley, I support recycling, not least because I live next to a tip, around which I want to reduce the traffic.

I agree with the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment in that, although I accept that 65 per cent. of funding should be directed to projects that deliver sustainable waste management, I am anxious to see the remaining 35 per cent. remain as a source of funding for good-quality projects that improve the local environment and address wider sustainability issues.

I caution the Minister against replacing the landfill tax credit scheme with, as some have suggested, a public spending scheme. The beauty of the scheme is that it is multi-point to multi-point, which means that lots of people are handing out money and lots of people are applying for it. If it became a public spending scheme, it would become one body and one person's decision, and we would lose, to mix my metaphors, the thousand points of light, which would be a mistake. Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Henley on raising the matter, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

12.46 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Thank you, Mr. Winterton. I agree with everything that has been said so far.

The landfill tax credit scheme is excellent, and it should be simplified, not scrapped. The Government should consider two issues. First, they should entrust the

[Tony Baldry]

scheme's regulator with the task of ensuring that sufficient funds are allocated to waste management. If the scheme were abolished, the cost of financing projects by other means would be too high for most volunteers.

Secondly, the Government should consider whether their aspiration to divert 65 per cent. of resources to waste management will ultimately remain an aspiration. As the Environmental Services Association has observed, the landfill tax credit scheme makes a positive contribution, but it will never be large enough to pay for the £7 billion of new infrastructure needed to deliver compliance with the national waste strategy, or to bring the £1.5 billion annually spent on British municipal waste management services up to the £3 billion spent in France, an EU member state with an economy and population similar to the UK's.

I strongly suggest that a new scheme—I echo the remarks made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman)—is needed to aspire to waste management, but we should keep the current landfill tax credit scheme so that other environmental initiatives can be encouraged in the community. As we have heard from my hon. Friends, many valuable environmental schemes will disappear if the landfill tax credit scheme is scrapped.

12.47 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Thank you, Mr. Winterton. I shall be extremely brief because I want to allow the Minister time to respond.

The first priority must always be not creating waste in the first place. The second must be to recycle the waste that is created. The last thing that one wants to do with rubbish—I say this as the Member of Parliament for Mid-Bedfordshire, where there are many holes in the ground that are filled with lots of rubbish, including London's rubbish—is to dump it in a hole in the ground or to burn it. The priority for any environmental scheme must be not to create waste in the first place and to recycle what is produced. Historically, we have a poor record on recycling. Much more of the money that is collected by the landfill tax credit scheme should go on recycling because that would be better both for my constituency and for the country as a whole.

12.48 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): I congratulate the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on an excellent and well-subscribed debate. He gave us a tour de force in which he shared the delights of watercress beds and church halls in his constituency. He also shared with us the startling fact that it takes 50 years for a newspaper to become biodegradable, while it takes 500 years for a baby's nappy to achieve the same state. That begs the question how long it would take for a newspaper graced by a column from the hon. Gentleman to biodegrade? Would it be 75 years, 100, 450 or maybe even 10? Nevertheless, he has shared with us real knowledge of and sympathy for the organisations that benefit from the landfill tax credit scheme, as have the hon. Members for Witney (Mr. Cameron), for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) and for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) and my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who has a long-standing knowledge of this subject, and whose contributions to debates and Question Times in the House are eagerly looked forward to by myself and my colleagues.

We need to recognise the importance of this scheme to local communities. It dates back, as was said, to 1996. It represents the outcome and the product of a tax that forms a key part of this Government's strategy to reduce the environmental costs of landfill and encourage waste producers to consider more environmentally friendly alternatives such as minimalisation, reuse and recycling. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire is right to stress the primary importance of the first of those. We all share a belief that reuse and recycling have an important role to play.

One consequence of the arrangements put in place for the landfill tax credit scheme is that the contributions count as tax forgone, so they do not count towards public sector spending. The scheme can therefore support projects that improve local communities around landfill sites, reclaim contaminated land or support research and education into more sustainable waste management.

The path down which my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield urges the Government—to use 80 per cent. of the tax for environmental schemes—is a radical solution. I shall count it as his contribution to the consultation. He will understand, as will other hon. Members, why I do not intend during this debate to pre-empt the outcome of that consultation. However, I assure all hon. Members, especially the hon. Member for Henley, who put his case passionately, that we do not come to the consultation process with any foregone conclusions. We want to see more environmental bodies supporting more recycling projects. We are looking at ways of improving the performance of the scheme by encouraging contributors to target their funding at more strategic actions.

We are anxious that more of the available money should go into sustainable waste management. Last year we set an indicative target of 65 per cent. of landfill tax credits to be allocated to sustainable waste management projects, with at least a third of those to be allocated to recycling projects. Initial indications are that the industry has made significant progress towards meeting that target, which is warmly to be welcomed.

The scheme has much to commend it. It has raised some £450 million for spending on the environment, which represents a large amount of landfill tax forgone—over £100 million last year. The amount forgone is likely to grow in the coming year, as we are committed to increasing the rate of landfill tax. Therefore, it is right and proper that we should look closely at the way in which the funds are put to use. In the 2001 Budget we announced our intention to replace all or part of the scheme with a public spending programme directing resources towards Government priorities on sustainable waste management. That is a priority. We are seeking to consult widely on how best to achieve it.

The scheme has been successful at directing money to local community improvement projects. A number of them have been described—new church roofs, revamping of parish halls, nature reserves, playgrounds and other local amenities. The recipients of the funding are often small local bodies that may have difficulty in accessing other forms of funding. I take to heart the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield about the innovative approach embraced by the local schemes. They add value that would not necessarily be there if local authorities alone were the providers. That is an important point to bear in mind.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the Minister deal with the position of ENTRUST? As he knows, that organisation runs a scheme involving some 11,000 projects with only 26 staff. Does he think that such a large scheme can be managed with so few staff?

Mr. Boateng: I have met people at ENTRUST and shall do so again. I am satisfied that they are up to the job and delivering a quality service.

There are some positive signs that the waste management industry is responding to the Government's challenge to divert more contributions into sustainable waste management projects, and we welcome that. However, there are areas for improvement. The Exchequer forgoes a large amount of revenue each year. It is important that a national strategy for waste management should receive some benefit from the operation of the scheme. We have adjusted the categories of project that may be funded under the scheme. Devolving control over the funds from the tax credit means that judgments about value for money remain in the hands of contributors. That is not a problem for small schemes delivering local benefits, but it can be a problem in terms of delivering the wider strategic vision that has to be in place to develop sustainable waste management.

There are other matters that it would be wrong for hon. Members to neglect. Various Committees of the House have expressed concerns about transparency. Arrangements for funding projects can become extremely complex. Relationships between contributing site operators, environmental bodies, local authorities, any other third party contributors and those who ultimately benefit from the project can be very close. That can be for the good, but it creates issues of transparency that must be addressed. I am satisfied that ENTRUST and others recognise the importance of so doing.

We want to make sure that the network of relationships produces the right outcome. Sometimes it does so in a rather convoluted way that requires close and effective regulation, for which ENTRUST is responsible. The goal of delivering a better environment is one that we share with the communities that are most intimately affected by landfill and other means of disposal. I well recall, as will you, Mr. Winterton, the contribution that was made to our consideration of these matters under a Conservative Administration, long before it became fashionable, by the former Member for Hornsey and Wood Green, Sir Hugh Rossi, who chaired the Select Committee on the Environment. I remember visiting some of the sites in mid-Bedfordshire at that time, when we learned a lesson about the importance of making sure that we better protect the environment and, within that, the importance of better regulation and of enabling and empowering local communities to deal with the concerns that most affect them.

The hon. Member for Henley made an important point in describing the strength of feeling among the environmental trusts that serve his constituency and those of several other hon. Members in the Chamber. The great benefit of those trusts is that they are locally based and represent local opinion. The great benefit of schemes and projects such as those described by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield is that they are directly accountable to those who are living with the problem, and provide a framework and context for innovative and imaginative approaches to tackling local needs. That is something that any new scheme must reflect.

This is an open and genuine consultation and I believe that today's debate, although short, has helped to further it. All the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield and other hon. Members will be taken into account in the course of that consultation, in order that we may better protect the environment at the end of it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): We all thank the Minister for his reply.

NHS Dentistry (Rossendale Valley)

1 pm

Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): It gives me great pleasure that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), is to respond to the debate. She knows Rossendale only too well. Some years ago, she had the good fortune—some may say the misfortune—to work at the town hall there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) would have been here, but he is engaged in important Select Committee business this morning. He very much wishes to be associated with the debate because the town of Haslingden, in the borough of Rossendale and very much part of the Rossendale valley, falls within his parliamentary constituency.

The lack of national health service dentists in Rossendale has been a growing problem in recent months. It is not confined to Rossendale. A recent survey of 91 health authorities in England and Wales claimed that only half of all adults are registered with an NHS dentist. The situation in Rossendale is especially acute and now demands urgent attention and special treatment. It has been raised with me by several of my constituents, of whom I mention one or two.

Mrs. Sheila Charleson of Loveclough wrote to me recently about her family's experience. She said:

> "Today I have spent over an hour on the telephone trying to acquire a dental appointment for my son with an NHS dentist. This task has proved impossible despite the fact that the whole family, including previous generations have worked all their lives and paid tax and national insurance contributions! The family were all previously patients of Wood and Duffy at Waterfoot but they now only see private patients and my son cannot afford to pay for private treatment nor indeed afford the insurance premiums required to offset some of the dental expenses.
>
> It would appear that within the whole of Rossendale there is not one dental practice taking on NHS patients, a situation I find deplorable and totally unacceptable. I have been informed that the nearest dentist with an NHS list is in Accrington and his list is apparently closed until at least January 2002!
>
> After much frustration and hard work I managed to secure him an appointment at Waterfoot for emergency treatment next Monday 19th November but this will only be for his immediate pain problem and further check-ups and treatment will have to be done elsewhere (where that might be seems to be anyone's guess!)
>
> Something needs to be done immediately about this unacceptable state of affairs as I am sure my son is not the only person faced with this disregard for the health and welfare of the hard working citizens of East Lancashire."

Another constituent whom I would particularly like to mention is David Walsh of Newchurch, whose experience was very sad indeed. He wrote:

> "Dear Janet,
>
> On Boxing Day I had to walk from my home here in Newchurch...to the nearest NHS Walk In Centre outside the Rochdale Royal Infirmary. I had a huge tooth abscess. I set off at 7.10 in the morning on foot and I got to the Rochdale Infirmary (the NHS Walk In Centre is just opposite the Accident and Emergency) at 9.50! The dentist was amazed that I'd walked so far to get his help...p.s. I had to walk to Rochdale on Boxing Day because there was no public transport and I cannot drive or ride a bike."

What are the reasons for that situation? They were recently clearly outlined to me by Dr. J. G. Whittle, the consultant in dental public health at the East Lancashire health authority. He told me:

> "The underlying problem with NHS dentistry in East Lancashire is the shortage of dentists willing to come and work in this part of the world. The problem has been compounded by the reduction of dentists in training since the 1980s. The introduction of vocational training in the 1990s means that the first job for many dental graduates is close to the university where they train and this gives the practices involved in that training an advantage in obtaining new dentists.
>
> It is true that the number of registered dentists has grown considerably in recent years. However, this is mainly because of dentists from overseas coming to work in Britain. This has not helped East Lancashire because these dentists want to work in the major metropolitan centres which they hear about at home. East Lancashire Health Authority has advertised for dentists in Europe but with no success for this reason.
>
> For these reasons our practices have been unable to attract new dentists to the area and their present dentists have been struggling to cope with large lists of NHS patients. Last year the three large practices (in Haslingden, Rawtenstall and Waterfoot), all owned by the same partners, decided that the only way to reduce their workloads was to privatise. The knock-on effect of this has been to overwhelm the other six practices to the point where they are unable to take on any new NHS patients.
>
> When we submitted our expression of interest in providing a Personal Dental Services (PDS) pilot for Rossendale in 2001 we requested a dentist for five sessions a week. A few months later when we came to writing the full proposal we increased this to 10 sessions. The PDS we have set up at Haslingden and Waterfoot now provides 11 sessions.
>
> However"—

this is perhaps the most disturbing point—

> "recent figures from the Dental Practice Board, show that during the quarter ending 30 September 2001, the number of patients (adults and children) registered with East Lancashire dentists fell by 15,358 from 241,873 to 226,515."

I was astonished to learn that

> "ninety per cent. of that fall was accounted for in Rossendale where the number of registered patients fell by 13,765 over the three months. At the same time the Emergency Dental Service which was set up to provide care for up to 20 patients a session in the evenings and at weekends is regularly having to cope with 40 patients and more.
>
> We have therefore worked with Rossendale PCG and the Burnley Trust to develop proposals for a much larger PDS pilot in Rossendale. We have identified vacant accommodation at both Rawtenstall Health Centre and at Rossendale Hospital. Refurbishment of either would create a unit containing four dental surgeries. Subject to recruitment of dentists this unit could provide up to 40 additional sessions of dental treatment each week. Our first estimates of the costs of such a service are set up funding of approximately £259,000 and recurrent expenditure of about £442,000 per annum.
>
> Experience of setting up a PDS in Rossendale has shown that there are some, but not many, dentists who would prefer to work in such a system rather than the general dental service. Therefore, even if we got the funding, it might take some time until it was fully staffed."

Dr. Whittle ends with these thoughts, which I commend to the Minister, on how the Government could help to improve access to dental services in east Lancashire. They could

> "introduce fluoridation of the public water supplies in the area. This would reduce dental decay by up to 50 per cent. and reduce the demands on dental services."

They could also

> "increase the provision of salaried dental services in Rossendale by supporting the PDS proposal described above",

and

> "train dental graduates in Lancashire. The Cumbria and Lancashire Strategic Health Authority Area will be the only one in the North of England without a dental school."

Lastly, and perhaps most important, the Government could

"direct dentists to under-dentisted areas for their vocational training."

So, in the Rossendale valley at the end of September last year, nearly 14,000 fewer of my constituents were registered with an NHS dentist than were registered three months earlier. That is a staggering statistic, and the situation is likely to be even worse now. As health watchdogs have warned, serious health problems can arise if people stop seeing a dentist altogether. Problems such as cancer of the mouth may not be detected before it is too late.

I hope, therefore, that the Minister can offer some comfort to my constituents by acknowledging that the Government understand the serious situation now facing us in the Rossendale valley and will take urgent steps to put matters right.

1.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson) on raising this extremely important issue. I have no doubt that her constituents will be pleased that she has raised them in such detail. She has also pointed the way forward with some practical suggestions about action that the Government can take, with local health organisations, to ensure that the problem is eased for her constituents. As she rightly says, I know the Rossendale area quite well. It is a beautiful area that has a lot going for it, but I recognise that her constituents have particular health problems and need a good service.

The whole of east Lancashire has had long-standing problems in gaining access to NHS dentistry. Throughout the 1990s, not just in east Lancashire but in many parts of the country, the NHS dentistry system went through a great deal of strain, with many dentists deciding to opt for private practice instead of concentrating on work in the NHS, as many of them had done previously. That was partly due to some dramatic changes in the remuneration system for dentists and the contractual situation, which meant that working in NHS dentistry became a much less attractive proposition for many dentists. Since the Government were elected, we have tried to take practical steps to draw dentistry back into the NHS, by looking at remuneration and extra incentives for dentists who do a greater proportion of their work in the health service and by training young dentists and involving them in communities across the country.

We must recognise that dentists are independent contractors and can therefore choose whether to practise in the private sector or in the national health service. This may be one area where the Government have fewer levers to direct what happens and must therefore be more imaginative in creating a climate in which dentists want to be part of the national health service. That is a challenge that I face and am enjoying trying to meet.

In September 1996, the Government cut the maximum period allowed between visits so that patients could retain their registration with an NHS dentist. Originally, the period was 24 months between visits. It went down to 15 months and, as a result, hundreds of thousands of people were removed from the registers of their NHS dentists. We saw a dramatic fall in the number of people registered and thus the number of people who can get on-going care rather than the emergency care to which my hon. Friend referred. In 1993, 21.6 million adults were registered in this country. That had fallen to 16.8 million in 1999—a dramatic reduction. My hon. Friend is right that in east Lancashire now, and particularly in Rossendale, a worryingly low number of dentists are prepared to take on new NHS patients.

The health authority runs an emergency access service, which is open every night of the week, so that patients can get emergency care. I understand that it is in Accrington, about six or seven miles from Rossendale. At present, 30 to 40 patients a night seek access to that service, so it is clear that the demand exists in the community for dentistry services.

In trying to address those issues, the Government published "Modernising NHS Dentistry–Implementing the NHS Plan", which is part of the overall NHS plan. That document commits us over the next few years to ensuring that everybody can have access to an NHS dentist and to raising the level of oral health, particularly in children, to reducing the massive inequalities in oral health between different communities, and to improving the quality of service offered by NHS dentists. In addition to the plan, the Prime Minister pledged in 1999 that by the end of September 2001, although [illegible] everyone would necessarily be registered on a [illegible]-term basis, they would at least be able to find a dentist, which they had not been able to do before, by phoning NHS Direct. That system is working in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen and people are being signposted by NHS Direct to dentists who are taking on new patients. However, people often have to travel some distance from their homes for that access.

During the past 18 months, £100 million has been spent on introducing the strategy to increase NHS dentistry. We have tried to be innovative about the way in which that money has been spent to give patients the maximum value. Every health authority had to produce a dentistry action plan to identify gaps in its community and areas in which people were least well served, and produce practical solutions.

The health authority in east Lancashire has come up with a plan to provide dentistry in the community and has set standards that state that people should be able to get routine care within a 10-mile distance, urgent care within 18 miles and emergency care within 12 miles. Those are long distances for people to have to travel, so we would like to improve on the standards. However, it is important to secure a base framework for an NHS service. The plan identifies areas with particular problems such as Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale. The situation is slightly better in Blackburn, Hyndburn and the Ribble valley, but gaps exist there, too.

The health authority plans to introduce incentives into the system to encourage NHS dentists to increase the proportion of its practices devoted to NHS patients; payments are now available to dentists for that. We have given £50,000 to the dental care development fund to incentivise dentists, to which the health authority added £20,000. That is a fair-sized fund, which means that an

[Ms Hazel Blears]

extra 11,000 people can be registered in the area. I take note of my hon. Friend's worry about the dramatic decrease that has happened during the past three months. That has arisen from a decision of three major practices in her constituency to privatise their service and move towards a Denplan system. Those practices are owned by the same dentist, but a decision of such magnitude in a relatively small community can have a disproportionate impact on services available to local people.

The health authority has also put almost £500,000—a significant amount—into the modernisation fund for distribution to general dental practitioners. In his letter, Dr. Whittle highlighted the difficulties of staffing and the fact that, despite extra funding, it is not always possible to convince young dentists that they want to work in Rossendale, Darwen or other areas away from major metropolitan centres in which those at the beginning of their careers often think they will receive the best practice.

I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that, in 2001-02, seven dental practices in east Lancashire have been approved as vocational training practices and can take on new trainees. It is hoped that young trainees will get to know the community, become settled in the area, appreciate the benefits that Rossendale and east Lancashire have to offer them and their families, and develop practices. The fact that seven practices participate in the vocational system should draw new dentists into the area. New finance will help to establish new practices and the NHS will help to support the costs of establishing dentists in an area—we want to do everything we can to draw them in. We hope that, at the end of their vocational year, the dentists will stay in the communities where they have got to know the patients and the health service.

Another creative way in which we have tried to provide services is through a fourth-wave personal dental services pilot. Salaried dentists are employed by the health authority to provide services to local people. Funding of £360,000 went to a third-wave pilot based in three areas: Rossendale, Burnley and Pendle. The one in Rossendale, in my hon. Friend's constituency, operates at Haslingden and Waterfoot on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays, and is well used. My officials will discuss the proposals to extend that personal dental services pilot with the health authority and local people to see whether we can expand the service to provide a greater range of sessions for local people to attend. I do not pretend that that will be easy, because of the staffing issue, and if a service is set up, we must be sure that we can attract the dentists, dental therapists and hygienists so that we obtain value for the money invested. I am more than happy to give the assurance that my officials will explore the prospects for expanding the fourth-wave dental services pilot in my hon. Friend's constituency.

I recognise that some access problems are fuelled by higher-than-average levels of dental disease in people living in my hon. Friend's constituency. As Dr. Whittle said, water fluoridation offers the most effective means of reducing inequalities in oral health, but, as hon. Members know, that is very controversial. We responded to concerns about the safety of water fluoridation by commissioning research into the evidence of its effect not just on oral health but on health generally. The Medical Research Council undertook a review that should be completed within the next couple of months and we shall review our policy in the light of the MRC's findings.

In the meantime, I am pleased to confirm that east Lancashire is included in the areas involved in the national "brushing for life" scheme, which I was delighted to launch last autumn. In the scheme, families with young children are given packs containing fluoride toothpaste, a toothbrush and a leaflet on oral hygiene. Health visitors show children how to brush their teeth almost before they have teeth and help them into a habit of good, early oral health care and of regularly brushing their teeth, which can help to reduce some of the problems that arise later in life. I am delighted that east Lancashire is included in that scheme. There will also be regular checks on children's teeth and oral health with lots of encouragement.

We are not encouraging a nanny state telling people what to do; we are making a genuine attempt to persuade people into good habits early in life because what we learn then tends to remain with us for many years. I hope that my hon. Friend will see the scheme in action in some of the schools and child health clinics in her constituency. I am pleased to offer my hon. Friend the comfort that we are trying to direct dentists into her area.

Another matter that Dr. Whittle raised was training. He said that there is no dental school within the Lancashire and Cumbria strategic health authority area and that it is the only strategic health authority in the north-west without a dental school. However, two dental schools—in Liverpool and Manchester—are fairly close to the area and of the 28 strategic health authorities throughout the country, only 10 have dental schools, so Lancashire and Cumbria are not unique in not having a dental school in their immediate area. I accept that, when training young dentists, we must encourage them to spread their wings a little wider than the conurbations of Manchester and Liverpool. That is important for the residents of the whole north-west region.

I hope that I have provided some comfort to my hon. Friend. It is impossible to spirit dentists out of the air. They must be trained and encouraged to work within a national health service that recognises their skills and values their contribution, and in which we have a proper dialogue with them. In recent years, the dental service may have become a little detached from the NHS as a whole. In my negotiations with dentists and in discussions with their professional and representatives groups—I have met them on many occasions—many of them have said that they want to change the way they practise. They want to be part of the NHS, but they want their skills to be properly value and rewarded. We want a national health service in which dentists feel that they are a key part of the primary care team rather than simply drilling and filling, and in which they use their skills to advise on improvements to young people's health in particular. They will then have the satisfaction of seeing people's teeth gradually improve with less need for emergency care and the sort of pain relief required by my hon. Friend's constituent, Mr. Walsh, who had to go through such a gruelling and terrible experience on the day after Christmas. I cannot imagine anything much worse than his experience. I hope that in future we can ensure that generally, if not on Boxing day, he has access to an NHS dentist. That is what most people want to find for themselves and their families.

I am pleased to say that the rewards for the profession have been appreciated in recent years. We have paid in full the Doctors and Dentists Remuneration Review Body pay awards. They have not been staged. This year the basic pay increase is, I think, 3.6 per cent., which is above inflation. I hope that that will show dentists that we value the services that they provide. We have incentives to try to make them increase the amount of NHS practice that they do. The more dentists we can involve in improving the teeth and oral health of everyone in the country, the better. This is not simply about teeth, but about such matters as oral cancers and general health. Good early dental examination can make a real and significant difference to people's health.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen has raised the issue. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) could not be with us, but I fully appreciate his concern about the matter on behalf of his constituents. I shall certainly endeavour to do whatever I can, through my officials, to ensure that NHS dentistry in Rossendale improves in the months to come. My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen has done us all a service by raising this important issue here today.

Law of Trespass

1.26 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Any reasonable person watching news unfold during the Christmas recess will have been truly shocked at two cases in which farmers had their barns invaded by so-called "revellers" and very little action was taken. It might be recalled that, in the Lincolnshire case, the farmer said that he felt more like a farmer in Zimbabwe than in part of the United Kingdom. In the Essex case, outrageously, when the farmer cut off the electricity to the barn, he was arrested by the police and held in his local police station until 5 o'clock in the morning. My right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) is taking that matter up with both the police and Ministers at present.

It might be hoped that those incidents were unusual and isolated, but I regret to report that that is not the case. I want to illustrate what has happened twice in my constituency during the last six months. With your indulgence, Mr. Winterton, I shall read some correspondence that illuminates a serious problem.

The first invasion took place on town council playing fields in Bracknell. I shall read from the experienced and well-regarded town clerk Barbara Rumbold's letter to our chief constable, Sir Charles Pollard, dated 27 July. She says:

> "On the evening of 10th July gypsies with six caravans moved onto the Wildridings Playing Field, one of our many sites for football pitches in the town. Notice to remove themselves from the site was issued at 9.30 am on the 11th. This group was joined by a further eleven caravans on Saturday the 14th. During this time several requests were made to Bracknell Police to remove them from the site either under Section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 or under the Byelaws for the site granted by the Secretary of State in 1983...Whilst occupying this land they chased my own staff off the playing field and made it difficult for any local people to enjoy...their own open space.
>
> As the local police were not prepared to move them, quoting their reluctance in view of the Human Rights Act, we instructed Common Law Bailiffs and the gypsies moved off the site at 7 pm on Tuesday 17th. They moved only across the dual-carriageway to our Ringmead Playing Fields—also football fields. I rang the Bracknell Station when I learnt of their apparent destination and was informed that Officers had been despatched as the caravans were blocking an adjacent bus lane. Your Officers then allowed them to occupy the playing field that is of sufficient size only for one football pitch that has suffered considerable damage.
>
> Again more phone calls to Bracknell station failed to result in any action to remove what soon became a much larger camp site, eventually growing to thirty-three caravans when they were evicted by Bailiffs at 8pm on Sunday the 22nd. The Ringmead encampment became particularly offensive as it was so close to local residents."

I would add that I spoke to several local residents who contacted me in fear of their property and safety. Mrs. Rumbold goes on to say:

> "The whole site was badly contaminated when vacated, the gypsies having defecated indiscriminately anywhere on the site and having left a particularly foul mess all along the shrubs adjacent to the fence of one particular house.
>
> My staff have cleared this disgusting mess consisting of both human and canine excrement, dirty nappies, toilet paper, clothing used as toilet paper, female sanitary goods, bags of vomit, general household waste, heaps of concrete, soil and other building

> materials from the site. It would appear from what we collected that washing had been stolen and goods taken from shops as some of the clothing was still on hangers.
>
> My Council and the residents of both Wildridings and Great Hollands feel that they should have expected better service and co-operation from the local police. Nothing was done to ensure that the local community could peacefully enjoy their own playing fields for which residents pay their Council Tax.
>
> We have Byelaws in Bracknell...that are routinely enforced against the local residents to prevent the fouling of land by dogs yet the gypsies were able to foul the land without penalty.
>
> If local residents had indecently exposed themselves on open ground as the gypsies did they could very well have been arrested.
>
> Local motorists and pedestrians were put at risk by the manner in which the gypsies drove on and off the site and on local roads with little regard for the safety of others.
>
> Harassment took place in local shops and neighbourhood centres.
>
> Whilst we appreciate that some form of dialogue has to be kept open with the gypsies, it was particularly galling for my staff to see the friendly way in which the gypsies were approached by your Officers.
>
> As a minor local authority, this Council has no responsibility whatsoever for gypsies but will incur considerable costs for the two actions so far undertaken for us by the Bailiffs, to say nothing of the clean up costs. The gypsies are still in this area and have been observed checking out more of our football grounds. To the best of my knowledge since January the Bracknell Forest Borough Council have moved gypsies on some twenty-two times. The cost to the local Council Tax Payers is unwarranted and unnecessary.
>
> As you very well know, there is little point in erecting fences, gates, height restriction barriers etc., as these are no deterrent to gypsies who are determined to enter land. They simply remove them or cut the padlocks on gates required for our own access and such criminal damage is ignored. Bracknell is obviously now known as a soft touch where the Police will take no action. You have the powers to remove them but will not use them. It is much easier to keep telling residents that it is down to the local authority to remove them.
>
> My Council, on behalf of the residents of Bracknell is seeking your assurances that you will issue instructions to local Officers to ensure that gypsies will be promptly removed in future using your powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Also that whenever possible they will be deterred from entering local parks and playing fields.
>
> Local residents would...prefer that the Police went back to being a 'Force' and enforced the law as there is little evidence of 'Service' being offered to the local community."

I, too, made representations to the chief constable, as I was shocked and appalled at these events. The reply from his superintendent of specialist operations, Stephen Evans, beggars belief. On 16 August, he wrote to me to say:

> "Our policy is based on relevant legislation and the Code of Practice issued by the Home Office in conjunction with the Department of Transport and the Regions. I am sure that you will be aware that the Code of Practice quite clearly sets out considerations that should be taken by all relevant Authorities when dealing with traveller encampments. Our approach to traveller encampments is aimed at being lawful, proportionate and within the guidelines set out in the Codes of Practice. Your letter suggests that we were slow to act"—

in this particular case. He continued:

> "This is not the case. Our officers attended these encampments as soon as they were established and made an assessment as to the appropriate course of action. At two of the three encampments, our judgement was that it was not appropriate to invoke our powers under Section 61 of the Crime and Disorder Act. This is of course a subjective decision, but it is made in accordance with our policy guidelines and it takes into account all relevant factors, including the codes of practice. Having made such a decision we do not walk away from the problem. Our policy is to continue to monitor traveller encampments, to provide high visibility reassurance patrols, to deal with incidents".

That is hardly reassuring to my constituents.

Stephen Evans then makes the following outrageous statement:

> "Travellers are an extremely emotive issue and a decision by us not to invoke our powers under Section 61 is rarely greeted favourably by local people. However I am sure you would agree that it would be cavalier to misuse this power in inappropriate circumstances or to act outside of recognised good practice. If circumstances are such that in our judgement Section 61 should be used then we will not hesitate to use it. However we will be equally robust in not exercising this power if the circumstances are not appropriate. You mention in your letter the issue of Human Rights, which is one of the factors that we will consider. My interpretation of the Human Rights Act is that it applies equally to all groups and sections of society and it is within those parameters that we must operate."

The Minister will not be surprised to learn that my constituents, the town clerk and others were deeply angered by that totally inadequate response.

Just one month ago, a further incident occurred on public property that also cost council tax payers a lot of money. In his letter to me of 14 December, Mr. Bob Lewin, the highly respected principal and chief executive of Bracknell and Wokingham college of further education, said:

> "I am reluctant to bring you a problem but I hope you will understand my concerns in this case.
>
> At about 6.00pm on Thursday 6 March a large group of travellers was required to leave the town centre car park on Bull Lane, Bracknell. They drove out of the car park, straight into our student car park off Bull Lane which serves our Wick Hill Centre. The attached report prepared by our site manager gives some details."

He proceeded to outline the following concerns:

> "This is the second time this year we have had travellers on this site. They are no respecters of property or people's sensitivities (e.g. students aged 11-90 use the footpath from Bull Lane to the Garth Hill School and to the College. The travellers' vehicles were parked across the path on both occasions. You can imagine the threat to their security this causes would-be users of the footpath).
>
> Why on earth should we have to put up with this? Being a public sector organisation we cannot of course resort to the methods private land owners use to rid themselves of unwelcome visitors.
>
> The police took no action to stop the travellers entering our site. They were there; their comment was 'they have to have hard standing'. I happened to be at the Wick Hill site that evening and witnessed the chaotic situation as we helped our students move their cars from the student car park to the much smaller staff car park off Sandy Lane. No student would have considered it safe to leave their car in the car park—which in the event was completely filled by the travellers' cars, vans, caravans and lorries. See also my site manager's comments. The impression he gained was that the police wanted the public car park cleared for the Saturday market and Christmas shopping and the College was somehow expected to cope with the travellers.
>
> As the enclosed report shows, the travellers caused damage and left an appalling mess. The College has to meet the cost of clearing this up and replacing damaged property.
>
> We lose students of course on these occasions as they are scared away by the travellers.
>
> You should know that we cannot use permanent barriers on the site (which in any case I suspect the travellers would destroy): we allow parents of the Sandy Lane Primary School to use the area

as a drop off point when driving their children to school and we have thousands of students who are eligible each year to use the car park; the issuing of tickets (or any other control system) would be impractical therefore. The entrance to the car park does have a gate. We could not close and lock this on Thursday as this would have trapped our students and their cars. We will be installing a height barrier. After our last invasion we had to erect bollards around the site as the travellers broke through a hedge to gain access. This all costs us money, of which we do not have enough."

I shall quote in part from the report to which he refers, from the site manager Stan Wears. He says:

"I asked if he"—

that is the police inspector—

"could stop the rest of the travellers who were still on Albert Road car park, but I didn't get any support and he seemed to be wanting them all on our site rather than splitting them up, which seems to the College quite bewildering.

I explained we had parents bringing in children during the day to our nursery and Sandy Lane Infant and Junior school, and naturally our own students who would feel threatened by the situation, to which he offered police officers to monitor the situation the next morning.

While we were talking all of our students came down...and removed their cars... The Bracknell Forest Borough Council officers seemed to be more supportive than the Police and as Sites Manager I was quite perplexed by the Police and their lack of support in the situation.

Our staff felt threatened on the Friday and naturally I had to keep going to the site on a regular basis especially during Saturday and Sunday... I arrived at Wick Hill on Sunday...to find the site empty but in a disgusting state, rubbish strewn all over the site, rubbish bags, boxes, gas bottles, rubble and children's toys some usable, some broken. I checked the nursery area and found the hut/storage unit had been broken into over the weekend, which explained the toys all over the site. The grass area had also been used as motorbike run and was cut up and damaged.

The College will have to bear the costs for extra staffing hours regarding security, cleaning and two skips (£250) to remove rubbish. I had to spend late Sunday pm cleaning the car park to make it usable for Monday am. Assistant site managers have also had to be used to help clear up the mess.

We also had Priestwood Families"—

Priestwood is the neighbouring council estate to the car park—

"asking us why the travellers were there and that they felt intimated by their presence."

Naturally, I again made representations to the police. This time, I had a reply from the assistant chief constable, territorial policing, Mr. Steve Love, who said:

"Our local police commanders often feel caught between a rock and a hard place on this issue. Although the police have a power under section 61...to order travellers to quit land, they have no power to direct them where to go when they do quit—they can simply drive down the road onto somewhere else. Nor do they have the power to stop somebody entering onto land in the first place—I myself have stood, without police powers, watching vehicles drive past me onto a recreation ground.

The law and the guidance then require them to balance the human rights of the travellers with the occupier of the land. Because, temporarily at least, the land represents the home of the travellers as soon as they have arrived on it, any eviction of them represents potentially quite a serious infringement of their human rights."

It is the same story again.

Not surprisingly, the excellent Mr. Bob Lewin, principal of the college, was not impressed with the deputy chief constable's inadequate response. In a letter that I received today, he says:

"Whilst I suppose the human rights of College staff were not infringed when the travellers moved onto our car park, our ability to go about our lawful business most certainly was curtailed! I believe that in Scotland, the Police or the local authority can impound sound systems if they are used in such a way as to annoy neighbours. Is there a basis here for a way of dealing with trespassers—'if you don't move on, we'll impound your lorry'?... As you may be aware, a group of travellers moved onto the borough's car park off Bull Lane last week. My caretakers maintained a twelve hour guard on the entrance to our Bull Lane car park for three weekdays and carried out additional surveillance at the weekend until the travellers had moved on —to ensure they did not move into our car park at times when we could not have the gates locked."

The cost to the college of further education, which is already hard pressed, is huge. The cost to council tax payers, where there are natural budgetary restraints, is great. Ordinary, innocent people—hard-working, normal, straightforward people who live around Bracknell—want to get on with their lives in peace, but they want protection under the law when they are invaded by this scum. They are scum, and I use the word advisedly. People who do what these people have done do not deserve the same human rights as my decent constituents going about their everyday lives. Either the police are not doing a proper job, in which case I hope that the Minister and the Home Secretary will issue directives to police constables to take appropriate action, or Parliament in general and the Government in particular have inadequate legislation.

I return to Assistant Chief Constable Steve Love's letter of 3 January, in which he states:

"There are a number of things which could be done at your own level without which we are unlikely to make much more progress. These include"—

I should be interested in the Minister's comments on these suggestions—

"a legal power, when the police or a local authority directs travellers to leave land, to also direct that they will not return, that nobody else will enter that land, for a period of, say, 12 months, and a minimum distance that they must go having left that land."

His second point is that he needs

"a positive statement that would stand up in law to the effect that there will be a presumption that the human rights of the occupier or owner of land will outweigh the human rights of someone who parks a caravan on it and claims occupation."

Thirdly—I appreciate that this goes beyond the Minister's remit, but I sympathise with the point—he says that he needs

"direction to the Inland Revenue to really take a grip on the 'cash in hand—no overheads' economy, which underpins a lot of traveller activity."

I am not convinced as to who is in the wrong, but I know that my innocent constituents, the residents of Bracknell, are in the right. I initiated this afternoon's debate to establish how they can be properly protected. It must either be for the police to carry out their duties properly, directed by the Home Secretary, or for us as a Parliament, and for the Minister representing the Government, to strengthen the law so that the police can carry out their duties. We cannot have a situation in which ordinary decent people's lives are made a misery, they are under threat, their environment, their homes and their family's lives are ruined for a time and where the cost to individuals, taxpayers and hard-pressed organisations such as Bracknell and Wokingham college have to be met out of their own funds.

I shall be fascinated to hear what the Minister has to say. I appreciate that most of this will be new to her, but as she does not have long to wind up I would also appreciate a more detailed written response from her or the Home Secretary, because it is vital that this matter is tackled once and for all.

1.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) for raising the issue of trespass with particular reference to the difficulties caused by unauthorised camping. Unauthorised camping is a serious matter, and in many areas it is a challenge to balance the problems that the right hon. Gentleman has graphically described.

It would be a good idea if I began by confirming that travellers are part of our society, and they should be accorded the same rights and dignities as others: they have equal human rights to the settled community. However, human rights also extend to the settled community, and travellers' behaviour and the expectations of that behaviour should therefore be the same for those in the travelling community and the settled community. Anyone who thinks that that is not the case is profoundly wrong. The minority status of travellers and gypsies should not allow them to indulge in crime or antisocial behaviour; nor should it excuse that behaviour. The law should be enforced equally on them.

The right hon. Gentleman might be interested in a recent case in the High Court in which section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994—the part that encompasses police powers—was challenged and found not incompatible with the Human Rights Act 1998. I hope that that is another reassurance that he will take away with him. Each operation by the police is subject to challenge on the same grounds, so the police must bear the Human Rights Act in mind. However, within the context of what I have just said—that all people's rights are equal in our society—if people behave in an antisocial or criminal way, or in some of the ways that the right hon. Gentleman outlined, the full force of the law can and should be brought to bear.

A variety of legislation is in place to tackle the issue of unauthorised camping. Section 61 of the 1994 Act allows a

> "police officer present at the scene"

of an unauthorised camp to direct people to leave if he or she

> "reasonably believes that two or more persons are trespassing on land...with the common purpose of residing there"

and reasonable attempts by the landowner to get them to move have been unsuccessful. There must also have been some

> "damage to the land or to property",

and the right hon. Gentleman clearly outlined some of that. The travellers must have been "abusive" or "threatening" towards the landowner or agent trying to get them to move, or have brought "six or more vehicles" on to the land.

Once those conditions are fulfilled, a direction can be given to the travellers to leave the land and remove their property from it. When evicted from a place under section 61 of the 1994 Act, travellers cannot return to that place within three months. If given a direction to leave, the refusal to do so carries the power of arrest.

That is a discretionary power, and I suspect that that is the nub of the matter. How that power is used operationally is a matter for the chief constable and the local police commander. The legislation does not refer to land forming part of a highway—another loophole, which the right hon. Gentleman did not mention, but which has become obvious to people trying to use the powers.

If the police have any knowledge of any large-scale incursion into an area, they can apply to a district council for an order prohibiting trespassory assemblies for a specified period, under section 14A of the Public Order Act 1986. Once such an application is received, the council may with the Home Secretary's consent make an order banning such assemblies. It is then an offence to assemble in breach of that order. The offence also carries a power of arrest. The police may direct people away from travelling towards such a gathering if an order is in place. That is a more preventive power that exists under current legislation.

Local authorities also have powers, under section 77 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, that enable them to direct any unauthorised campers to leave land where they are camped without consent. It is an offence not to leave as soon as is reasonably practical thereafter.

We have noticed in the operation of the 1994 Act that there is not always sufficient co-ordination between local police and local authorities over whether section 61 or section 77 is appropriate. The legislation works best where there is a proactive association and on-going co-operation between the local authority and police to try to deal with those issues and decide which of the two sections should be used. In the worst examples, the local authority expects the police to use section 61 and the police want the local authority to use section 77, so not a lot of progress is made.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the good practice guidance, "Managing Unauthorised Camping", which featured in the letter from the chief constable that he read. It suggests more proactive co-operation between local agencies, not just the enforcing agencies, to ensure an appropriate response when incursions occur and cause nuisance, criminal damage and other serious disruption. Magistrates courts have powers under section 77 of the 1994 Act to order eviction, so there must also be a good and co-operative relationship with the courts to enable fast action to be taken. Part of the key to dealing with the matter appropriately and quickly when an encampment is causing problems is to persuade those organisations to work together instead of one expecting the other to take action. The good practice guide suggests that.

A landowner may take certain measures for the recovery of land under the civil procedures rule. Sections 1 to 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 and common law give the police powers to deal with a variety of other antisocial behaviour, such as public nuisance and breach of the peace. Again, creative and proactive action has often been proved to work when an unauthorised encampment exhibits such behaviour.

The legislation is discretionary and it is not for me as the Minister to interfere in operational decisions by the police and local authorities. However, the Government have made it clear—not least in asking the Association of Chief Police Officers to revise its guidelines on how to work with the legislation—that police powers can be used at an early stage if necessary. If the right hon. Gentleman looks at the way in which the legislation is framed, he will see that it allows early intervention to prevent large-scale incursion, especially if there is evidence that it is being organised.

I suggest gently that the legislation could be used more proactively and imaginatively than in the past to have a preventive effect. I am happy to write to the right hon. Gentleman about the detailed points, particularly on strengthening the law, but I am not giving a commitment that it will be the Home Office's top priority and he would not expect me to do so.

New work is being done between the Home Office and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to update the guide in the light of experience. Human Rights Act concerns exist, but I assure the right hon. Gentleman that if people are treated equally and have their human rights accorded to them, the police are not powerless to take action when criminal damage is done, there is breach of the peace and other laws are broken. I expect that to be taken into account appropriately by local forces. Laws exist that allow a proactive and sometimes preventive approach to the issue, but experience shows that they are more likely to be successful if there is open co-operation between local agencies that allows the law to be used to its maximum effect.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 January 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Asbestos Sufferers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am fortunate indeed in having been able to secure this debate. I am pleased to have done so because asbestos sufferers are suffering great anxiety, and what is happening in the industry is of great concern to us all. Recent actions by insurance companies, asbestos manufacturers and, in particular, the courts give sufferers the impression that there is a concerted effort to avoid liability and responsibility to those suffering from an asbestos-related disease contracted in the course of their employment and, in most cases, through negligent exposure to asbestos dust.

I have three main points. First, I want to make the Chamber aware of the size of the problem and to emphasise that it is not only historical but very current. Secondly, I want to highlight the difficulty that many people encounter in trying to establish their eligibility for an award under Department for Work and Pensions procedures, and to suggest how that process might be made easier. Thirdly, I want to refer to recent events and, in particular, to draw the attention of the Chamber to the judgment made on 11 December in the Appeal Court. I want also to suggest a way forward.

At present, asbestos dust is responsible for more work-related deaths than any other single cause—a fact that is not always appreciated. The victims are not located in any single industry, but spread throughout UK industry, although it is fair to say that there are more sufferers in industries such as ship-building, construction and energy. Asbestos-related disease creates a chronic respiratory problem for sufferers, many of whom find that their mobility is severely restricted. The dust can also cause mesothelioma cancer, for which there is no cure, and it is associated with other types of cancer which, according to the Health and Safety Commission, are on the increase.

The latest statistics provided by the HSC make a new prediction that male deaths from mesothelioma cancer are likely to peak in about 2011. I say "new prediction" because earlier predictions were based on the work of Professor Peto, who predicted that the peak would come later. The HSC, working on current cases, considers that it will be a little earlier, but I emphasise that its figures relate to male deaths. Mesothelioma deaths in women are running at about a sixth of the rate for men, and the difference is due to exposure to asbestos.

There were 1,595 deaths from mesothelioma in 1999, the last year for which figures are available, and the HSC reckons that there are one or two cases of other asbestos-related cancers for every mesothelioma case. Working from the statistical information provided by the HSC, the GMB union considers that about 4,000 people die in the UK annually as a result of exposure to this fatal fibre, and the number is increasing.

The reason for the increase is that the peak of exposure was in the mid-1960s, when blue and brown asbestos were used widely. After the 1960s, exposure levels seemed to fall as workers became much more aware of the dangers. I would contend, however, that one of the major factors in reducing exposure to asbestos was the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. The Act and its associated regulations covered all workers, but the fact that it also created the opportunity to appoint workers safety representatives and set up safety committees meant that it put in place a mechanism to extend meaningful protection to workers in asbestos manufacturing.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify for the Chamber the statistics that he quoted? I have figures from the *Financial Times* of 11 December which, reporting on the case to which he referred, says:

> "The number of mesothelioma cases is not expected to peak until 2020. An estimated 10,000 people will die from the disease in that year—twice the number killed annually on the roads".

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has seen that information. How does it correspond with the information that he has?

Mr. Clapham: I referred earlier to the new figures from the HSC, which relate to the year in which it expects male deaths to peak. I said that the prediction was new because the earlier work was done by Professor Peto, who believed that the peak would come later. That may be so—much of the work is based on estimates. The HSC bases its estimates on the current number of mesothelioma cases, which in 1999 was 1,595. The difference between the figure in the *Financial Times* and mine is merely due to the difference between the estimates from the two sources, Professor Peto and the HSC. We must bear it in mind that the HSC figures do not include female deaths.

Although blue and brown asbestos were banned in 1985, and white asbestos in 1999, it should not be assumed that there is no danger at present. In addition to its industrial use, asbestos has been used in more than 1 million public buildings, and I have seen reference to a figure of more than 1.2 million. From this year, the owners of buildings will have a duty to manage asbestos in their buildings, but workers will still be exposed to it. Electricians, plumbers, joiners and heating engineers are all likely to come into contact with asbestos and risk developing mesothelioma cancer. We know from medical evidence that mesothelioma can be caused not only by long exposure, but by intermittent exposure, to asbestos dust. The risk therefore is current, not merely historical.

Claiming benefit for asbestos-related disease or mesothelioma cancer can be a trial. I dealt with such a case about two and a half years ago, and I still represent people in medical appeal tribunals on Fridays, although not every Friday and not as often as I used to. The case to which I referred is that of Ted Dudley, deceased. After he was diagnosed as having mesothelioma cancer, we still had to prove to the tribunal that he had worked

[Mr. Clapham]

in an industry where he was exposed to asbestos. We had to do months of work conclusively to prove to the tribunal with engineers' reports that he had been exposed to asbestos while working as a miner. After that, he had to prove to the satisfaction of the Benefits Agency doctor that he was suffering from mesothelioma, despite the fact that he had been diagnosed as such by his own consultant.

The Occupational and Environmental Diseases Association, to which I pay tribute, has long contended that only a small proportion of people suffering from an asbestos-related disease are in receipt of an award. It will produce statistics in a forthcoming pamphlet which clearly show that. For example, it will show that while it is accepted by insurers in the United Kingdom that 80 to 90 per cent. of mesotheliomas are caused by exposure to asbestos, the number of people receiving industrial disablement benefit does not exceed 38 per cent. Moreover, the OEDA believes that for lung cancer that has been caused by exposure to asbestos, fewer than 3 per cent. of people who could reasonably be expected to receive benefit do so.

In mesothelioma cases and asbestos-related lung cancers, the current dual diagnosis procedure should be ended. Even if a man is diagnosed by the consultant treating him as suffering from the disease, he still has to go to the Benefits Agency doctors for confirmation of his condition before benefit is paid, which can take up to six or seven weeks. That time can be ill-afforded because mesothelioma victims generally have a short lifespan. A way forward would be to end dual diagnosis and use the treating consultant's report as the basis for the disablement assessment and awarding disablement benefit. Benefit for mesothelioma victims should be awarded at 100 per cent. because of their short lifespan.

As if being diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease were not sufficiently traumatic, developments in the insurance world and asbestos companies have thrown into question the likelihood of victims being able to claim compensation for that terrible disease. Last October, Chester Street became insolvent and Iron Trades was sold off, which left hundreds of pre-1972 cases in limbo. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) raised the issue in an Adjournment debate and I shall not go over the ground that he covered. After a great deal of work by my hon. Friends, a number of whom are in the Chamber today, and the Treasury, to which I pay tribute, a scheme was worked out with the insurance industry that covered the pre-1972 cases left by the Chester Street debacle. I understand that under the scheme, the pre-1972 cases, which were a big worry, are receiving 90 per cent. of the full value of their claims.

I very much understand the disappointment of claimants who are not receiving the full worth of their claims. I had hoped that in the Chester Street case the resources apportioned by the administrator would have been added to the 90 per cent., taking the figure nearer to 100 per cent. compensation for victims, but that does not appear to be the case. Lawyers tell me that many people who suffered as a result of the Chester Street collapse have not yet received a pay-out under the scheme; the Minister may be able to check that. From 30 November last year, the Financial Services Authority established another compensation scheme to replace the previous insurance board protection scheme.

The situation is not the fault of the claimants, who are double victims. First, they were negligently exposed to asbestos by their employers and, secondly, they were let down by the failure of insurance companies, particularly in the Chester Street case, but also in the Turner and Newall case, by the route taken by the parent company, Federal Mogul, to escape liability. The next devastating blow for claimants came when Federal Mogul filed for insolvency in the USA. My hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) and for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) gave the House details of that case only last week, so I need not go over them, except to say that there is a document on the web that clearly points out that Turner and Newall and Federal Mogul have taken the insolvency route to escape their responsibility to asbestos victims and their families. The Government must consider that and what route to take to address the issue seriously.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): One concern of the victims of Turner and Newall—as my hon. Friend said, they are victims because of the recklessness of asbestos companies in their heyday—is that the Federal Mogul operation not only protects the company in the United States, but may also formally protect the assets of Turner and Newall in the UK within the Federal Mogul empire, so that they will not be available for UK victims of asbestosis and mesothelioma.

Mr. Clapham: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. There is a real difficulty. As I understand it, Turner and Newall insured its own risks. In addition, its assets are now owned by Federal Mogul, an American company. Even if we can bottom the situation, there is a question about whether Turner and Newall would come under the remit of the FSA compensation scheme, so there is a genuine worry. I understand that the Treasury is working to try to bottom the issue, but it is certainly a great concern. If the victims do not fall under the FSA scheme, the Government and the insurance industry must consider how to address their situation. I shall come to that later.

The hammer blow for sufferers of asbestos-related disease was delivered in the Court of Appeal on 11 December 2001 as a result of the Fairchild case. The Court of Appeal stated that if two defendants equally exposed a claimant to asbestos, the "guilty" fibres could not be identified, so both defendants escaped liability. The judgment specifically says:

> "If there has been more than one employment involving asbestos exposure there is no means of determining from which employment was derived the fibre or fibres which brought about the malignant transformation".

That decision effectively overturned the apportionment principle that has existed in the courts in such cases for at least 25 years. Usually, defendants would be joined and liability apportioned according to the time that the person had worked with each employer.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Does not that judgment make it imperative that the Government introduce a national policy of compensation for asbestos workers? In most instances, particularly in the building industry, where people may have worked in 30 locations for a dozen employers, it is impossible to prove the source of the disease, and such people have nowhere to go in law. They stand no chance of getting compensation unless a national compensation scheme is put together by national Government.

Mr. Clapham: I agree with the last point. The court decision was a scandal. Using a brief from a causation expert, I hope to demonstrate that the court got it wrong. The difficulty is that leave to appeal to the House of Lords was refused. The decision means that thousands of victims of the fatal disease mesothelioma have been deprived of compensation. The decision was first made in the High Court and the case then went to the Court of Appeal, so asbestos victims have been in limbo for nearly two years. That decision was wrong.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): In support of the case made by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), the judgment on fibres is the equivalent of saying that if someone is killed by two bullets, that person is responsible or is not really dead. The courts and the companies seem to be mocking the victims. People who have already won justice in the courts cannot get the compensation that they have been awarded because of corporate gamesmanship by companies that say that they are going into bankruptcy when they are trading and making millions of pounds. We cannot wait for 10 years of extended court proceedings. We need concerted, joined-up, co-ordinated Government help to break through the proceedings, rather than allowing them to drag through the courts for ever.

Mr. Clapham: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend's comments.

I have a brief provided by a causation expert, Mr. Alan Care, of the chemical poisoning department of Russell Jones & Walker. It refers to the court decision and how it dealt with the medical evidence. Mr. Care states:

> "The established way in which to deal with causation has already been decided by the world's medical profession in any disease case. It is the *Bradford Hill* criteria and the twin concept of dose significantly increasing the risk of developing any disease. For causation to be established the following must apply—
>
> Strength of association;
>
> Temporal sequence;
>
> Biological gradient/plausibility (and a dose-response gradient);
>
> Specificity;
>
> Coherence with biological backgrounds and previous knowledge;
>
> Experimental evidence."

Mr. Care continues:

> "All of these criteria are met in the case of asbestos induced mesothelioma and this has been accepted for many years. By the gold standard of the *Bradford Hill* criteria for 'cause' or aetiology for all disease and illness is defined. Asbestos exposure at work caused mesothelioma; of that there is no doubt."

The brief adds:

> "The Court of Appeal has made a fatal error and has effectively usurped the established medical and scientific community approach as to cause and causation. The Court of Appeal has asked the question that the medical profession cannot answer—'which fibre?'. It is precisely because medical science cannot answer such a question that *Bradford Hill* is the gold standard. The Court of Appeal should have kept to the law and not muddied its decision by wrongly questioning the accepted basis of causation by seeking to identify the 'guilty fibre(s)'. This is simply not possible."

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that that is just another part of the saga? Previously, the argument was that white asbestos was good enough to eat, and that it was blue asbestos that caused all the problems. That argument has had to be rejected, so the credibility of the medical and scientific establishment in the matter is akin to its credibility in the BSE tragedy.

Mr. Clapham: I agree. There is no doubt that there were people who believed that white asbestos could have been spread on cornflakes and eaten for breakfast. It was only the studies carried out in France and later by the Health and Safety Executive that identified white asbestos as a carcinogen. It may be recalled that as a result of the information gained by the French authorities, asbestos was banned in France. Following the ban, the Canadian producers took them to the World Trade Organisation. The WTO tribunal upheld the right of France to ban white asbestos because it was shown to be a carcinogen.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the Library brief on the case to which he referred? It might interest him. It states:

> "The judges at the Court of Appeal admitted that their decision amounted to 'a major injustice crying out to be righted' by the government or by the insurance industry, but refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords."

That request was made on 21 December 2001. Will he join me in hoping that their lordships expedite their decision on whether there should be an appeal, and that when the appeal is heard, it will be heard quickly?

Mr. Clapham: The lawyers will petition the House of Lords, and if the House of Lords decides to hear the case, it could be some considerable time before the case is heard. Meanwhile, the victims wait for justice. We must ensure that the case is heard speedily or that another route is taken.

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that there may well be another route: a scheme devised by the insurance industry to pay compensation at the levels that the court has been determining, but possibly through some sort of no-fault liability arrangement. I do not expect an answer this morning, but I ask him to consider that proposal, discuss it with colleagues and determine whether the Government could work with the insurance industry to create such a scheme.

If that cannot be done, we need the House of Lords to consider the case, and speedily, but it must be recognised that the House of Lords may well go the way of the Court of Appeal. In that event, the issue of the victims would still have to be addressed. We would require an insurance industry-initiated scheme to be introduced speedily to pay compensation equivalent to that awarded by the courts in similar cases.

I ask the Minister to give consideration to those two courses of action: proceeding speedily to the House of Lords, or discussing with the insurance industry the implementation of an appropriate scheme to compensate the victims quickly.

[Mr. Clapham]

There was also some argument in the Fairchild hearing that the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 might enable claimants to obtain compensation. Again, I doubted whether that could happen when I first heard about it. I have received an opinion from APIL, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, which clearly states its view that the regulation in question would not apply to Fairchild and others in his position. A barrister member of APIL has said that claimants and their families recently caught by the Court of Appeal's decision on Fairchild have no claim under the 1979 Act, which, apparently, serves as a safety net for claimants with neither a defendant nor insurance. In the Fairchild case, there was a defendant and insurance, but no liability, so the case falls outside the Act's safety net. It may well be, therefore, that the route considered by judges in the Court of Appeal is not a way of dealing with such cases. Will the Minister consider that issue when he consults his colleagues on the best way of dealing with compensation in these cases?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend makes an important point, but does he agree that even if a route were available through the current workers' compensation scheme, the compensation would be a matter only of thousands of pounds? With proper justice, such compensation may amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds, so the scheme is not adequate in its own right.

Mr. Clapham: I agree completely. The scheme pays small amounts that are linked to weekly payments through the award system of the Department for Work and Pensions. The compensation is nothing like that paid in the courts when negligence is established. I believe that people were negligently exposed in all the cases. If there is to be a scheme, or if the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme is to be the route through which compensation is obtained, it must be significantly enhanced and pay lump sums equivalent to those decided previously in the courts. I urge the Minister, when considering any scheme, to remember that the lump sums, or even periodic payments, must be equivalent to the compensation that people are generally paid in the courts.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. Gentleman is developing his argument well, but there is an unknown factor: the countless tens of thousands of people who cannot prove the origin of their asbestos-related illness. Many such people will not have recourse to the law as they have no such proof, so they will get nothing more than inadequate sums. One of my constituents gets £22.58 a week in industrial benefits at the age of 62, for an illness that is going to kill him and is undoubtedly a result of his working career. What should happen to people who cannot prove where they contracted their illness, are not covered by any sort of insurance and cannot obtain legal redress?

Mr. Clapham: That is an important point. Indeed, it is one of the reasons why the pneumoconiosis workers' compensation scheme came into being in 1979. The scheme was introduced to provide a means of obtaining compensation when the responsible company had disappeared and the insurance company could not be traced. However, only pitiable sums are payable under the scheme, which needs to be considered in its entirety with a view to enhancing the payments, which are very small.

I began by saying that much is happening that gives asbestos sufferers the view that a concerted effort is being made to deprive them of their compensation. I want to finish my speech by referring to an article that appeared on 13 December in *Post Magazine*, which is produced for the insurance industry. The article states:

> "Employers liability insurers could escape millions of pounds of disease-related claims in the wake of this week's landmark Court of Appeal ruling, which will leave hundreds of mesothelioma claimants without compensation."

The article quotes Chris Phillips, head of insurance litigation at Halliwell Landau, which represents one of the defendants, as saying:

> "We believe the logic in Fairchild may be applicable to any claim where a single act causes damage—including cancer and asthma—and this is the line of inquiry being taken actively and considered by the same team of solicitors and counsel."

That shows clearly that some lawyers in the insurance industry are working not to seek justice for their defendants, but to find a route around the liabilities and responsibilities that the industry has in respect of its asbestos victims. That is a scandal.

The Fairchild case must be put in its historical context, given the scandalous way in which millions of workers in the 1950s and 1960s were exposed to asbestos in UK industry, despite the fact that the dangers were known in the 1930s, when the first legislation was introduced, and even before that. Now a Court of Appeal decision has legally deprived sufferers of the rightful route to compensation. That decision is wrong and shameful. We cannot allow it to stand and the Government must act to put in place a route for compensation for asbestos victims.

10.7 am

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) has campaigned on these matters for many years and it is to his great credit that he has secured this debate. Having sat in the ministerial chair, I must say that I have never seen such a debate so well attended. That tells me that this matter should be given Government time and be properly debated on the Floor of the House, where it can be fully aired. We are discussing one of the most important and lethal legacies of the 20th century, and it will have to be dealt with in the 21st century. I have recently spoken in the House on these matters, so I shall not detain hon. Members, as I know that others wish to contribute and speak for their constituencies.

I represent a community in Armley, Leeds, where asbestos dust was blown out of the J. W. Roberts factory and on to the neighbouring streets. People who lived in the neighbourhood and played in the dust years later have contracted mesothelioma and died from it. It took us 10 years to fight the owner of the factory, Turner and Newall, which denied that it owned the company or had any records or documents, even though we unearthed 27,000 documents about what was happening. We won the 1995 case of Margereson and Hancock, who courageously took on the company and won a verdict saying that it was responsible for polluting them and their neighbourhood. It was a groundbreaking case. At the time, I thought that, as a Member of Parliament, I could then leave it to lawyers to do the decent thing, put the other cases forward, get the medical evidence, take them to the courts and get the compensation. Some 15 or 16 people were paid compensation, but others are in train and waiting to go through the process. Some hundreds of people are waiting. Some cases remain to be filed, while some people are waiting for medical evidence.

What happened next? From being a national company in Britain, Turner and Newall became part of a mega, multinational company—Federal Mogul in the United States of America—which started to play global corporate games and decided that it could wrap all the claims together, bury those of Armley and hold off liabilities. Consequently, even those who had won their case in court found that the cheque from the company bounced. Solicitors' letters stated that the company had been put into administration, was filing for bankruptcy and therefore did not need to respond. That process of administration could take years.

It has been reported that the company is trying to sort out the claims, but was Turner and Newall properly insured from the outset? From 1977, the board minutes show that there were doubts about its insurance. Who were the insurers? Nobody knows. When the case was won in 1995, Sir Colin Hope, the chairman of the company, said that he was confident that there was money in the kitty to pay the claims. He was confident that claims of up to £1 billion would be covered and that the victims of Armley would get the money. Where is it? Where is the money for the victims? Is it locked in administration? Why cannot we know? Why are we told that Turner and Newall's insurance cover is commercially confidential? Victims' lawyers cannot know about it.

If the company is not properly insured, it should be prosecuted. The Department of Trade and Industry should have prosecuted it in the past for illegal trading. If it is properly insured, why cannot the insurance money be made available to victims now, outside the administration process?

Games are being played in the world of insurance. We are in murky waters when we consider Turner and Newall's insurance cover. It now claims to be self-insured. I have a copy of the "General Report and Background to the Proposals of the Joint Administrators". The company went to the administrators and asked, "Please make us bankrupt", even though it is trading, getting millions of contracts every week and making millions of pounds. The report to the administrator states:

> "In 1996, T&N purchased a £500 million layer of insurance, through the UK Group Company called Curzon Insurance Limited"—

it trades from Guernsey rather than the rest of the United Kingdom—

> "which itself reinsured the cover through three major insurance companies. This will be triggered should the aggregate costs of claims made or brought after 1 July 1996 exceed £690 million. Management now believes that the aggregate cost of claims made or brought after 1 July 1996 will exceed the trigger point. Based on this assessment, the FM Group recorded an insurance recoverable asset under the T&N policy of US$577 million in the fourth quarter of 2000."

The report continues:

> "One of the reinsurers, European International Insurance Company Limited (which is an affiliate of Swiss Re), issued proceedings on 22 November 2001 in the High Court to seek a declaration that it was entitled to avoid the reinsurance agreement."

The company is trying every trick in the book to avoid its liabilities.

We need a co-ordinated, joined-up Government response that involves the Treasury as well as the Department of Trade and Industry because the victims cannot wait for 10 years of litigation. The Armley victims have won court cases that prove the company's negligence. They are not covered by the workers' occupational schemes because they did not work in the company. The employers' liability schemes would not therefore cover them. We need a separate package for them. The proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone are along exactly the right lines and further proposals could tackle matters in the interim. Victims cannot wait for years for the determination of the court cases.

The companies are engaged in corporate gamesmanship on a massive scale to evade their liabilities. In other contexts, we have discussed corporate manslaughter. We are currently considering a classic example. We are not discussing hired hands in the 19th century; people's lives have been taken and the companies walk away and are not held to account. That is wrong and scandalous, and the Government must tackle it.

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Time is not on our side, and I therefore make a plea for brevity so that as many hon. Members as possible can speak.

10.14 am

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I shall try to be brief. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) and for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on their speeches. I want to pick up on the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West that the Government must act more co-operatively. Sometimes there almost seems to be a conspiracy to hit the people who have suffered from such an appalling disease. Everyone appears to be lining up to beat them. They come into contact with the Government through the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Health, social security and the legal system. They receive a good service from none of them. The Government must therefore be much more proactive.

We were delighted when the Government produced a response in early May to the Chester Street debacle. However, if it had not been for a handful of Members of Parliament and for asbestos campaigners, thousands of people would have suffered from what is called the genius of capitalism, whereby companies walk away from their responsibilities and profits remain high.

We met the Financial Services Authority when we were campaigning for improvements. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and

[Tony Worthington]

Penistone agrees that it was a bemusing experience. The FSA did not appear to understand that the matter had anything to do with it. We could not understand why the FSA had approved the Chester Street restructuring when it was obvious that the company was headed for oblivion. The FSA interpreted its duties as protecting the companies and their shareholders, not the customers and the small people who were the victims of the action. That view persists.

We subsequently met the liquidators who were checking the way in which the company had been run. Again, that was a disturbing experience because their statutory duty appeared simply to be to ascertain whether the board had taken proper advice, even it was bad, and protected shareholders' interests. They did not understand that there was something appallingly wrong in a chief executive taking more than £1 million from a failing company and thousands losing the insurance that they believed that they had. They did not appear to have a duty to consider that.

I am worried about the new scheme that the FSA introduced at the beginning of December because hardly anyone knows about it. I receive many letters from colleagues who are asking about its details. The FSA introduced the scheme without consulting Members of Parliament who campaigned on the issue, asbestos groups or victims. Document 108 sets out the scheme, but I look around the room and see people who have actively campaigned on the matter and do not know about it.

I shall not say much about the Fairchild judgment because it has been covered admirably, but it is a disaster. The law made itself an ass in that case. Everyone knows what constitutes justice. People have been poisoned by employers who knew about the risks for years. If those employers will not face up to their responsibilities, the Government must ensure that they do. I have lost faith in the courts. The Government must have a law ready to do justice to the victims.

Why will not the Government or the FSA tell us what they are doing about Federal Mogul and Turner and Newall? This company has for years flagged up the fact that it is a chancer. Clydebank suffered under a Turner and Newall company for years. It eventually went and, as always under the genius of capitalism, the public had to pick up the cost. It cost between £10 million and £12 million to make the site safe, and Turner and Newall did not pay a penny. We have to ask the Government what they are doing about this. I do not want letters from the Minister saying that they are monitoring the situation. I know what the word "monitoring" means. It means that they are lying back and hoping that nothing comes to their attention. I want something active done about Turner and Newall.

I want to raise an issue that has not been raised so far, and I shall refer here to British Shipbuilders. A press release from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 10 May 2001 contained the very welcome news that the uncertainty of asbestos sufferers would soon be over, due to a partnership between the Government and the insurance industry. It stated:

> "The Government will itself fund the compensation owed to former employees of public sectors for whom it is liable."

That includes British Shipbuilders.

I am told—if necessary I could provide names—that British Shipbuilders is now not paying up in settled cases. In other words, it is becoming a debtor. Far from co-operating, it is refusing to pay what it has agreed to pay in judgments. Furthermore, in cases in which it had previously agreed liability, it is now withdrawing admissions of responsibility. Just what is going on? Will the Minister give me an undertaking that he will find out, and apply the necessary pressure on British Shipbuilders to act decently and honour the Chief Secretary's promise?

In several of these instances, there are implications for Government expenditure if the insurance industry and the courts do not play the game. We will have to pick up the bill. We are in danger of losing the much-deserved credit that we gained for the Government's response to the Chester Street case if we do not get these other matters right. People in my constituency ask me all the time about how the new scheme is being administered, about Turner and Newall, and about British Shipbuilders.

I would also like the Government to launch an inquiry—and to provide us with the resulting information—into whether payments have dried up, as is stated in complaints that I am receiving. That applies whether the payments were set up under the old Policyholders Protection Board or under the new arrangements. Will the Minister produce some statistics on that? What has been happening to the paying out of compensation over the last few months? Will the Minister also, through Government channels, please tell the FSA that it is simply failing to communicate to the people we represent about how it is responding to their needs. I am delighted that we have had this debate today; I wish that it could have been much longer. The turnout in the Chamber proves how necessary it has been.

10.23 am

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): I congratulate my colleague on securing this important debate; I also welcome the opportunity briefly to highlight a couple of issues.

First and foremost, I want to highlight the severity of asbestos-related diseases in the country and, more specifically, on Tyneside. I was also going to expose the injustice of the Fairchild judgment, but that has already been well covered today. I shall mention the case of a constituent of mine later. I do not need to explain the horrors of asbestos-related disease, because hon. Members know about that only too well from their constituents, whether through their mailbags or from their neighbours.

I do, however, want to reveal the extent of the problem. It is known that there are more than 50,000 sufferers nationally. Locally, on Tyneside, there are more than 10,000. Over the past four years, one person has died of asbestos-related disease every three days on Tyneside. This will only get worse as we come to terms with our industrial past, and with the hard life that people in shipyards, ship repair and shipbuilding—as well as building workers—have endured over the years. They never had it easy. They endured hard conditions involving night shifts, work in dock bottoms and low wages. When those people make claims, all sorts of blocks are put in their way by evasive employers such as Turner and Newall, and evasive insurance companies such as Chester Street. The recent judgment in the Fairchild case only adds insult to injury.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Does my hon. Friend agree that the effect of the Fairchild judgment in the north-east has been to stop many former shipyard workers living in Jarrow and Durham, for example, getting any access to justice? The nature of the industry was that people moved around from one employer to another, and Fairchild has, in one fell swoop, stopped access to justice for thousands of former workers in heavy engineering and shipbuilding in the north-east.

Mr. Hepburn: That is an excellent point. The Fairchild judgment is unfair; it denies justice to people with mesothelioma—the cancer caused by asbestos. Workers in the shipyards and in the building industry often work for a number of different employers, so how on earth can they prove where a single fibre came from?

I want to highlight the problem by mentioning the case of a constituent of mine, Mr. William Cuskin. He worked as a painter in the shipyards for many years. He worked for a number of companies and came into contact with asbestos on a daily basis. He contracted mesothelioma and, sadly, died in August last year. He contacted me earlier last year, having sought legal advice at the time, and I am dealing with his case now. He died an agonising death, but because of the Fairchild judgment, no compensation will be paid, which is absolutely disgraceful. That is the travesty of justice that people face today. That is the main point that I wanted to raise and, as many hon. Members want to speak, I thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Stevenson.

10.27 am

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I shall be brief. I endorse the remarks made by all the previous speakers. The history of suffering in the asbestos industry has been one of companies behaving recklessly. Their consideration for their moral obligations has been so low that they deserve condemnation for their actions past and present. That must be placed on record because they are corporate fat cats who, living successfully themselves, have been quite prepared to dismiss with absolute contempt the needs of some of the most victimised people in society. We have heard this morning how large the scale of asbestos-related suffering is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) raised many issues about the way in which Turner and Newall is using legal devices to avoid obligation. The Government must satisfy themselves as to whether the company was legally insured under the national employers obligation scheme. That is central to the argument, because if it was not, the company should have been prosecuted for that failure, and if it was, that insurance should now kick in.

There are huge questions about the irresponsibility of the insurance industry. Insurance, by its nature, is about the taking on of risk, and about making payments when that risk goes wrong. The insurers try to ensure that they take the money at the front end, but attempt to deny liability in all circumstances. That is a disgrace, because, by definition, we are not talking about a group of claimants who can sit and wait for government processes, court processes and administrative and bureaucratic systems to work. People do not have that time. The lifespan of someone diagnosed with mesothelioma is about 19 months.

Mr. Hancock: If they are lucky.

Mr. Lloyd: Indeed. That means that all those people with the disease who are around at the moment will be dead before their claims are settled, unless central Government say to the insurers, "You have to do something very quickly. To do otherwise flies in the face of morality." If the Government would not let them even contemplate that flight from responsibility, they would be forced to act.

I make an appeal to the Minister: please can we have joined-up government? Will Ministers from the relevant Departments get together, so that we do not find ourselves here in a year's time saying that we are monitoring progress? We should be here in a year's time saying to the Minister and his colleagues, "Thank you very much for moving this matter forward on behalf of those people in society who deserve a lot better from those who have betrayed them."

10.30 am

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on having had the good fortune to be able to introduce the debate and, more important, on the consistency that he has shown in fighting this cause and bringing it to the House's attention on numerous occasions. He has displayed continued determination over getting justice for so many people.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) referred to corporate manslaughter and I agree with him entirely. I would go further and say that there has been corporate fraud. The directors of those companies are nothing short of corporate spivs, as they have given people no support, no protection under the law and little or no opportunity to get decent compensation, which is a fundamental issue because the private sector is not the only party involved and the Government are not blameless. They are not the first to admit liability. Employees who were able to track their work record back have been denied justice and service personnel have been denied justice and told that they must claim.

The statistics are interesting. In the year up to 1998, 11,400 people with asbestos-related illnesses received industrial benefit and 12,900 claimed benefit in 1995. There is a genuine issue here: those who can claim find it difficult to get benefit because of dual diagnosis. They have to go through two hoops, as they have to get their own doctor and a consultant to agree and then convince the Benefits Agency that they have a claim to make. If they are successful, the maximum they are entitled to if they are 100 per cent. disabled because of asbestos-related illness is £108 a week. That may be topped up by other benefits, but only to a maximum of £237 a week.

I am speaking on behalf of a number of my Liberal Democrat colleagues today, and, as is the case for many Members, hardly a day goes by in my constituency

[Mr. Mike Hancock]

without a coroner's court addressing a death from asbestos-related illness. That is not unique to Portsmouth, although the situation is worse in the Portsmouth area because of the high concentration of asbestos in ships and the fact that many of the 40,000 people employed in Her Majesty's dockyard 50 years ago worked with asbestos each day.

I shall give two examples of the difficulties. Mr. Winnicott of Eastney in Portsmouth worked in the building industry for 40 years. He recognised that his asbestos-related cancer was caused by working on the docks in Southampton—the very city that the Minister represents. His only benefit is £22.58 in industrial benefit. He has been to several solicitors, none of whom want to take his case on because of the difficulty of the burden of proof.

The example of Mr. Leigh Tongue shows how such a situation can arise so quickly. Mr. Tongue was a pretty formidable character who led a good life. Early in 2000, just before his death, but before he knew he was ill, he wrote to his colleagues to say that he had a great job, a lovely home, a wife he loved and who loved him and two beautiful children. He added, "Life does not get much better than this." On 29 November 2000, he was diagnosed as having cancer through asbestos. He died on 1 March 2001. He was 44. He had run in the Portsmouth command field gun crew twice and he was a physical training instructor in the Royal Navy. He had a great career in civilian life in front of him, having left the Navy.

I took the case up and the Minister wrote to me to say that Mr. Tongue's wife had redress through the benefits system. The benefits system could never replace what she lost and it is hopelessly misplaced as a solution in respect of compensation for that man's two young children. He was denied at least 20 years of working life and his family have been denied his presence for ever, yet the Government suggest that the benefits system can cope with compensation.

I want a system introduced similar to that for the mining industry. I recently asked questions about miners' compensation. On average, it takes 16 months to process a miner's claim from start to finish under the Government's scheme. In November 2001, they processed 7,000 claims totalling £47 million. The number of claims stands at 173,600; a total of 58,000 have been settled and £238 million has been paid out. There are 133,000 vibration white finger claims and £438 million is being paid out.

I want the same justice to be given to those with asbestos-related illnesses. Many suffer an agonising death and every Member in the Chamber will have had first-hand contact with constituents who went through that. I am dealing with more than 200 cases and 30 have been submitted to Ministers for them to use as a test for introducing a Government-related scheme. All 30 involve Government employment in one form or another. We may criticise private companies, but we are not blameless and it is a national disgrace that this moral obligation has not been taken up sooner.

I am delighted that so many Members are here to have their say. Many people fought their claim, but were denied justice. They went to the grave knowing that their families would have to continue the battle or give up. That simply is not right. We are short of time, but I am pleased to have played a part in the debate. However, I hope that we are doing more than playing a part. The Minister must take back the strong message that the majority of the House of Commons demands action to deal with this issue in the private and Government sectors.

10.37 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Thank you for allowing me to catch your eye, Mr. Stevenson. I shall be brief in order to give the Minister time to respond to the widespread concerns expressed in the Chamber. I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing the debate, and a number of Labour Members and my Liberal colleague, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), on ably expressing the anxieties over this serious issue.

There were 1,595 new cases of asbestos-related disease in 1999 and 678 in 2000. Sadly, those figures are likely to represent a rising trend. The Health and Safety Commission 1993-94 annual report confirmed the continuing upward trend in deaths from asbestos-related diseases in Britain and predicted that the number of such deaths will probably increase until 2010 and possibly 2025. That is a serious problem and it will get worse.

Much has been made of the way in which Chester Insurance Holdings Ltd. was able to become insolvent and avoid its liabilities. The Government should look into that very carefully. The Financial Services Authority needs to take much tougher action in this respect. Without rehearsing the whole history of how the company went into insolvency, it is worth remembering that it was taken over by an American company whose rules on chapter 11 corporate insolvency are considerably different. It has used those rules deliberately to avoid its liabilities. Constituents of the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone and others are therefore unlikely to receive the insurance cover to which they are entitled. That is a disgrace, and the Minister should say something about it when he winds up.

I should like the Minister to comment on the various insurance schemes that are available, and on how they are working. We know that the insurance industry—through the Policyholders Protection Board—

> "will ensure that private sector employer companies, or, where that employer no longer exists or is insolvent, the affected individuals, receive 100 per cent. of compensation awarded in respect of injuries incurred after 1972 (1975 in NI)(up to the statutory limit of £2 million per claim).
>
> For injuries sustained prior to 1972 . . . employees whose private sector employer no longer exists or is insolvent, will receive payment of 90 per cent. of the compensation they would have been entitled to from their employers."

It would be useful to know from the Minister how the two schemes are working. We know that the pneumoconiosis claims scheme in the mining industry is working quite well. There is inconsistency, in that miners can receive quite generous compensation—

Ian Stewart (Eccles): Well deserved.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It is well deserved. I am casting no aspersions, nor am I wishing to downplay the deservedness of miners' cases. I am merely seeking to highlight the fact that they are getting generous compensation while people with asbestos claims are suffering and are not receiving the same generous treatment for the same type or class of disease. The Government should look at the issue in the round and make sure that the two sets of claimants are receiving the same sort of compensation.

In order to give the Minister plenty of time to reply, I will bring my remarks to a close. He has much of substance to deal with. Many Members have raised concerns today about a huge issue that affects many constituents, particularly in certain constituencies. It will be interesting to hear what the Minister has to say.

10.42 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): First, I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing the debate. The attendance and the forcefully expressed sentiments of hon. Members this morning underline the importance of the issue and the need to ensure that we deal with it in a way that provides justice and reflects the severity of certain people's plight and the speedy loss of life that can occur after mesothelioma has been diagnosed in patients.

There is a need to ensure that compensation, where it is required, is delivered speedily and effectively to those who have contracted those awful diseases as a result of their work, or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has said, as a result simply of being in a certain neighbourhood where an industrial process is taking place.

I am aware of the efforts that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone has made, and continues to make, on behalf of the sufferers of dust-related diseases. The Government are very sympathetic about the concerns that he has expressed about many issues, particularly the effect of the recent judgment of the Court of Appeal on the Fairchild case on sufferers from work-related mesothelioma who wish to claim compensation and who feel that their scope for bringing claims against employers in the courts has been reduced.

My Department has a particular interest in the matter, to the extent that we administer a scheme—the pneumoconiosis (workers' compensation) scheme—that provides for the payment of compensation to sufferers of certain dust-related diseases who are unable to obtain redress in the courts because the employer has gone out of business and there is therefore no one at whom they can direct a legal action. We have received inquiries about the effect of the ruling on the pneumoconiosis (workers' compensation) scheme, as set up by the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979.

It is worth emphasising that, overwhelmingly these days, the compensation scheme does not provide compensation for miners. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) indicated the existence of the separate miners' scheme. Overwhelmingly those people who are provided with compensation have not spent their working lives in the mining industry.

Members are also right to say that the number of cases and claims is rising and that that is likely to continue for some time. Indeed, the number of claims made in the last complete year of the scheme stood at almost 1,000, whereas the number of payments to date over the 20 years from 1980 is less than 10,000. Those payments are clearly going up annually at present.

It might be helpful if I outlined the Fairchild judgment and what it means. One might liken some of the considerations in the Fairchild case to the consequences of the legal proceedings following an attack on a passer-by by six hoodlums. Witnesses have said that the passer-by was beaten-up by a group that they can identify, but because they cannot state with certainty who landed the blows and kicks, no one is prosecuted. That seems to defy common sense. The Fairchild judgment—whether or not it is correct in terms of the exact legal definition—frankly seems to lack justice in terms of people's judgment of the concept of a just outcome to a certain event.

The Court of Appeal commented that for the claimants not to receive compensation was a major injustice—it said that its own judgment was a major injustice—and that it was one that should be remedied by express statutory provision or by an agreed insurance industry compensation scheme. There is a fine balance to be struck. It could be said that unfairness would have been created whichever way the Court of Appeal had ruled, resulting either in the claimants not receiving compensation or defendants having to pay damages for injuries for which they may not have been responsible.

In the six appeals that the Court of Appeal heard, it decided upon three different issues that arise in cases where a claimant suffers or may suffer asbestos-induced mesothelioma after being exposed to asbestos dust having worked for more than one employer. Historically, there have been cases where the proportion of the compensation between different employers has effectively been worked out as a method of joint payment. The Fairchild judgment appears to suggest somehow that that route produces injustice to the employer. That is not entirely in accordance with common sense.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): The funeral will take place tomorrow of my neighbour and constituent Mike Ledger. He worked for two employers, and worked with asbestos for one, Harworth Glass Bulbs, for 33 years. How could justice be served proportionately by deeming that the 33 out of the 39 years of his working life that he worked with asbestos were not relevant to the cause of his death?

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The commonsense view of what has happened to my hon. Friend's constituent would fly in the face of the direction of the Fairchild judgment. We are grappling with that issue.

The judgment suggests that as the claimant cannot establish, on the balance of probabilities, when it was that inhalation took place of the asbestos fibre or fibres that caused a mesothelial cell in the pleura to become

[Dr. Whitehead]

malignant, he cannot show that a particular defendant was responsible for causing the disease, and cannot recover any damages. The Court of Appeal considered that the claimants could not prove on the balance of probabilities which period of exposure caused or materially contributed to the cause of the mesothelioma. Bringing a case when the case has not been made out on the balance of probabilities may impose on an employer with whom the claimant was employed for quite a short time in a long working life liability for the whole of an insidious disease. The Court of Appeal considered that allowing such a claim to succeed would be yielding to a contention that all those who have suffered injury from which someone else should have protected them should be able to recover compensation, even when they are unable to prove who was the culprit.

The Court of Appeal said that the only damages that can be claimed are for contracting the disease. Until the disease develops, the employee does not know that they have an injury capable of giving rise to a cause of action. Once it does develop, he has to establish on the balance of probabilities that the particular defendant caused the disease. None of the claimants in Fairchild could establish that.

The Court of Appeal's judgment made reference to the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979, and the scheme that my Department administers under it. We are looking very closely—we are not simply monitoring what is happening, but are actively involved—at the implications of the Fairchild judgment on the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme and I hope to be able to let my hon. Friends know the outcome of that in due course, and at an early stage.

Mr. Clapham: It would be a travesty if the insurance industry were able to jettison its responsibility and liability and leave it with the taxpayer. If the Minister is exploring the potential use of the pneumoconiosis scheme, I suggest that discussions should be held with the insurance industry with a view to its contributing to the scheme, to enhance it so that it could make reasonable payments.

Dr. Whitehead: Discussions are being held with the insurance industry. I am sure that my hon. Friends will accept that simply introducing a Government scheme that allows all the people who have been mentioned this morning to walk away from their liabilities would not be a satisfactory way forward. It is right, as far as the pneumoconiosis scheme is concerned, that in the first instance action should be taken against former employers of people who contract one of those awful diseases. Only when it is not possible, for various reasons, to establish the liable employer does the pneumoconiosis scheme take over. That is right in principle, but we must balance it against the other point that, because of various activities, some of which hon. Members have mentioned this morning, it is possible that some people—for reasons entirely beyond their influence—will not get the compensation that they deserve, and it is important that the Government take that into account.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Does the Minister accept that some companies have gone into liquidation or otherwise disappeared, but others—as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle)—are using tactics such as voluntarily going into liquidation to avoid liability? They are a very different proposition from the companies that have genuinely gone bust.

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend is right. I was attempting to draw attention to the general principles of the scheme, which should hold. However, in the particular circumstances in which a company has gone into administration or an insurance company has gone into liquidation, we should rightly distinguish between the generality of the principle and the specific circumstances of those cases.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: While the Government consider whether the insurance companies or the employers should bear the liability, people are suffering and many will die. Can the Minister give us some assurance that the Government will consider the problem urgently and ensure that—unlike the pneumoconiosis scheme in the mining industry—a scheme is drawn up quickly and people get the money to which they are entitled?

Dr. Whitehead: The Government are urgently considering the issue, for precisely the reasons that I have mentioned. It would not be right for the Government to stand aside while the issues are debated protractedly, to the detriment of those people who have deserving claims. At the same time, it is important that the principle of the pneumoconiosis scheme is upheld. As hon. Members have agreed, it is not right that companies that are properly liable should simply be able to walk away because a scheme has been put in place that somehow absolves them of that liability.

Mr. Lloyd: The real concern is that many crooks are involved, some of them in high places in the insurance and other companies. Will my hon. Friend undertake to bring those people together and tell them that if they do not act quickly, the Government will make them act? That is the real issue.

Dr. Whitehead: I would love to be able to do that, but frankly the situation with several of the companies is that the process of legal examination of their positions has to be gone through. The issue is the extent to which—as a result of those legal processes being pursued—injustice is meted out, simply by the effluxion of time, to people who are entitled to receive quick compensation. The Government must ensure that the issues relating to the companies are properly expedited, but at the same time we must not lose sight of the fact that people are suffering while those legal discussions are taking place.

One of the companies involved is Chester Street and I note the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone on that issue. I will ensure that the concerns he raises are investigated and I will write to him. On the question of delays in payments, under the Policyholders' Protection Board scheme the board's processes to validate the claims and make payments are usually completed within one week, once the provisional liquidators' team has brought the claim to settlement point, obtained a signed deed of assignment from the policyholder, satisfied its own tests to establish eligibility for protection and sent the appropriate documentation to the PPB. I share the concerns of my hon. Friend to ensure that all valid claims are paid as quickly as possible to those who are eligible for compensation. The PPB and the provisional liquidators are conscious of the need to speed up the totality of the settlement process and are continuing to work together towards that end.

Mr. Hancock: The Minister has addressed the problems in the private sector. Will he also give an undertaking to speed up the Government's response to claims lodged against them?

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman has made that point and I am happy to write to him.

Tony Worthington: What about shipbuilders?

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend mentions British Shipbuilders and I am happy to undertake to write to him. Indeed, several letters will be sent after the debate, but it is important that the issues are given proper consideration.

Under the insurance industry's scheme, it is taking a total of four to five weeks to settle and pay most claims, including a seven to 10 day turnaround at the Association of British Insurers—the ABI. The insurance industry has paid about £350,000 so far under the scheme. Occasionally, claims may be delayed beyond the time scales indicated. The provisional liquidator has a duty in the interests of the creditors of Chester Street to defend the assets of Chester Street against invalid claims. Some claims are delayed by gathering and evaluating evidence, disputes over liability, and litigation. Those delays would have happened irrespective of Chester Street's insolvency. After 30 November, the financial services compensation scheme has worked with the provisional liquidators to ensure claims which are eligible for payment by FSCS are paid as quickly as possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) mentioned Turner and Newall. Unfortunately, it would take more time than we have to tease out the details of what has happened with Federal Mogul and Turner and Newall. I endorse many of my hon. Friend's comments about what has happened and the effect on those poor people who have been caught up in claims from across the Atlantic in which they have no part and with which they have no power to deal. My hon. Friend mentioned Turner and Newall last week and I know that the legal specialists are working hard to resolve the insurance position. On that occasion, the Minister replied to my hon. Friend that she had asked officials in her Department's insolvency service to keep her in touch with the progress of the case; she also invited him to discuss further with her in the Department the aspects to which he wanted to draw attention.

Metropolitan Police

11 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): A week is a long time in politics. Only seven days ago, in a debate on the London underground in this Chamber, I was bemoaning the fact that, although I had been putting in slips every week, my name was never called to initiate an Adjournment debate. However, as luck would have it, I have been called to speak on a most important issue. I suspect that shows one of two things: one should be persistent or one should moan often enough and someone in the Speaker's Office will look after one.

Metropolitan police funding is important. Letters on the subject have made up a significant element of my constituency postbag during recent weeks and months. I can confidently assume that the same applies to the other 73 London-based MPs.

I accept that the Metropolitan police work under strong constraints. Even the Home Secretary, in his keynote speech in Sheffield last weekend, recognised that policing in London is more problematic than elsewhere.

There is clear evidence of police overstretch in London. I am sure that other London Members will agree that a blind eye is being turned towards what the police might regard as minor crimes, but which none the less cause great anxiety among the stable long-term residential population—for example, aggressive begging and mobile phone theft, which have made the headlines during recent months. There is a also wide feeling in the business community that there is insufficient concentration on ensuring the core responsibility of the police to tackle crime.

Recent press reports, including one in *The Sunday Times* of 6 January from which I shall quote, suggest that

> "people in London are now six times more likely to be assaulted or robbed than the residents of New York, which was once considered the most dangerous city in the world."

Apparently, in November alone, 2.5 in 1,000 inhabitants of London were victims of violent crime compared with 0.4 in 1,000 in New York. In essence, that means that one in 400 people in London was the victim of some form of criminal activity in one month alone. During the past three years, muggings have risen by about 28 per cent. Violent crime in London outstrips even such hot spots as Chicago, Los Angeles or Detroit.

I realise that the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs will want to comment on the comparisons with the other side of the Atlantic as well as those within the UK, but it is simplistic to compare the London experience directly with that of New York. However, it is interesting to note the divergence in crime and, most important, in public confidence in security over the past five years. Under Mayor Giuliani and his team, New York has adopted a high-profile zero tolerance policy that has concentrated on ensuring visible and aggressive policing in neighbourhoods that previously suffered high crime rates. That has resulted in the prosecution of even relatively minor offences.

I want to say a few words about retention and recruitment in London—two of the most important issues—and to give a London overview. Obviously,

[Mr. Mark Field]

there have been factors that made a difference both pre and post-11 September. Then, if the Minister will forgive me, I want to be a little parochial in relation to Westminster. I see that my Westminster neighbour and colleague, the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) is in the Chamber.

Londoners and the police agree that a high visible police presence is essential, not only to detect criminals but to ensure adequate prevention of crime and to counter the real perception of fear of crime. Successive Home Secretaries have heralded record levels of police recruitment. Such claims pre-date 1997—I do not want to make a narrow party political point about that. They mask a particular problem for the Metropolitan police—retention.

There has been much talk of the inclusion of a new warden rank in London in future years. That will offer an important short-term fix, but it is equally important that the warden rank is not included in all the official statistics, although we accept that front-line policing requires adequate civilian back-up. A raw head count should not be seen as the be-all and end-all of London resourcing.

In 1991, there were about 28,485 police officers in London. That number has been reduced to about 25,500—about 3,000 short of what is widely recognised as the minimum necessary for effective policing of the capital.

From my experience as a relatively new Member of Parliament during the past seven months, representing a most inner-city of inner-city seats, as well as my experience as the prospective candidate during the previous two years, I have realised from speaking to many people that there is a multitude of reasons why officers want to leave the Metropolitan police. The 30-year rule, whereby pension rights are made considerably more attractive, causes real problems that will come to a head during the next few years as a great bulge of the intake come up to that 30-year deadline.

All too often, police officers want to transfer and move to other parts of the UK in order to obtain a better quality of life and standard of living. In recent years, there has been low morale and resignation from the police service as a whole but also directly from the Met.

When I talk to junior police officers, they tell me that London is an exciting place to come to early on in their police careers. A young policeman working in central London and the west end is very much at the centre of things. There is no doubt that the Metropolitan police are able to take on many raw recruits, but that gives rise to many management problems. Many young officers in their early to mid-20s enjoy the experience of working in London, but when they have four or five years' experience under their belt and are just at the threshold of becoming useful officers they move elsewhere. All too often, apart from anything else, that is due to the cost of accommodation. Many police officers, even those working in the centre of London, live in far-flung places in Hertfordshire or Kent. It is thus unsurprising, especially in view of the transport crisis, that the prospect of daily commuting is daunting, notwithstanding the positive initiatives that the Government have taken to help towards transport costs. Such quality of life factors mean that after a while many junior officers decide to move out.

Retention rather than mere recruitment is important. I shall be interested to hear the Minister's comments as to what we might do to address that issue in London.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I agree with the hon. Gentleman that retention will be crucial in sorting out the staffing problems in the London police force over the next few years. Is he aware that the Metropolitan police service has been carrying out exit interviews with officers who have been leaving the force, either to take up other employment or to join other forces? Some of those interviews do not focus as much as one might expect on quality of life issues, but on what are euphemistically described as management issues. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that some of the overall results of those exit interviews need to be made public so that we can understand some of the problems in the Metropolitan police service, especially as regards retention?

Mr. Field: I shall certainly take that on board and I hope that the Minister will have some thoughts on the matter. For obvious reasons, some management-related information would properly need to remain confidential.

One problem relates to one of my earlier points. There is a significant number of extremely young officers in London, many of whom are probationers and trainees. Achieving the correct balance between probationers and experienced officers often means that junior officers feel that they are not getting the on-the-job training that they might receive in other parts of the UK.

I feel strongly about key worker housing, especially in central London. We must try to ensure that key workers, whether in the public or the private sector, are given preference in central London. I appreciate that that is a much broader problem than can be answered in this debate but I wanted to raise it as an important factor. I suspect that there is no political divide on this matter. We all realise that in central London there is a massive polarisation between individuals who are wealthy enough to live in the area and those who qualify for social housing. Unfortunately, that means that the people who are the glue of our society—the people who become shopkeepers, police officers or nurses and who do everything in day-to-day society—do not have the opportunity to live in central London.

I should like some more imaginative thinking to be done on the matter. The Mayor of London, Mr. Livingstone, has put together a rather prescriptive policy that ensures that 50 per cent. of new build will be earmarked for social housing. However, the danger is that a too-prescriptive policy will put developers off building in central London, with the result that we miss out on opportunities. I want the Greater London Authority and local councils to have more leeway when it comes to the allocation of scarce resources.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): The hon. Gentleman may not like my question, but does he agree that the £27 million owed to

Westminster as a result of the homes-for-votes scandals, if we are successful in recovering it, should be directed towards increasing the stock of affordable housing?

Mr. Field: I had a feeling that that might be the hon. Lady's line of questioning, but I should prefer to draw a slight veil over that matter. An amount of money is due to Westminster city council, which is taking action to recover the funds. Clearly, that money would make some difference.

I turn now to the important question of national pay bargaining. The London weighting is totally inadequate to take account of the cost of living in London. Far more significant premiums should be paid, and I know that London Members have been asked in the past few weeks to make representations to the GLA about London weighting. The debate should cover quality-of-life issues as well as the expense of housing and transport, although I accept that the Home Office has moved in the right direction in relation to transport costs in the past few years.

As a central London Member, I know that many of my constituents owe a great debt to the increased numbers of officers on anti-terrorist duty since 11 September. Clearly, though, having more police on the streets of Westminster and the City of London has been to the detriment of many suburban areas.

I appreciate that the debate is about the Metropolitan police, but my constituency also covers the City of London, and I wish to devote a brief aside to the City of London police, who are under intense pressure. Although the 3 per cent. capital city allocation in the Metropolitan police budget recognises that extra resources are needed to provide national and capital city functions, as well as to police the very shop window of what is a large part of central London, it is wholly inadequate. That was true even before the heightened tension of the international terrorist crisis.

The City of London police's anti-terrorism responsibilities are of a continuing nature, as is the international remit involved in the protection of the constant stream of VIPs who come to the City for both business and ceremonial purposes. However, I share the disappointment felt by many central London Members at the one-size-fits-all approach to the entirety of London policing adopted by the Metropolitan police authority when it comes to calculating its resource allocation formula. That approach fails to recognise the different strains felt by different parts of London.

I am also very concerned at the zero-sum game that effectively means that central London must suffer if the suburbs are to get more money. I hope that the Metropolitan police authority and the Home Office will ensure that London gets the larger slice of the financial cake that is its right.

There has also been insufficient recognition of the fact that London is the economic powerhouse of the country. The city also makes enormous earnings from international investment and tourism. Mayor Livingstone is proposing additional burdens for the Metropolitan police, who are expected to transfer scarce resources to the enforcement of the new bus lanes. The police will also have to enforce the congestion charging zones, assuming that the scheme comes into force as planned from next February. We must get the priorities right, as the relatively modest 3 per cent. increase in the Metropolitan police funding has been accompanied by a whopping increase of 41 per cent. in the demands on the force's headquarters.

Above all, Londoners deserve better. Public services such as health, transport and policing are deteriorating while London tries to perform a role as a truly global centre. As I said, London is the economic powerhouse of the country, and central Government should ensure that we are rewarded for the important role that we play.

Slightly parochially, I wish to speak about a police section house in Soho called Trenchard house. Not everyone in the district, or beyond, will be familiar with it, but the Metropolitan police authority wants to sell it off, for short-term financial reasons. I do not expect the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs, who will respond to the debate, to comment now, but I hope that he will come back to me about the matter at another time.

I recognise that that is not, strictly speaking, a Home Office matter, as I wrote to the Minister in November and received a reply in those terms. However, given the housing shortage in central London, it is a source of great concern that Trenchard house could be disposed of. That would fly in the face of what the police are trying to achieve in other ways with regard to retaining staff.

Since 1995, the number of police officers in Westminster has fallen by some 28 per cent., or about 600. That compares to a drop of about 7 per cent. in the number of officers in London as a whole. The residential population in the city of Westminster, which covers a large chunk of my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North, has risen by some 30 per cent. in the past seven years. There has also been a 12 per cent. rise in net employment over the past five years. Some 900,000 people come to work in my constituency every day of the working week.

The current police work force in Westminster is about 1,513 officers. The proposal is that, as of the end of March, the figure will rise to about 1,650, although that depends on the Mayor of London delivering the 1,000 or so additional officers that he has proposed. However, a strict application of the resource allocation formula that applies to the whole of London policing suggests that Westminster is entitled only to 1,418 officers. It has been agreed that there will not be a reduction in the number of officers in Westminster, but the 1,418 figure will be used as a baseline for future reference.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman with increasing hidden fury. He is making his case for Westminster, and I hope, if I catch your eye later, Mr. Stevenson, to make some points about Barnet at greater length. In Barnet, we have twice Westminster's residential population, but only a third as many police officers. The geographical area in Barnet is such that the whole of Westminster could fit into two of my council wards. The hon. Gentleman is somewhat over-pleading his case.

Mr. Field: In a sense, that is my role, and I suggest that the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) would probably have made a similar case before May 1997, when he was a city councillor in Westminster. However, my argument is that there should be a bigger cake, and I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman should get furious at what I am saying.

[Mr. Field]

I do not believe that we should be playing a zero-sum game, so I do not suggest that funding should be taken away from the suburbs, which I fully appreciate face some major policing problems. We need considerably more police throughout London. Central Governments, both before and after 1997, have benefited from the party-political squabbling among hon. Members with London constituencies. I think that we should all work together in this matter.

The current formula gives considerably greater weight to the perception of need than to demand. That puts inner London at a strong disadvantage. For example, the capital city allocation is very much top sliced rather than needs driven. That allocation should reflect the special circumstances of policing in central London, taking account of state visits, ceremonial events, state security, and all the royal and diplomatic protection that has to be provided.

At present, the allocation offers only an additional 360 officers for Westminster as a whole. That does not cover the enormous task of managing the streets in the face of weekly demonstrations and the very real late-night disorder that officers encounter. Hundreds of often inebriated revellers remain on the streets of places such as Soho and Covent Garden because they are unable to get home.

Central London also plays an important role in implementing some very high-profile and labour-intensive schemes such as the rough sleepers initiative. I appreciate that extra Government funding has been made available for some of those tasks, but they are massively labour intensive. I have spoken to Superintendent Burman and Inspector Walsh at the Belgravia station, who have played an important role in developing that initiative.

I should also mention Operation Lilac, in which Westminster works alongside Camden. I spent half a day at Savile Row station with Superintendent Ingledew and saw how hard the officers there work. Such initiatives are high profile and trend setting, and are enormously labour intensive. The necessary funding has to be available. Exceptions must therefore be made for London as a whole, and for central London in particular.

I appreciate that several other hon. Members would like to speak, so I shall wind up my speech by making a few comments. All that I have said must be viewed in the light of the determination in central London to create a better quality of life, not just for the residential population—important thought that is—but for the 900,000 workers who come here every day and, indeed, the tourists who spend enormous sums each year to ensure that we have a thriving economy.

I have worked with Westminster city council, alongside my Labour counterpart, the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North. We have individually undertaken large-scale consultation exercises with the public in the past year, and local policies have been developed in the light of many of those results.

An integral part of the civic renewal and regeneration of each of England's cities involves rapid and firm action against antisocial behaviour, which requires labour-intensive policing. We need sufficient resources for effective policing, as well as concrete policies to compensate adequately for the much higher living costs in the capital and to ensure that we have good and stable levels of staffing in our police service.

I would plead that urgent action needs to be taken by the Home Office to ensure that Londoners get a fair deal. I draw the Government's attention to the demographic time-bomb, which is likely to result in the significant departure of many senior police officers in the next five to 10 years, and ask for an assurance today that well-thought-out steps will be taken to ward off what could be a very problematic development.

Finally, I welcome the high-profile initiatives mentioned in the national news last week. Sir John Stevens, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, is ensuring that 315 traffic police will be redeployed to front-line street duties, but that is a drop in the ocean in relation to London. I reiterate the fact that we are roughly 3,000 policemen short and crime—more importantly, the fear of crime—grows almost daily for many residents.

11.22 am

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on securing this debate. I share many of the concerns that he has expressed, which I shall deal with a little later, but I shall concentrate my remarks on three things. First, I want to comment on the level of policing in London, and I will support and underpin what he has said about that in many ways. Secondly, I shall talk about the impact of the resource allocation formula on Westminster. Thirdly, I shall talk about the fight against crime and antisocial behaviour, the responsibilities and duties of the local authorities and the way in which the Government have sought to support Westminster council and Kensington council in doing that work, and I have a couple of criticisms to make of the local authorities in that respect.

I should like to place on record my warm congratulations to the police teams in Westminster and the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea on the work that they have done over the years, especially since 11 September. One of Britain's major mosques—the Regent's Park mosque—and the Muslim cultural heritage centre are in my constituency. I have heard nothing but praise from the directors of both those organisations for the way that the police responded swiftly and thoughtfully to the events of 11 September. Since then, the police have worked closely with the local communities in monitoring the risk of racial incidents and in helping to defuse any of those tensions, and it is right to praise them for their work.

I should also like to praise the work of my local police teams in the general fight against crime and antisocial behaviour, which is a serious problem on my constituency's streets and estates. There is no doubt that crime and the fear of crime, and antisocial behaviour, which are distinct but related issues, represent the top or the second from top concern of almost all my constituency's residents.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster talked about the case for London, and I strongly support that case. It is on record that police numbers have declined to a most unsatisfactory level during most of the past decade, although the figures are now rising again, and I shall refer to that fact in my closing remarks. We should be pleased that the tide is definitely turning, but the decline has been substantial and long term. It is undoubtedly the case that police on the beat may not always represent the most effective way to stop crime and catch criminals, but it is none the less true, as policing since 11 September has confirmed, that high-level, visible policing is greatly appreciated by communities and has a knock-on consequence for people's sense of care for their community and in reducing the fear of crime, so allowing more people to go out and about without fear.

I fear that, for many years, London's special needs have not been fully recognised in the funding of the police service, as the hon. Gentleman has said. London has extraordinary costs, especially in relation to housing. That has been mentioned, so I shall not go into detail, but I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments on the recruitment and retention difficulties in the London police service, and housing costs are a key part of that.

We have had rapid population growth in the past few years, as a consequence of which our communities are extraordinarily diverse, which is a challenge for every public service—health, education and policing. That diversity is exciting, but it undoubtedly presents a challenge and involves several cost pressures.

I ask the Minister to consider—I have told the Metropolitan police authority about this, and I believe it to my core—that we need to address more seriously the fact that London, and central London in particular, has the highest incidence of mental ill health in the country. It is a recorded fact that Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster health authority has the highest incidence of mental ill health, especially psychotic illness, in the country. There is no question but that mental ill health is closely related to the pressures on police services. It is about time that all the agencies involved began to collect systematic and comparable data on mental health services and their implications for policing, so that we have an indicator that would be of considerable benefit to virtually every part of the London police service.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I, too, was a little disappointed by this year's settlement for the Metropolitan police service. Although I am sure that there is scope for further efficiency savings, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will use his powers with the Chancellor in the comprehensive spending review to urge for a better deal for the police service, especially the Metropolitan police service, in the forthcoming spending round. Further settlements along the lines of that which we have had will not be sustainable. That has been underpinned by Ian Blair, the deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan police service. In giving evidence on the budget to the Metropolitan police authority, he said that, although he can manage with the budget proposed for this year, any further reduction or additional non-Treasury-funded expenses would be impossible to manage. It is clearly not the case that this year's settlement has been generous, and we need to press the case for a more generous settlement for the Metropolitan police in future.

Mr. Edward Davey: I agree with the hon. Lady's point about the comprehensive spending review settlement for the Metropolitan police, but does she agree with the bid submitted by the Metropolitan police authority for the forthcoming budget for the 2002-03 financial year, in which they have asked for £97 million to assist in the extra work that they need to undertake next year to tackle the capital's extra security problems? We need an early decision on that request; we can wait no longer. The Home Office needs to assure the Metropolitan police authority and the Greater London Authority that £97 million will be forthcoming, so that, on 13 February, the GLA can set the budget with some certainty that it will have that Home Office grant.

Ms Buck: I am certainly happy to support the principle that there should be an early decision. I have not gone through the budget in detail, so I cannot say whether I would agree with every dot and comma, but I certainly agree that the earlier that decision is taken the better.

My second set of comments is on the resource allocation formula. I hit the roof when I saw the first draft—I think it was a leaked draft—of the resource allocation formula figures, for the reasons that the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster has also outlined. I am afraid that the resource allocation formula process was not handled well. Lessons need to be learned from that, because much misinformation was put out. People were allowed to panic when they saw the first draft and before they were reassured that the process was a consultative one. That was deeply regrettable.

I welcome the fact that, as a result of the consultation process, the worst-case figures were to some extent ameliorated. The "pure" resource allocation formula for Westminster began with the figure of 1,410 and ended up with 1,541. In Kensington, it began with the figure of 498 and ended up with 544. We finished better off than we first thought and with no loss against the highest point figures for 2001.

I have spoken to borough commanders about the issue on a number of occasions, and the borough commander of the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea is not dissatisfied. He would happily support claims—I am sure that this is true of others—for additional policing resources, but he is certainly not saying that the final settlement in the resource allocation formula is unsatisfactory.

However, I am afraid that I will now come close to terminating a 20-year close personal friendship with my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) by saying that central London has a powerful case, and we sought to make it when we clawed back on the worst figures in the resource allocation formula. However, that case has not been properly accommodated, given the high crime figures in central London and the high day-time and night-time populations in central Westminster. They are the result of the tourist trade, on which criminals seeks to prey, and the fact that people congregate in licensed establishments at night.

[Ms Buck]

The crime figures in themselves justify a much higher level of policing in central London than in many other areas. It is completely counter-intuitive for the resource allocation formula not to have supported claims for additional policing, given the extent of crime in central London.

There is also the popular assumption that Westminster and Kensington are uniformly prosperous boroughs, and they do indeed include some of the most prosperous areas in the country. However, there are also high levels of deprivation in both, and they are almost exclusively in my constituency. As on so many other issues, we suffer from the tyranny of the average, whereby acute pockets of deprivation do not always receive the attention and the resources that they deserve because of the way in which the prosperity of Belgravia and Knightsbridge flattens out the borough-wide figures. In the arguments about the resource allocation formula, it was pointed out that deprivation is an indicator for police resources and that people from deprived areas come to central London and Westminster to take advantage of the presence of the large day-time population there.

As the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster pointed out, Kensington and Westminster have taken a disproportionately large cut in police numbers over the last decade. To my intense dissatisfaction, that fact was initially denied when I made representations on the resource allocation formula and was told that there was no evidence that Westminster and Kensington had received a larger cut than anywhere else.

However, I received an answer to a parliamentary question at the end of October last year and it demonstrated that in 1993, which is when the decline set in, the City of Westminster had 1,901 police officers but only 1,642 in September 2001. Kensington had 655 police officers in 1993, but only 577 last year. The fall in numbers in those two areas was significantly higher than the fall in numbers in the Metropolitan police as a whole. The position has been worsened by the fact that police strength is significantly lower than the numbers for the work force that have been budgeted for, which means that in practice significantly fewer police are available for duty on the streets and estates than there should be.

Although I am not as unhappy as I was when the resource allocation formula first came out, I cannot claim to be satisfied with the level of police services in Westminster or Kensington. I would strongly support any arguments in favour of additional resources for the Metropolitan police authority as a whole and for central London to have its share of those resources.

Although police numbers are rising—that is extremely welcome—it is obvious that, no matter how many police we recruit, it is unlikely that police officers will be available on the streets when most crimes are committed. We know the figure for the chances of a police officer stumbling across a crime being committed. We must therefore ensure that policies and strategies are set in place to reduce the incidence of crime. The Government have done a great deal on that and helped the local authorities that have a critical front-line role in helping to tackle crime. For example, Westminster received a grant of just under £2 million to help it to tackle—I am afraid I am straying into the hon. Gentleman's constituency—crime in the Charing Cross area. It has suffered seriously as a result of the drugs trade and associated crime.

More locally, Westminster and Kensington have both received Government funding from the neighbourhood renewal fund, which has been directed towards helping to improve security and tackling crime in the deprived areas of the boroughs. The councils also received a 7 per cent. increase in their general funding this year, which is the equal highest in the country. The local authorities have had the assistance that they need—I accept that there is always a case for more—to tackle the causes of crime. They have introduced practical security measures and have attempted to divert young people at risk of offending by providing alternative activities for them.

My criticism, however, results from the fact that Westminster council in particular has a deplorable record on that front. Its youth service was a disgrace and Ofsted strongly condemned it. In practical terms, in most areas of the constituency there is little or nothing for young people to do and there has not been for years. That is beginning to change but almost exclusively because of central Government support through single regeneration budget funding and the neighbourhood renewal fund.

Mr. Mark Field: I cannot resist the temptation to defend the honour of Westminster council. Clearly, it is well appreciated that its youth department has suffered difficulties as a result of the borough's geography. However, in fairness, as the hon. Lady knows, education results have improved in the past two or three years and it must be pointed out that social services—

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. We do not want to get into a debate on education or social services. Will the hon. Gentleman make his point briefly in his intervention?

Mr. Field: I just wanted to say that the social services department has received a benchmark award in recent years. Although I do not suggest that everything is wonderful, there have been positive developments. The department is making its contribution to the quality of life issues that we are debating.

Ms Buck: I will not argue about that, but my central point was that the council's record on youth services has been absolutely deplorable. Young people excluded from school are on the streets, and there is a long way to go before the situation is turned round.

I know that other Members wish to speak, so I shall draw my remarks to a close. However, I must point out that on a cluster of estates—the Amberley estate, the Lydford estate, the Avenue Gardens estate, the Hall Place estate, the Church Street estate and around Scott Ellis gardens and the Lisson Green estate—we face serious problems with what is usually lower-level crime and antisocial behaviour. That is directly linked to the failure to sort out the services, support and intervention for young people at risk of committing crime.

Street lighting services, which can also help to prevent crime, are appalling in some areas of the borough. Last year, Westminster council had to admit that it had lost control of the street lighting contract, plunging areas into darkness and creating a muggers paradise. I live in north Westminster in what is virtually tunnel, so I can substantiate that point from my experience. Local authorities can do a great deal through environmental and social measures to prevent crime at every level, but Westminster council does not do anything like enough on that. To coin a phrase, we have to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Local authorities are at the forefront of that and not doing a terribly good job.

In summary, I am delighted that police numbers in London as a whole are rising after many years of decline. There is a strong case, which I support, for more police overall. There is also a strong case for additional police resources in Westminster and Kensington because of our high levels of crime, the day-time population and the deprivation in parts on those boroughs. That has not been properly accommodated in the resource allocation formula, and I will continue to make that case. The local authority can do much more to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour.

I strongly support the Commissioner's proposals to introduce auxiliary support to help the police in their work. There is a great deal that the police can do to free up police officers for a front-line policing role by using people to act as their eyes and ears in the community. I once again congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster on securing this helpful debate.

11.41 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on giving us another opportunity to discuss police resourcing and the wider issues of policing in London.

I often find myself whingeing on in Westminster Hall and the House about what we want in Hillingdon. As that makes me sound a bit more like Victor Meldrew than I should, let me start by saying that the previous formula for resourcing was incomprehensible and what we have now is a vast improvement—but I would think that because the London borough of Hillingdon is a winner. However, that is relative because it was a loser for so long, with a constant erosion of police officers. We need an extra 93 officers to reach a target strength of 463. That might, on the surface, seem a good target and it is welcome, but it should be seen against what we have lost over the years. People in Hillingdon are happy to have those extra officers, but it does not mean that the problem is solved.

My hon. Friend referred to the danger of party political squabbles, and it is fair to pay tribute to my two colleagues whose constituencies are also in the London borough of Hillingdon—my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). We have put aside party political matters to work together with the London borough of Hillingdon and the excellent police consultative committee. I hope that our unified front has helped us to obtain the increase.

In addition to the constant erosion of police numbers in Hillingdon, the civilian work force has been cut by 30 per cent. so we still have many gripes. Staffed front counters are virtually non-existent in police stations—not that there are many in my borough. It is difficult to find a front counter in West Drayton that is open for more than a couple of hours a week, which is a source of great annoyance to my constituents. There has also been a huge increase in the precept that we have to pay.

I do not want to enter into an argument in which the suburbs and the centre of London square up against each other, although Labour and Conservative MPs are present in roughly equal numbers today. The point has been made that we should all argue strongly for increased funding for the Metropolitan police because London is a diverse and special case. It is not just the centre that has problems; the suburbs also have peculiar problems. My borough is diverse. It covers a large area and it is important to recognise its problems.

I want to draw the attention of hon. Members to an excellent pilot scheme that started last Friday evening, when I went out with the local police force. It is trying to be more visible and a large number of vehicles and officers were on the streets to stop antisocial behaviour. It was interesting to discover that many of the people who were involved in under-age drinking were known to the police as burglars and petty criminals. There is a strong tie between the two. People ask whether tackling under-age drinking is a priority—it should be because it is where crime can start: we picked up a young 13-year-old with a knife, and there were other incidents.

I know that most Members of Parliament go out with their local force and it is a real eye opener. I was struck by the sheer size of the division. When a call comes in, it could be for eight or nine miles away. The traffic in the borough, even in the evenings, is not conducive to getting there quickly, which is another source of great annoyance to the public.

The problem with the increase in police numbers in Hillingdon is that it is a target. I emphasise the need for recruitment and retention. We have problems similar to those in central London. The price of housing in suburbia is sky high. There is a great temptation for officers, once they have trained with the Met, to go to other forces where they have a better standard of living. They want to be in the Met, but the housing problem puts them off. I acknowledge that a Conservative Government sold off the housing stock. In retrospect, that was possibly an accountant's move and it has been a problem. Although there has been a climbdown on the Golden Jubilee medal, the five-year service cut-off is a source of great annoyance. At a time when we are trying to recruit and retain people, such small things add up and cause more frustration.

Hillingdon has started a scheme to use street wardens. Although it is welcome in some ways, the police told me that it creates serious problems. The police receive, as I saw at first hand, little respect from certain sections of the community and the street wardens will have even less. Indeed, the police were recently called out to rescue them from an unpleasant incident.

I should like to know how the recruitment of special constables is proceeding. Two specials were on the exercise that I attended and it was interesting to hear their views. One WPC said that she was happy in her usual job, but going out with the specials at the weekend was the highlight of her week. The sergeant who was with her was working hard to recruit her for the regulars

[Mr. John Randall]

and I hope that that works out. That must be a good way to get people into the force so that they can see what it is really like.

I make one plea, which I have made before, on behalf of a Cinderella part of the Metropolitan police. The wildlife service investigates wildlife crime. Although that might seem insignificant, much of that crime involves unsavoury people and is often linked to organised crime. It does not sound as serious as the major incidents that we hear about, but the department must not be forgotten.

I hope that we do not divide ourselves into suburbia and central areas and that we fight hard together, whatever Government are in power, to ensure that we get more funding for the Metropolitan police and more police officers on the beat who are visible to our constituents.

11.49 am

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on securing this important debate. I should declare an interest in that the Police Federation is a client of my law firm; however, the views I express may not coincide with its policy, as I have not discussed them with the federation.

I agree with the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall): we should not turn this into a suburbs versus inner-city debate. I hope that my remarks will be seen in the context of needing more police officers in London as a whole, as well as the resources to pay for that. To some extent, the changes to the resource allocation formula have been a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. I shall focus on that aspect.

I was pleased with the original draft of the resource allocation formula, because it would have resulted in a significant increase in the number of police officers in Barnet—the original allocation approached 600. I am therefore horrified that the net result has been, in effect, a transfer of the proposed increase in numbers from Barnet and other suburbs to inner-city areas, no doubt after special pleading from the two MPs for Westminster, the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster and my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck). The formula has not dealt fairly with inner and outer London. Under the "pure" RAF formula, Westminster would have had 1,410 officers, but under the "no losers" formula, which rigs the system, it ends up with 131 more officers than it is justified in having, and those officers to some extent come at the expense of outer London.

I emphasise the capital city formula, which includes an extra 360 officers for Westminster and 50 for Kensington and Chelsea but does not prevent demands being made on outer-London boroughs for additional police officers to support special operations. My chief superintendent told me this morning that only last night, at the drop of a hat, local police were asked to provide one sergeant and six constables from the late turn—one third of the officers available for patrolling in our borough—to support special operations. Given all the additional officers they have received, it is a bit rich for other forces to expect us to provide even more for special operations.

I am pleased that the number of officers available in Barnet is to increase by 50 from a low of 485 in April last year. With a target of 535, we now have 522.79 officers. My borough commander took some trouble to explain to me how it is possible to have 0.79 of an officer; I am still not sure I understand, but I am sure that there is a logical reason. None the less, with the police college in Hendon full to the seams with recruits, it is somewhat irksome that the patch in which it is situated is short of police officers. I also question the use of the commissioners' judgment formula, which strikes me as a bit of a fiddle. It seems that numbers are just thrown up in the air, and decisions are made on the final outcome, irrespective of analysis.

The net result is two-tier policing in London. I have experience of policing in Westminster and in my Hendon constituency. If I call the police from my Westminster flat, they will arrive in two or three minutes if the call is urgent; if I make the same call from my flat in Burnt Oak, I am lucky to get a turnout within half an hour. That is not an unusual result from a comparison between outer and inner-London. It is wholly unacceptable that such two-tier policing is developing.

Mr. Mark Field: Might that have something to do with the fact that the hon. Gentleman was more respected as a councillor in Westminster than he is as an Member of Parliament in Hendon?

Mr. Dismore: That may be so, but I dispute it. I never plead rank when I call any of the emergency services, and it would be wholly improper to do so. I doubt that the person who answers the 999 call knows me from Adam.

When the hon. Gentleman talks about the threat of terrorism, he ignores reality. I believe that Hendon has suffered more bomb attacks than any other constituency. Last year, there were two bomb attacks in Hendon. Recent years have witnessed the bomb attack that blew up the flyover at Brent Cross and one on Mill Hill barracks. To suggest that terrorism is confined to inner London is wrong. Resources to fight terrorism should be allocated more fairly across the city.

We must bear in mind the geography of outer London compared to that of inner London. The central activity zone of Westminster covers about half a square mile—an area that would fit into a polling district in my constituency. The whole of Westminster would fit into two of my wards, yet we have only a third of the number of police officers to police the same area with twice the night time population. Geography creates serious problems for officers trying to get from one end of the borough to the other. That, too, leads to two-tier policing.

It is important to examine the reforms that are to be made. Auxiliaries are an interesting and welcome idea which builds on the neighbourhood warden services which are growing throughout London. The hon. Member for Uxbridge commented on his local service, but I have nothing but praise for the system introduced by the London borough of Barnet. We have a growing neighbourhood warden service, which has been well received by the local community, at a price of 14p a week on the council tax. The service works well with the Metropolitan police and has already scored some remarkable successes, even though it has been going for only a few months.

We should consider the extent to which jobs done by uniformed officers could be carried out by civilians. Those civilian workers should be paid properly. I have been told by my local police station that there is a freeze on recruitment of civilians. That is a false economy. We should also examine the issue of long-term sickness and recuperative duties. This morning, my chief superintendent told me that 50 of her officers—10 per cent. of the total officer force potentially available to her—are currently either long-term sick or on recuperative duties.

I welcome the decision in the short term to transfer traffic officers to the boroughs for front-line policing, but I hope that in the long term it will be possible to replace those officers on traffic duties. Perhaps we might establish a traffic police force, building on the traffic warden service, using people who are traffic wardens but training them properly to carry out more traffic enforcement activities, which are an important task. I do not want people to have to consider whether it is better to be mugged than to be run down by a speeding motorist, which is the sort of decision that we might have to make.

A traffic police force might be a welcome long-term development. All of us have been told by police officers that when they catch someone for speeding they are often asked, "Why aren't you out catching burglars?" A traffic police officer could respond, "It's not my job to catch burglars. I catch speeding motorists."

We should also examine police service shift patterns. I know that a lot of work has been done in that respect lately. Negotiations are under way with the Police Federation and the Metropolitan police to ensure that police are on the street at the times they are needed, not at the times the shift pattern dictates they should be there.

We must recognise that the police cannot do everything. We impose unreasonable demands on our police service, whether through people making daft 999 calls, or expecting them to investigate trivial crimes to the nth degree. Barnet police service has taken wonderful strides to target policing and concentrate on crime hot spots, and it has reaped dividends from an intelligence-based approach. We expect too much from our police, and not only in the light of resources, although more resources are needed throughout London. We must be realistic and fair about what we expect them to do.

In closing, I pay tribute to Chief Superintendent Akers, my borough commander, who has worked hard to build links with the local community and ensure that local police priorities reflect the needs and demands of the community. I also pay tribute to her hard-working and overstretched officers, who provide an excellent service despite all the demands on them, which, in some cases, are somewhat unreasonable.

11.58 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on securing this helpful debate. I also congratulate Sir John Stevens and his team at New Scotland Yard: whenever I have had dealings with them, they have been both courteous and extremely helpful. Finally, I congratulate Commander Brathwaite, who leads the Kingston division. I have met and spoken with police officers in my area and I am amazed by how overstretched they are. They have to make difficult decisions and fine judgments. My conversations and meetings with them fill me with admiration for their work. That is why debates such as this, and their tenor, are welcome.

The debate has focused on resources for the Metropolitan police. There are two sources: the Home Office and council tax payers in London. I want to have a pop at the Home Office, because I do not believe that its grant to the Metropolitan police authority is sufficient.

I suspect that all hon. Members would agree that there is a case for a larger Home Office grant. Under the Conservative Government in 1995, an adjustment was made to the formula between the different constabularies. I hope that the Minister can assure us that we will not see the like of that again. There is supposed to be one more round of transitional adjustment to implement that 1995 decision, which would work against London, but I hope that the Government will cancel it and reconsider the issue. London's share of the overall cake is not sufficient.

In speculating about how that problem has come about, I wondered whether it was because London has only one voice on the Association of Chief Police Officers, and whether the greater number of chief constables in other parts of the country has outgunned Sir John Stevens and his predecessor, good though they may be at arguing London's case on that body. Will the Minister ensure that in future we do not allow that weighting against London on ACPO?

The evidence from the front line is that London is under-policed, and I am sure that that is felt in all our constituencies. I sometimes wonder whether there is greater inefficiency in constabularies in other parts of the country.

I am delighted that we now have a Metropolitan police authority that can argue London's case. That is an important development, but the authority needs to work with London Members to ratchet up the call for a better deal for London.

In my intervention on the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), I mentioned the MPA's bid to the Home Office for another £97 million for 2002-03 to take account of the extra activities that are having to be undertaken to deal with the terrorist threat. The MPA is still waiting for an answer from the Home Office, even though it must set its budget as soon as the middle of February. It would be nonsense if the Government could not give the MPA an answer on that, and I hope that they will agree to that bid in full, so that London has the Home Office support that it needs to deal with that threat.

Other issues relating to the Metropolitan police could do with proper funding from the Home Office. Negotiations on pay are taking place, and we do not know how that will work through. There is a legacy of Home Office inefficiency with regard to the MPA. It is interesting talking to colleagues on the MPA and the Greater London Authority. When they began to scrutinise what has been going on in the Metropolitan police service, they discovered the inefficiencies and inadequate accounting practice that were allowed to continue when the Home Office was in charge.

[Mr. Edward Davey]

The Home Office should be careful when it decides whether to give the MPA less money, because it should apologise for its lack of scrutiny of the Metropolitan police service and its failure to get greater efficiency. At least in the short term, while the MPA is doing its job of scrutinising the service, the people of London should not lose out due to long-term Home Office inefficiency in managing the Metropolitan police service's budget.

I am concerned about how the Government are sorting out the funds for front-line policing. There was a 6.1 per cent. increase in the police budget from the Home Office, but police authorities across the country are getting 2.8 per cent., so a lot of money is being held back centrally. We see that in public service after public service. That does not create stability or get money to the front line, and it results in little pots of money that police authorities and other public services have to bid for, which is a terribly inefficient way of delivering those services.

The Minister may tell me that I am factually wrong, which would go against what police officers have told me, or, like his colleagues in other Departments, he may now see the error of his ways. He should ensure that the money is out there and not put in a central pot for that inefficient bidding process.

Council tax receipts make up the other side of the resource equation. People in my area say that they pay more and get less. That is a real problem. I shall deal with the resource allocation formula in a second, but if people are asked to pay more by the Mayor and the Greater London Authority, they want to get more as a result.

The Mayor's budget proposals are being analysed by the GLA and the MPA. I have sneaked a look at the report. We will discover what the different parties on the MPA say about the proposals. I was concerned about what happened last year when the GLA had this debate. To try to get a lower council tax precept, Conservatives on the GLA voted against £48 million for the Metropolitan police service budget. I hope that they will not do that again this year. As the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster rightly argued, the MPS needs extra resources.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will my hon. Friend join me in adding further issues to the list of items that the Government should consider? For boroughs such as his and mine, there will be no increase in numbers next year. A system in which people pay considerably more of their local tax through council tax undermines their willingness to contribute towards better policing in London. That problem needs to be examined.

There is a list of matters for which the Government have principal responsibility in addition to those that my hon. Friend has mentioned. They include whether forces such as the Metropolitan police that train a huge number of people who then leave within 10 years should be able to recuperate a training levy for doing all the work. The latest figures show that about 40 per cent. leave to go to another force.

Before we debate the police reform legislation, we should consider the general formula for allocating resources around the country, and decide whether to revisit the division between what is expected to come from the council tax and what from the Home Office allocation. As my hon. Friend said, there was a 6.1 per cent. increase for policing, but less than 3 per cent. of that was allocated.

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. This intervention is turning into a speech.

Mr. Davey: It was an exceptionally good intervention, and I agree with everything that my hon. Friend said.

Reform of the resource allocation formula has taken up a lot of my time and that of other hon. Members. Although the process could have been improved, the reforms have resulted in a more transparent formula that has enabled us at last to ask some intelligent questions about how the police cake in London is carved up. I hope that the new resource allocation formula will be revised fairly soon. I am told by people on the MPA that that may come in the next two years. From my constituents' point of view, it could not come soon enough. Significant mistakes have been made, which I have brought up with the people in charge on the project board.

PA Consulting, which was hired to do the research, based its weighting and its results on a regression analysis. It is all in the report. When I raised this matter at a seminar with the analysts who carried out the research, they said that I had a good point. My point was that the data that they used in a least squares regression analysis was for one year. They used one year's data to work out the relationship between crime in different boroughs and police officer allocation. One does not need to be Einstein or a great mathematician to work out that one year's data in one regression analysis is not a strong basis on which to build a case for a formula. We must seriously examine that analysis on which so much weight has been placed to see whether it is stable over time and sensitive to changes in the data. I doubt that it is, and am concerned that the whole resource allocation formula debate is based on inadequate analysis.

Another major concern about the resource allocation formula, as it relates to my constituency, is the new and welcome opening-the-shop component, which recognises the fixed costs involved in providing the police service. In small boroughs such as Kingston, Richmond, Sutton and one or two others, those fixed costs can take a significant slug of the resources for policing. The opening-the-shop component is supposed to recognise that, but unfortunately it is far too small. When that formula is revised in two years' time, that component will need to grow.

My second point about the resource allocation formula and the review process is that it considers only territorial police officers, so large parts of the Metropolitan police service budget are not taken into account. Who decides how many police officers go into the territorial force and how many come out of it? That fact did not emerge from the review. I hope that the MPA will look at that division, because the centrally provided services may well be getting too many officers, some of whom could go to the front line. As the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster said, Sir John Stevens almost admitted that when he decided last week to transfer officers from the traffic police to other duties. I think that the results would be better if that decision-making process were closely scrutinised.

The hon. Gentleman's point on retention is crucial. We have to solve the retention problem, and on that point the current debate on police reforms is important. The proposal to reduce overtime pay may well affect London officers more than those in any other area. Their pay could fall steeply, which could severely undermine efforts to improve retention. While the Government are in debate with the police negotiating board, the Police Federation and other bodies, they must bear it in mind that their proposed pay reforms could have different effects in different parts of the country. Given that London has a huge retention problem, can the Minister assure me that any reform of overtime pay will not hit London as badly as I fear that it might?

12.11 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster on securing this debate, which I understand is his second in two weeks; he obviously has a knack that has eluded me. He addressed many important issues and raised the spectre of dispute between London boroughs. Several hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have referred to the need to avoid that, and as I do not represent any part of London, I have no intention of entering into any dispute.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): On that point, does my hon. Friend recognise that certain outer London boroughs, such as Havering, have specific problems? Havering comprises three constituencies, including Romford, which has the highest concentration of nightclubs in the entire Metropolitan police area, excluding the west end. The police in Havering face great demands, and that leaches manpower from Upminster. Often on Friday and Saturday nights, there are no police at all on duty in Upminster. That situation should be reflected in the resource allocation to the London borough of Havering.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is right, and I am sorry that she did not have the opportunity to make her points more fully.

There are big question marks over the resource allocation formula. I do not feel competent to enter into the detail of how it needs changing, and I certainly do not intend to do so in the short time that is left. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) emphasised parts of the formula that need to be reconsidered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) mentioned the problems of the police requirement where there are many nightclubs, and I suspect that when the police reform Bill is introduced we shall debate whether there should be a mechanism for charging for a private sector activity that places huge demands on the police. We have introduced such a mechanism in football, and some senior officers demand that we consider charging for policing in areas with a high concentration of nightclubs or similar establishments.

I know that many hon. Members will want the Minister to respond fully to the debate, so I do not want to take up too much time. We must reflect on what the Home Secretary has said in the past few months. Listening to him, one would assume that the whole of Labour's first term in government had been wasted as far as policing and crime are concerned. There is ample evidence of that in London, where there have been huge increases in crime. Robbery has increased by 56 per cent. and violent crime by 23 per cent. since 1998-99, when the method of calculation changed.

In the most recent year, up to November 2001, just two months ago, the figures are even more stark. The total number of offences has risen by 9.2 per cent., and robbery has increased by 50 per cent. In only one London borough was there a reduction in robbery in that year; other boroughs recorded increases in robbery of more than 100 per cent. There is a serious issue to be dealt with, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster said, according to those up-to-date figures, a Londoner is five times more likely to be the victim of violent crime than somebody who lives in New York, despite the Prime Minister's assertions to the contrary last week.

Unsurprisingly, the trend in police numbers is the converse of that in the number of crimes. Police numbers are down, and before the Minister chides me for ignoring boundary changes, I point out that even when one allows for the notional reduction of 887 in the Met establishment because of boundary changes, there are nearly 1,000 fewer officers than there were in 1997. As my hon. Friend rightly reminded us, even the 1997 figure is lower than those from earlier in the 1990s.

In March 1997, there were 356 officers per 100,000 head of population in the Met, but by last September, that figure was down to 353.5. That was an improvement on the situation a few months earlier, which is welcome, but it is still lower than the figure with which we started under the present Government. At the end of November, only four boroughs had experienced an increase in the number of officers.

I am sure that the Minister will refer to the fact that the Mayor is now primarily responsible for funding. No doubt he will seek to blame the man who in many Labour circles is considered a rogue mayor. However, the Minister should not be too quick to blame the Mayor because to his credit—I am not one to give the Mayor credit often—he has set out to try to increase police numbers. He has asked the MPA to budget for an extra 1,000 officers a year. In the past four years, expenditure on the police in London has gone up by 20 per cent., but the council tax element of that expenditure has gone up by 141 per cent. There has been a clear shift to the council tax payer, even though there has been only a very small increase in funding. As someone said, we are paying more and getting considerably less.

I am sure that the Minister will want to respond to those figures. He needs to understand, however, that it is not inputs that matter to people. They do not listen to how many millions or billions of pounds are being put into a service—that does not mean much to the average person. What matters to them is outputs—what is being achieved by that money. We are considering police numbers, but we are primarily looking at crime and

[Mr. Paice]

people's experience and perception of it. It is clear that there has been no improvement; indeed, the situation is worsening.

Only yesterday, a senior police officer told me that the police periodically have to decide not to arrest people who are committing crimes on a large scale, during festivities for example, because if they did they would denude the streets of officers, who would all be back in the station doing the paperwork. Although the Home Secretary has made many noises about paperwork and set up another taskforce, he seems to have ignored the fact that a Cabinet Office report on that subject, called "Making a Difference", was published two years ago. We are told that the Cabinet Office will publish another report this year. It is time that we stopped commissioning reports and started reducing paperwork so that police officers can stay on the streets and do their job more effectively.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Paice: No, I am sorry, but I want the Minister to have his full allocation of time.

There is no doubt that reform of the police is necessary not only in the Met area but throughout the country. Opposition Members will support many of the proposals in the White Paper, but there are others against which we will argue most strongly. We welcome the increases in officers that are beginning to occur, even though most of those increases are a promise rather than a reality. The clear message from hon. Members of all parties in this debate is that the Government have a great deal more to do if the Metropolitan police are to be able to deliver the service that the people of London want and, perhaps more importantly, are increasingly being asked to pay for.

12.19 pm

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on securing this useful debate. The odd element of partisanship has crept in, but it can generally be described as a pro-London and pro-police debate, which all contributors will welcome. Depending on the business managers, there will be an opportunity in the not too distant future for the annual debate on the police funding settlement as a whole, but we have had a useful chance to look at the situation in London.

I took comfort from the widespread recognition, implicit and explicit, that the Government have got to grips with the situation and are turning things round after many years of decline. Everyone has been honest enough to acknowledge that the decline in Metropolitan police numbers began a long time ago, back in the early 1990s under the previous Administration. During the period in which the Conservatives were in power, crime nationally doubled. So far, the present Administration have achieved significant falls in recorded crime as measured by the British crime survey which shows that the chance of being a victim in England and Wales is the lowest since the survey began. There have been falls in crime in London in recent years. Recorded crime in London fell by 2.2 per cent. in the year to March 2001, and burglary alone came down by 3 per cent. in 2001 compared with 1998. Of course, we have a problem with street crime and robbery, which we have acknowledged in recent weeks and to which I shall return. Our response is under way, but more needs to be done.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: Will my hon. Friend allow me to continue for a moment?

We need more police officers. As I have said, we are increasing police force numbers in England and Wales, and London as well. Recruitment is going well, as I shall explain. We need to ensure that resources are used in the most effective way. I shall not get involved in the borough by borough debate that we have had, but everyone will accept that it is important to deploy police officers where they will be most effective in catching persistent offenders, and in tackling and reducing crime and the fear of crime. To do so, we need to make the best and most effective use of the increasing number of police officers; that is what police reform is all about. It is about cutting bureaucracy and red tape, enabling people to spend less time in the police station and making better use of civilian staff, both in patrol duties and in police stations.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: I shall finish dealing with this issue, then give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) and the hon. Gentleman.

Police reform is about improving performance. Everybody accepts that if one compares basic command units within London with those in other parts of the country, performance varies from one place to another. The new standards unit is finding out what works most effectively in tackling crime and making sure that standards are raised everywhere. Police reform is about tackling long-term intractable problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) spoke about long-term sickness; it is for precisely that reason that we need a national occupational health strategy in the police force so that people do not suffer long-term sickness and can be helped back into policing duties. Police reform, in London and elsewhere, will help to underpin the changes that need to be made.

Harry Cohen: The Minister mentioned the problem of street crime and the need to tackle it, for example in our high streets. Will he comment on the impact of closed circuit television? The Government have had an important programme of boosting CCTV installation. Can we have a renewed programme for CCTV concentrated mainly in city centres, but in other areas of London as well? Will he press for tax incentives for small business and shops to install CCTV? Can it also be installed on the underground and bus and rail stations in London?

Mr. Denham: In looking to expand the CCTV programme, I am sure that my hon. Friend has in mind areas such as Leyton and Wanstead.

We have allocated £36 million to about 80 schemes in London in the past couple of years; some of those cameras are in place and others are being installed. They play an important role in tackling a wide variety of crimes, including street robbery, especially where their use is well co-ordinated with targeted police activities. The funding for next year's safer communities initiative is still being worked on, but there are opportunities under the communities against drugs funding to use CCTV in a wide range of crime prevention. I can therefore tell my hon. Friend that there are already opportunities in the system worth exploring, but we are obviously looking at future streams of funding.

Bob Spink: The Minister has been characteristically generous in giving way. He mentioned bureaucracy. No doubt he accepts that 20, 30 or 40 per cent. of police time could be released if bureaucracy could be cut, enabling the police to get on the streets and do what the public want to see them doing. Is he aware that the Government promised IT computer systems to help cut police bureaucracy? Those systems are now years overdue and chief constables are anxious to get hold of them to help cut bureaucracy. When will they be available?

Mr. Denham: Systems such as case and custody, which are being tested now, are an important part of custody and bureaucracy. We are anxious to roll them out to the police force, but want to do so when we are confident that they will deliver what we have promised they will deliver. However, I recognise the importance of the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Turning to funding, last year, overall expenditure on the police increased by 10.1 per cent and in the coming year it will increase by 6.1 per cent. That comprises money that goes to police authorities as police grants; in the unique case of London, it forms part of the overall funding to the Greater London Authority for all its services. Overall funding for GLA services increased by just over 4.1 per cent, although it is not necessarily expected that the police will receive that; that is for the GLA to decide. As part of the increased grant, there are allocated sums of money for expenditure on front-line services, most importantly the crime fighting fund, which funds the cost of additional recruits and police officers who are trained out on the streets. The fund is earmarked, and clearly delivers front-line services; £43 million will be paid into it this year, and there will be an increase next year of £19 million.

Although yet to be announced in detail, additional capital funding will be made available to police authorities, including the Metropolitan police authority. A further element is the special payment in the Metropolitan police service grant allocation in recognition of national and capital city functions, which has increased from £151 million in 1998-99 to £191 million in 2001-02; the year after, it will be £197 million. The funding of the Metropolitan police is more complex than that of other police authorities because decisions have to be taken by the GLA and the Metropolitan police authority about the overall allocation of funding to different services. However, there is no doubt that there has been a much more significant increase in Government funding for the police service in London, both last year and next year, than was the case under the previous Administration.

Mr. Mark Field *rose—*

Mr. Denham: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I have already given way a couple of times.

The MPS is recruiting strongly and on track to take on the full allocation of crime fighting fund recruits this year. Indeed, it is sufficiently successful for me to agree that the Metropolitan police can bring forward to this year 50 recruits for whom it had been allocated funding next year. That is a measure of the Metropolitan police's success in recruitment.

Retention is an important issue and one reason why this Administration have significantly increased the allowances payable to officers in London and support for travel costs. While it has always been the case that some officers leave London to work elsewhere, it is equally true that others migrate to London, especially from neighbouring south-eastern areas. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said that we need to look at exactly why people leave. Where there are management issues rather than other issues, we need to make sure that they are effectively addressed.

We are delivering extra resources and extra police numbers. Police reform will ensure that those officers are used effectively and, as the commissioner has recently set out, well supported by the deployment of civilian staff.

Under-age Drinking

12.30 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Although the full title of the debate is "Measures to reduce the incidence of under-age drinking", that is not primarily what I intend to discuss. I shall explain why.

I could pretend that I had extraordinarily good foresight and wisdom, that I had anticipated the news at the weekend about Prince Harry and his rather unfortunate exploits, and that with great timeliness I had chosen the debate. As nice as that would be for the press, it is not true. I hope that that will be the first and last reference to the young man.

I asked for the debate following a meeting I had with the midland counties Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association just before Christmas. A number of concerns were expressed, but the two main ones were reform of licensing law and proof of age cards. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who will reply to the debate, may want to comment on the reform of licensing law, but the important matter is proof of age cards.

The west midlands brewers outlined their involvement in a group of interested organisations including the British Retail Consortium, the Trading Standards Institute, and CitizenCard, among many others. They asked for standard information criteria that would include a colour photograph, a hologram PASS logo—PASS stands for proof of age standards scheme—and the date of birth and/or the age of the holder. Their request seemed reasonable.

I wanted to explore in detail whether the Government planned to introduce a national proof of age card scheme, which the industry wants and which it thought the Government supported. At this point, the fun began. I wanted to table a question. The Table Office told me that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had assumed responsibility for the matter. I was somewhat surprised, but bowed to the superior wisdom and greater experience of Table Office staff. By and large, I have found that when I have had doubts about advice from the Table Office, they were right and I was wrong.

My question was referred to the Home Office and a reply duly arrived on 29 November 2001, in which the Minister responsible, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs, stated:

> "The Government have no plans to develop a standard format for a proof of age card or to introduce a single national proof of age scheme. The Government welcome the recent initiative by the British Retail Consortium proposing to develop agreed standard design criteria and methods of accreditation for the various proof of age cards which currently exist so that retailers can be assured of the status of the cards presented to them."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 485W]

That was entirely in line with an answer given by Lord Bassam on 16 November 2000, in which he stated:

> "We have no plans to introduce a national proof of age card and so no plans to pilot one. But we are looking at the possibility of incorporating a proof of age function in the proposed Connexions card; and we support the use of industry-based credible proof of age cards such as the Portman Card and Citizen Card, which are already widely available across the country."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 November 2000; Vol. 619, c. WA 44.]

I wanted to initiate a debate about why the Government have no plans to introduce a proof of age card scheme, so I went to the Table Office and asked for an Adjournment debate on proof of age cards. The reply was, "Sorry, that cannot be done. As the Government have no plans to introduce such a scheme, there is no Minister with responsibility for it. Therefore, a debate under that title is not possible." Hence, my diversionary tactics in the choice of title for the debate. Proportionately, proof of age cards probably have a larger effect than any other measure on under-age drinking.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing such an important subject to the attention of the House. She will no doubt mention the Portman Group proof of age card, but is she aware that legislation on under-age drinking came into force in 1997? It deals not only with under-age drinking, but with the supply of alcohol on the street to people who are under age by people who are of age, who would have a proof of age card, get the alcohol and supply it to their friends on the street. The legislation allows the police to deal with that, thereby keeping youngsters out of trouble and stopping them becoming a nuisance to themselves and the community. It has been used successfully throughout the country. Will the hon. Lady urge police forces around the country to consider using existing laws?

Ms Stuart: I strongly support the hon. Gentleman's views, and I recognise that various agencies already have a willingness and a great number of means to address the problem, but the journey that I described to secure the debate highlights one of the problems that must be recognised: we will deal with problems such as under-age drinking only through a variety of agencies working together and using their existing powers in a co-ordinated fashion. Even in the House, it is sometimes difficult for us to co-ordinate Government activities to address the issue.

No single agency will be able to resolve the problem; they must all focus on it. On under-age drinking, drug abuse and other issues concerning young people, agencies ranging from schools to law enforcement agencies and the health service must all work together. For all of them, such issues are on the edge of their other responsibilities. If a police force is required to deal with a robbery and, at the same time, an 18-year-old providing drinks to younger people, there is always the danger that the under-age drinking problem will be seen as peripheral. I am trying to find a way of moving it closer to the centre, making it easier for everyone concerned to focus on it. Rather than asking for new measures, I am trying to achieve a more co-ordinated framework.

I finally managed to table a request for a debate on under-age drinking. At first, the debate was referred to the Department of Health. I assured my colleagues there that a Health Minister was not the right person to reply. It was then referred to the Home Office, which did not want to take it. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. I cannot imagine a situation in which I would rather not see him—he is one of the more delightful people whom I can think of meeting on such an occasion. I hope that he understands my reasons for saying that. I hope that he will reassure me that I am lobbying the right Minister for the introduction of a proof of age card. If he is not, I hope that he will help me to reach the right Minister to take up the matter.

As we have discovered, the debate is wide ranging. Proving one's age is difficult, and it is impossible to decide whether a young person is 15, 16, 17 or 18. However, there are many occasions when the precise differentiation between a 16-year-old and a 17-year-old is important—for example, for buying cheaper rail fares, hiring a video or buying alcohol.

Retailers of age-restricted products need a system whereby they can verify a person's age. Cinema seats, gambling, lottery tickets, glue and knives are part of a long list of such products. I take the opportunity to congratulate the Portman Group on its work in this regard. It introduced a card scheme called "Prove It", which was successful in allowing 18-year-olds to prove their age, but of course that did not address the problem of 16 and 17-year-olds.

To highlight the important work of the Portman Group, it may be useful to draw attention to its current campaign, "I'll be Des". I have seen the advertisement, which is extremely attractive. "Des" is short for designated driver, and the campaign is intended to encourage young people who go out in a group to designate one person to drive and therefore not to drink. It was a positive message, but it was not delivered in an authoritarian way. It was not the kind of thing that their middle-aged parents would tell them to do. It was jokey and funny, and I believe that it will be successful, like the campaign against drink-driving.

The Portman Group has been very helpful. Its work shows that, by and large, retailers and people in the drinks industry—not least the larger organisations—are willing to stay within the law. I simply want to make it easier for them to do so. As I said, the problem with the "Prove It" card is not merely that it addressed only the 18-plus group, but that it declined in popularity when photographic driving licences were introduced, as they were an easy means by which youngsters could prove their age.

Another Department then came into play. In June 2000, the then Department for Education and Employment announced in a press notice what it called a multifunctional smart card for teenage students, entitling them to a variety of discounts and containing curriculum vitae information about the holder. The card was scheduled for national launch in autumn 2001 and its roll-out in England should be completed by autumn 2002. Again, the card applies only to England, although the problem is nationwide. Furthermore, the Connexions card is not a dedicated proof of age card, but is intended to encourage young people to remain in some form of learning and personal development, although it carries the holder's name and date of birth and can therefore serve as a proof of age card. I hope that it will be included in the proof of age standards scheme. If Government forecasts are correct and the roll-out works in the anticipated way, it is likely that a total of 1.8 million cards will be in circulation by 2003. My main objection, however, is that the card serves a purpose other than that of proving age. Although I welcome the scheme, I must point out that if a card entitles youngsters to all sorts of benefits, they may be reluctant to take it with them when they want to go out for a night's entertainment. We lose cards, but youngsters lose them even more.

I should put it on record that, in my experience, the vast majority of retailers want to stay within the law. We are very much aware of rogue retailers. I accept that they exist, but I do not subscribe to the idea that the vast majority wish to circumvent the law. For reasons that I accept and understand, the Government have not opted for compulsory identity cards. Personally, I have never had any problem with identity cards and would have no problem with carrying such a card, but I realise that the vast majority of people in the country do have problems with the idea. I accept that the Government have decided not to introduce a compulsory card. I do not propose that it should be compulsory for 16 to 18-year-olds to carry cards that prove their age.

Bob Spink: I think that the majority of people in this country would welcome identity cards.

Ms Stuart: In that case, this is yet another occasion on which I would dearly love to be proved wrong.

Why are we shying away from making it easier for everyone to stay within the law? I do not believe that young people would resist carrying cards that prove their age. Many youngsters look older than their age, but just as many look younger. Somebody who is 18 but appears to be 16 should not be denied the opportunity to buy a pint in the pub. I do not think that youngsters would resist carrying such a card.

Ideally, I would like the Government not only to support the PASS scheme, but to provide a national overall framework, as the huge variety of cards makes it difficult for retailers to deal with them. For example, a framework of colour-coded cards in which orange signifies an age of 16, green signifies 17 and red 18 would be easily recognised and verified. However, I am a realist, so I know that I may not get a firm commitment on that point. Failing that, the Connexions card is another way forward. If it could be used effectively as a proof of age card, that would be an important step. As I said, my reservation about the Connexions card is its confusion between a variety of purposes. If a card provides access to other services, kids will get confused. Why cannot we have a card that is very simple, can be used for purchases in relation to which age is important and is easy to use for retailers? The Government should provide the framework for a nationally recognised scheme that will allow young people and retailers alike to stay within the law. Surely, that is something that we should all be able to support.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) for raising this very important issue. She has long been concerned with the welfare of children and these matters are vital for all hon. Members. I know that she has been raising them in her constituency for a long time and that they cause a great deal of anxiety in all our constituencies. I am sorry if she believes that she has got the wrong Minister in this debate.

As my hon. Friend said, proof of age cards are within the remit of the Home Office, but she is wrong to assume—I am not saying that this entirely describes her

[Dr. Kim Howells]

position—that such cards are a panacea for solving this very complex problem, which I believe will be best addressed by a review of the whole licensing system, as well as—dare I say it?—the culture in this country, about which we at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport are very concerned. However, if I may, I shall try to deal with proof of age cards, as our Department has something to say about them. After all, tenuous though this point may be, I am a member of the Government.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will recall that when we came to power in 1997 we promised to tackle the problem of alcopops. She was at the forefront of those expressing concerns about the problem, which was perceived to be very serious. I certainly worried about it a great deal. Alcopops were an issue of great concern to many parents and there was a worrying trend in their use, not least as the original alcopops began to be replicated across the whole range of alcoholic drinks. Working closely with the Portman Group, we called on producers and suppliers of alcohol to discharge their social responsibilities with regard to the problem of under-age drinking. A range of additional controls within the Portman Group's code of practice was introduced and had a significant impact on the merchandising and packaging of alcoholic drinks. I pay tribute to the manufacturers and retailers for their work. The number of complaints made to the Portman Group's independent panel about the marketing to children and packaging of alcohol has now dwindled to almost nothing, which is a significant step forward.

In 1999, we gave our wholehearted support to the private Member's Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell). I think that the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) was referring to that Bill, which was introduced in 1999 and not 1997.

Bob Spink: I was referring to the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill—a private Member's Bill that I introduced in 1996-97 with all-party support.

Dr. Howells: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I assumed that he was referring to the later Bill, which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey following the tragic death of his 14-year-old constituent, David Knowles, and which became the Licensing (Young Persons) Act 2000.

The 2000 Act closed a loophole in the main licensing statutes that had allowed some staff in licensed premises to sell alcohol to children without fear of prosecution or conviction. The Act also introduced for the first time a new offence that prevented adults from hanging around off-licences and buying alcohol on behalf of under-age persons outside. In April 2000, we announced a raft of measures to tackle under-age purchase and consumption of alcohol in the White Paper "Time for Reform: Proposals for the Modernisation of our Licensing Laws". My hon. Friend has urged us to implement the reforms at the first opportunity, and we will do so. I know that many in the House would have liked us to move more swiftly on reform in general, but we cannot be criticised for any delay on the measures regarding children, whom we have always put in the forefront of our concerns.

The White Paper proposals tackle under-age drinking in several ways. They were given priority before general reform and included in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. Three crucial measures have been brought into force since the general election.

On 1 December last year, the test purchasing of alcohol was put on a statutory footing for the first time, bringing it into line with the arrangements for tobacco. Trading standards officers can now send minors into licensed premises to attempt to buy alcohol—a valuable deterrent that has heightened the risk of detection and prosecution for unscrupulous traders who make a profit out of causing physical harm to our children. They are a minority, but there is no doubt that they exist.

The 2001 Act also placed a new positive duty on licensees and their staff not to sell alcohol to children. The defences that can be mounted against prosecutions have been amended, and it has been made easier for enforcement agencies to secure convictions. Retailers now know that in the case of any doubt about age, they simply should not make the sale. I shall consider that in more detail shortly because it is not a matter of one-way traffic. I shall try to prove that although a proof of age card may help in some circumstances, it is not a panacea.

The Act has also made it easier for local authorities to designate areas in their towns and cities where alcohol may not be consumed publicly by under-age drinkers or those who can buy and consume alcohol legally. We have expanded the powers of the police to confiscate alcohol that is carried by children in those areas.

I recognise that licensing law can be only one element in a much wider strategy. Data from research sponsored by the Portman Group strongly suggest that children are obtaining a great deal of cheap alcohol from unlicensed individuals who peddle smuggled alcohol. That is serious; it is a cynical trade with little regard for the consequences for the young and, indeed, for parents. The Government have stepped up their campaign to defeat the bootleggers. The Treasury is providing more customs officers dedicated to detecting those involved.

Our wider strategy includes the vital work of the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the Portman Group in providing more health education resources for children and parents about sensible drinking. Most of the alcohol obtained and consumed by minors is provided by parents, and public education to change some of our entrenched attitudes is essential.

A great deal has been done and a great deal is happening in the public and private sectors in licensing, health and education, but there are no easy or quick fixes for under-age drinking. Most hon. Members know that; it is a difficult matter.

A Government proof of age card is often portrayed as a panacea. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will want to weigh all the evidence before agreeing to the introduction of such a card. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston to consider why no Government since the second world war have introduced such a card. The test is whether proof of age cards would significantly reduce the amount of under-age drinking. Neither the Government nor previous Governments have been convinced.

The problem is not only adequate proof of age. Professor Paul Willner of the University of Wales conducted test purchasing studies, using

13 and 16-year-olds, which were published by the Alcohol and Education Research Council in August 2000. Each of the children held a valid and well known proof of age card showing his or her correct date of birth. In 80 per cent. of cases—the figure was higher for girls—16-year-olds successfully made a purchase, despite showing the cards. Almost a third of the 13-year-olds were successful. As many as 60 per cent. of the 16-year-olds were not even challenged for proof of age. Worse, many retailers who demanded to see valid cards went on to make the sale despite seeing a card that confirmed that the child was under age.

Ms Stuart: Let me turn the Minister's test around. Instead of asking, "Why introduce a card?", we should ask, "Why not?" Such a card could cover a range of products; we do not need to isolate alcohol. For example, it could apply to purchasing lottery tickets. Every retailer would then know about such a straightforward and simple system. The industry would support it if the Government provided the framework. Why not introduce such a card?

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend asks a good question and I shall try to give a good answer. All Governments must decide whether such actions will be cost-effective. Until now, they believed that the considerable money and resources necessary for such a large, bureaucratic arrangement could be better spent elsewhere. I am not convinced that introducing such a card is the best use of taxpayers' money. I am sure that that also applies to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, but perhaps he will be convinced of the argument for a card. I dealt with such matters as a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry and as an Education Minister, and I remain unconvinced.

That does not mean that the range of cards available, such as Validate UK, Connexions, CitizenCard or the Portman card, are not good and valuable. They contribute in a small way and, in some cases, a large way, to reducing the problem. However, a card is not a panacea or necessarily the best way of tackling the problem.

We may learn more about the potential impact of such cards from the introduction of the Connexions card, which my hon. Friend described. It has a proof-of-age function for those enrolled in higher education between the ages of 16 and 19, and has begun to be introduced nationally. She is right that the speed of roll-out, to use an awful expression, remains to be seen.

I acknowledge that we can do much more in the general reform of licensing. Our licensing laws are archaic and incomprehensible to many parents. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has taken over responsibility for licensing from the Home Office. Until I became a Minister in the Department, I did not know the law on children drinking in pubs or what happened when people took their children into a pub. I am sure that hon. Members will be amazed to discover that although minors cannot purchase alcohol in pubs and nightclubs, children as young as five can lawfully consume alcohol in pub gardens and some family rooms. Consumption is prohibited only in the area of licensed premises known as "the bar". Only the landlord knows what constitutes the bar. It is a dotted line on a map.

That means that children over four can drink alcohol freely in a licensed restaurant that has no bar. We should not be fooled by the counter from which drinks are supplied. That is often not a bar as understood in law. It is no wonder that most parents find all that utterly confusing. We intend to sort it all out in the general reform of licensing law. A Bill will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time permits.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising such an important matter. I hope that a good, proper and robust study of the use and effectiveness of proof of age cards will continue to be conducted. If I am proved wrong, I shall go along with the results. Until then, I hope that my hon. Friend will accept at least some of the arguments that I have tried to present in response to hers.

Suez Veterans

12.59 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a serious failing of successive Governments to put right an injustice that has existed for 50 years. It concerns the recognition of almost a quarter of a million men who served their country in the Suez canal zone between 1951 and 1954.

A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have been concerned about this issue, and have written to Ministers about it. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) is present and hopes to speak in this debate. She has my permission and that of the Minister to do so briefly.

I am particularly grateful to Lieutenant-Colonel Ashley Tinson, retired, and to Charles Golder for the excellent briefing that they have provided, and for keeping me up to speed on this issue. I also want to pay tribute to the work of other hon. Members, particularly the hon. Members for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) and for Wentworth (John Healey), who have pursued this question in a variety of ways for some considerable time. The Minister will know of the strength of feeling behind this matter. A petition of 20,000 names was presented in 1998, and during the last five years there have been two Adjournment debates and many hundreds of letters from MPs on behalf of constituents.

The emergency in the Suez canal zone began on 8 October 1951 when the then Egyptian Government sought to abrogate its treaty agreement that British troops and airmen could be stationed in the canal zone. British armed forces and installations came under attack soon after that abrogation, and for three years our armed services faced a series of terrorist and paramilitary attacks.

The scale of the deployment to counter the terrorist threat and protect British citizens in the canal zone reveals the seriousness of the events. After the first attacks, the British garrison was increased to 80,000 troops, and possibly as many as 250,000 troops were stationed in the area during the period. In his book "The Regiments Depart", Gregory Blaxland said that the deployment was

> "the swiftest build-up ever achieved by the British Army in peacetime, and included the air despatch of 6,000 men, 170 tons of stores, and 330 vehicles in a matter of ten days."

The scale of military operations was significant, and the deprivations suffered by the service personnel and their families were considerable. For example, in January 1952, the Lancashire Fusiliers supported by tanks and armoured cars stormed the police barracks. In that action alone, British casualties included four killed and 10 wounded. During the three years, 54 service personnel were killed in action and more than 300 died from all causes, many of whom would have survived had they served in the UK. This is the eighth highest incidence in the table of British casualties since the second world war.

Still there is no formal recognition. There is no Suez medal. The question appears to turn on whether the Army Council ever formally considered the request made by the Commander-in-Chief, middle east forces, General Sir Brian Robertson, in January 1952 for the general service medal to be awarded to his troops serving in the canal zone. This matter was, therefore, being raised 50 years ago.

In 1999, further papers came to light. The Army historical branch considered the papers and came to what I consider to be the surprising conclusion that they contained nothing to justify an approach to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals. I, too, have examined those papers. They deal almost exclusively with the question of operational gallantry awards, military medals and the like. The only mention of a general service medal is in the January 1952 reply from the Military Secretary, Lieutenant-General Sir Euan Miller, to General Robertson, in which he says that he will "sound out" the Adjutant-General. The later—February 1952—memo from the Military Secretary to the Army Council, which included the Adjutant-General, deals exclusively with operational gallantry awards, and contains no mention of a general service award.

On 20 February 1952, the Military Secretary wrote to General Robertson in response to a letter that he had written on 2 February about an award to Brigadier Exham, who had led the assault on the Egyptian police barracks of which I spoke earlier. Again, the exchange related exclusively to operational gallantry awards, and to the need for those matters to be put to the Army Council before going to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals. The Military Secretary went on to say:

> "I had no sooner done this than the King's death took place, which led to everyone concerned in the A.G.'s department becoming extremely involved in ceremonial."

I wonder whether that understandable distraction might have led to this matter being overlooked? In March 1952, the Military Secretary wrote to General Robertson to inform him that the Army Council had decided that

> "the scale and the scope of the operation do not justify the granting of purely operational awards."

Again, there was no reference to a general service award.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Does the hon. Gentleman share the concern of my constituent, Mr. R. T. Wilson, who represents the Havering Suez Veterans Association, who was advised by the Ministry of Defence to go and buy a general service medal from a medal dealer for £50?

Mr. Burstow: If that was the case, it was clearly a callous and thoughtless thing to say, and I am sure that the hon. Lady will have taken it up with the appropriate authorities.

Between 18 January and the 7 March 1952—the period during which these matters are supposed to have been considered—the available documentary evidence confirms that only operational gallantry awards were considered. There appears to be no documentary evidence in any of the relevant files held by the Public Record Office to show that the Army Council gave the request for a general service medal any formal consideration. It is this missing link that should give rise to fresh consideration of the original request, and to a submission to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals.

Looking through past written answers and ministerial correspondence on the Suez emergency deposited in the Library of the House, I notice that a recurring theme is that the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals has a long-standing policy of non-retrospection. However, if no evidence can be found to show that the original request was properly considered—no evidence has been presented—that policy should be set aside to allow the case to be considered on its merits. Indeed, I understand that, last June, the Prime Minister said that the chairman of the committee was carefully considering the matter. Will the Minister tell us whether Sir Richard Wilson has reached any conclusions?

The emergency in the Suez canal zone is unique in that it is the only major post-1945 campaign not to have been recognised by the awarding of a medal. Given the events of the time, and set against the standards of the period, it is hard to fathom why no medal was granted. Looking back over 50 years of history, it is even harder to understand. So, what evidence is required? In March last year, the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), then the Minister with responsibility for the armed forces, in reply to an intervention from the hon. Member for Wentworth, said:

> "Evidence relating to, for example, the Army Council could persuade me to alter my position."

He went on to say:

> "Evidence relating to whether the case was considered properly in terms of procedure might constitute grounds for reconsideration."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 14 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 302WH.]

Given the meticulous way in which records are kept, the fact that the Department is unable to turn up conclusive evidence that the matter was ever properly considered should be sufficient grounds for the matter to be reopened. If the evidence that I have put to the Minister today is correct—that, apart from some informal soundings about a general service medal, the matter was never progressed—a great injustice has been done to many troops. I hope that, in those circumstances, the Minister would feel that he could use the powers of his office to ask the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals to give the matter further formal consideration.

Further careful reading of the evidence can lead only to a single clear conclusion. I am not asking the Minister to rewrite history; rather, I am asking him to right a wrong that has remained on the Department's books for far too long, and to find a way to recognise those veterans who served their country in Suez between 1951 and 1954 and who have not been recognised.

1.8 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on securing the debate, and thank him for allowing me to speak. I pay special tribute to the Suez veterans who, individually and through their organisations, have kept up the fight for recognition of the part that they played in our history, and also to the many MPs who have raised these issues over a long period of time.

As a new Member, one of my first surgery appointments was with Mr. John Friberg, the Dorset representative of the Canal Zoners, who described the situation to me. I must confess that I knew very little about the activities of our troops in Suez between 1951 and 1954. Most of my generation can just remember 1956, but we do not know much about those earlier years. Perhaps that highlights why it is so important to redress this injustice. My fear is that, rather than be remembered, "they will be forgotten", as one service man said on a recent television programme. He went on:

> "All we've got is egg on our faces; we are swept under the carpet".

But why?

There is no doubt that conditions were dangerous and unpleasant and that troops were on declared active service. As my hon. Friend said, 54 men were killed in action and it is claimed that there were 613 casualties during the period. A recent letter says:

> "I had a brother killed, Jan 19th 1952, age 18. We have a wreath sent every year, November 11th. It would be wonderful to receive a medal on this anniversary—50 years this coming November—to pass on to our next generation. We believe Arthur was guarding water tanks and a bomb was in a barrel of oranges—Arthur and another boy got blown to bits."

The veterans have many stories of armed attacks, sniping and even mutilations. Since 1945, life has been lost in at least 16 conflicts around the world involving this country, but service in only this one appears not be to recognised. The negative replies to requests for recognition over the years represent a vicious circle. Put simply, a case was not established at the time, so one cannot be considered now. Round and round we go. My hon. Friend ably argued that there is no evidence that the case for a general service medal was ever considered, which I hope is sufficient to break that circle and lead to a positive outcome.

I am heartened by last July's letter from the Deputy Prime Minister's office, to which my hon. Friend referred, which states that

> "the possibility of some kind of recognition is currently under consideration by Sir Richard Wilson in his role as Chairman of the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals".

In the week preceding Remembrance Sunday, the BBC showed in the south a documentary entitled "Suez—the Forgotten Campaign". I have a video copy to present to the Minister if he did not see it. The programme contains the observation that, last year, the Suez veterans were invited to march to the cenotaph for the first time. There was no Suez medal to wear, of course.

Veterans point out that a medal is wanted not only to recognise those who survived, but primarily for the dignity of those who died. My constituent, Mr. Friberg, wrote to me:

> "I shall continue to campaign until I draw my last breath against the injustice done by my country in not giving us just a small token of gratitude for services rendered."

I urge the Minister to facilitate a positive reconsideration of a unique case in the Queen's golden jubilee year.

1.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on securing the debate and I assure him that I listened carefully to his points and those made by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

(Mrs. Brooke). I can make no specific comment on the intervention of the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) as I am completely ignorant of the matter, but if she writes to me I promise that we shall look into it.

This subject is one on which I have corresponded with many hon. Members and it was debated here early last year. Circumstances have not changed recently and I am afraid that I must repeat much of what has been said before. It is well known that very little contemporary correspondence about a campaign medal for service in the canal zone in the early 1950s survives. For the sake of brevity, I shall not go into the details of the various correspondence between senior military commanders at the time, but it is clear that there is no definitive record of events and it appears that consideration of an award was at least mooted.

Canal zone veterans and their supporters have been particularly active over the past 12 years or so. During that time, there have been a number of reviews by successive Adjutant-Generals, two Chiefs of the General Staff have interested themselves in the case and in 1998 my predecessor instigated a full review of all available documents, including those held by the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Public Record Office. Other documents found in the Ministry of Defence or offered by veterans or their supporters have also been carefully studied.

None of those reviews has given us any reason to think that the matter was insufficiently or improperly dealt with 50 years ago or provided us with the necessary material to make a case for submission to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals. The committee has a long-standing policy that it will not consider instituting awards and medals for service given many years earlier. It will not look back at claims for medals if the operation concerned finished more than five years previously. That is because it feels that if no contemporary claim was made, it cannot second-guess why those in a position to ask for a medal to be awarded decided not to do so.

Claims rejected at the time, either by the Ministry of Defence and its predecessors or by the committee, were based on contemporary evidence. Those who rejected them had access to the full facts and would have had valid reasons for rejection. That policy has been in force since the end of the second world war, but no retrospective institution of medals has occurred since the 19th century.

Mr. Burstow: The Minister's argument does include points made in the debate last year, but is he telling the Chamber that the burden of proof rests with the veterans? Have they to come to him to show documents that the Department cannot find to prove that the matter was not considered? I have presented evidence today showing that only operational gallantry awards were considered. Why not accept that the evidence to support the Government's position is not there and allow the matter to be reconsidered?

Dr. Moonie: The unfortunate fact is that there is no evidence either way. What exists neither confirms nor denies either position. There are two points at issue: the contemporary record and the policy of the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals. In the Department's opinion, both in themselves constitute sufficient grounds for not proceeding to review the case.

I return to the question of why no case was put to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals in the 1950s. The evidence suggests that the Army Council simply did not think the operation to be of sufficient scale or scope, but that is not to denigrate in any way the sacrifice made by those involved. It is merely a reflection of how the campaign was viewed at the time, in the shadow of the second world war.

A number of more sinister reasons have been suggested over the years. One is Foreign Office "interference" in the procedure. I should make it clear that the Foreign Office would have had a legitimate interest had a case gone to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals. After all, service deployments are part of a foreign policy, which covers diplomatic, economic and military aspects.

The Foreign Office was represented on the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals, as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is now, but no evidence has been found of any consultation on the subject between the War Office and the Foreign Office and there is no record of the Foreign Office expressing a view. Furthermore, there are two suggestions why the Foreign Office might have intervened, and they conflict with each other. One is that the Foreign Office did not want to upset the Egyptians by admitting that we were, in effect, at war. The other is that awarding a medal would have pleased the Egyptians by conferring the status of military operation on what was in fact terrorist activity.

However, the views of opposing nationals clearly did not prevent the award of medals for contemporary or near-contemporary security operations in places such as Palestine and Malaya and neither argument about the effect on the Egyptians would have carried any weight when the further opportunity to make a case arose in 1956.

As well as embarrassing the Foreign Office, for whatever reason, it has been claimed that a case for a medal would have embarrassed the War Office. If we try to look at the operation from the viewpoint of the Army of 50 years ago, it is difficult to see why the War Office might have felt embarrassed. Troops were deployed in the canal zone to ensure the safe passage of shipping and protect a limited British presence, which existed by treaty with the Egyptians. That they did conscientiously and successfully, without unnecessary use of force, and there is nothing discreditable about it.

Had the War Office been embarrassed, the Military Secretary would not have taken the steps, which we know that he did, to ensure that those stationed in the canal zone received a good share of the awards in the 1952 birthday honours list. A similar allegation is that the War Office was influenced by the strength of public and political opinion against the operations. Opinion was in fact divided and we have no reason to believe that the War Office was swayed either way. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir William Slim, is widely acknowledged to have been the finest "soldier's general" since Wellington and it is very unlikely that he would have been deterred if he thought that a good case existed.

It is also claimed that the members of the Army Council in 1952 were unaware of the conditions in the canal zone. That is not so. The Secretary of State for War had visited the area and spoke about it at a meeting of the Army Council. It is inconceivable that the most senior officers in the Army were ignorant of the situation in what was the biggest British forces base in the eastern Mediterranean and middle east, or that they did not understand the implications. They had all been operational commanders at a high level. It was known then, as we know now, that the canal zone was unpleasant and, at times, dangerous, with an oppressive climate and sparse living conditions. In those days, however, British troops were stationed in many overseas garrisons where conditions were harsh.

Moving on from what are claimed to have been the factors that influenced decisions fifty years ago, I should like to look at some of the arguments that have been put forward recently in support of making a case for a medal now. The first is that troops were on declared active service. That is perfectly true, but it is not an argument for a medal. Declarations of active service are made when, for example, it is necessary to introduce greater disciplinary powers.

The declarations of active service made by the General Officer Commanding British Troops Egypt between 1950 and 1954 state:

> "It is emphasised that this is a purely administrative decision in order that the status of British Troops in Egypt regarding Courts Martial shall remain unchanged".

There is no automatic connection between active service and campaign medals. The British garrison in Berlin was on active service from 1945 to 1990 because of its status as an occupying power, but received no medal. Conversely, members of the armed forces who serve in Northern Ireland are eligible for the general service medal but have never been placed on active service.

Much has been made recently of the number of British deaths in the canal zone during the period from 1951 to 1954. One of the veterans' organisations claims that the total is in excess of 600. A more modest figure of 54 was attributed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in remarks supposedly made by him in November 2000 when he announced proposals for a new memorial to service personnel who have been killed since the second world war. I understand that the first figure was provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and relates not to the number killed on duty, but to the number of graves in cemeteries in Egypt maintained by the commission.

The second figure was not included in the announcement but appeared in some newspaper commentaries on it; we are unaware of its origin. The official total of troops killed during the period of unrest from October 1951 to May 1954, provided by the Adjutant General's statistics branch in 1955, was 40, with a further six missing and 75 wounded. We have no reason to doubt these figures.

It is often claimed that service in the canal zone was the only action after the second world war for which a clasp to the general service medal or a separate medal was not awarded, and that medals were awarded both at the time and subsequently for operations that were on a much smaller scale and had a lower casualty rate. The latter point is made particularly in relation to medals for present day deployments. The first point is, in fact, incorrect. From the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, there were more than a dozen internal security deployments for which no medal was issued—for example in Libya, Burma, Singapore and Hong Kong.

On the matter of the scale of the canal zone operation in relation to others, I have already mentioned that the Army Council did not think that the situation in the canal zone warranted operational awards. We must remember that the second world war had ended only six years previously. Even more recently, during three years of internal security operations in Palestine, about 260 service men had been killed and 700 wounded. The Korean war was still in progress. I do not believe that comparison with present day deployments is relevant. Policy on medals changes over the years, and different views are taken at different times.

Mr. Burstow: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way for a second time. I invite him to look again at the chronology of the correspondence during the period in 1952 about which we are talking. He should reflect upon that and upon this debate, as the correspondence and the debate show that only operational gallantry awards were considered, and not the general service medal. If he finds that to be the case, as I have, will he refer the matter on again?

Dr. Moonie: I shall certainly look at the chronology again, although I must tell the hon. Gentleman that I have looked at it on several occasions and I do not take the same view of it as he does. With regard to the Cabinet Secretary's investigation of the general procedure, his inquiries are still on-going and have yet to reach a conclusion.

To sum up, the War Office did not submit a case for a medal at the time of the canal zone deployment or shortly after, and we have no good reason to believe that that was a result of improper or inadequate handling. There have been successive reviews over the last twelve years but no evidence has come to light that demonstrates that the War Office got it wrong. The circumstances have not changed and our position remains clear.

Documents do turn up, and have done during the intervening 50 years. Should anything further turn up that gives a different slant on proceedings, we will look at it. At present, there is no evidence that such contemporary background material actually exists.

National Missile Defence

1.26 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Mr. Amess, it gives me great pleasure to be here for this debate under the fixity of your pensive gaze. I preface my remarks by making it clear that if I refer to "the Americans", I am speaking not about the American people—for whom I have a great deal of affection and regard and who remain warm and generous of spirit—but about the American Administration.

National missile defence, as it used to be known, is, I would argue, one of the biggest—if not the biggest—threats to global stability that we face in contemporary times. It unravels a whole series of treaties on the basis of unproven and undeveloped technology, an improbable threat and a huge financial cost, both materially and politically. I would also argue that it is against the interests of the United Kingdom, despite repeated Government denials that that is the case.

What is national missile defence? First, it no longer exists; it has been renamed missile defence. The reason for that is that the new title suggests that, in some way, it is a transportable system, appropriate to more than the defence of the continental United States. But as Southampton university's Mountbatten centre for international studies has argued:

> "It is highly debatable whether or not missile defence can be transferred to a British or European context."

Quite simply, it is important that we put on the table what missile defence is, as it is a piece of jargon for the average elector and, I would argue, possibly for the average hon. Member. "Missile defence" is the notion that missiles carrying weapons of mass destruction can, if they are in small numbers, be knocked out of the sky by other missiles. It has been likened to a bullet hitting a bullet at a combined speed of 15,000 mph.

It is further argued that it is important that this notion be embraced because there is a small group of rogue nations that might very well attack the United States using intercontinental ballistic missiles. Missile defence supporters say that this arguable threat needs to be met with a layered defence, giving the United States options to take out the rogue missiles at different stages in a putative attack.

Finally, the present American Administration argue that missile defence is entirely consistent with the legitimate interests of other powers in the world, including Russia and China.

I would aver that none of this is true, as I hope to demonstrate. Moreover, I think that our Government have hitherto been economical with the truth on these matters and are, in my view, failing to act in the British national interest.

I shall take hon. Members through some of the fallacies underpinning the American Administration drive for missile defence. The first general area of doubt about the efficacy of these proposals is the technology itself that is required. Ever since the ill-fated strategic defence initiative under President Reagan, trillions of dollars have been spent in researching missile defence. One of its prototypes was the Patriot system, which was devised by the Raytheon Corporation and deployed in the Gulf war. I am sure hon. Members will recall that we were told a great deal about its success in downing Iraqi Scud missiles. However, the House of Representatives noted that

> "the claims of success were false."

The then Administration and their contractor, Raytheon, misled the public and Congress. Those are the words of a reputable Committee of the House of Representatives.

What has changed with the current research and promises of success? Not a lot. If people doubt that, they should read the *Scientific American* of August 1999, which contains an article entitled "Why National Missile Defence Won't Work", written by three authors. One of them is Theodore Postol, who developed the Trident 2 missile system. He is not a peacenik or naive about such matters, but he felt compelled to write to the White House and to contribute to the article to express his concerns about the distorted test results used to argue in favour of missile defence.

Even more convincing is a letter sent to the Republican and Democrat leaders in both the Senate and the House of Representatives on 12 November 2001, if for no other reason than that it was signed by 50 American Nobel laureates, each one an eminent scientist in his—there were no women—field. The letter stated:

> "America faces security needs far more substantial than a technically improbable defence against a strategically improbable Third World ballistic missile attack."

That is aptly put. After all, the test flights that have been successful so far have been so only because a homing device was placed inside the target rocket and—as Theodore Postol demonstrated—a decoy was placed on the opposite side of the incoming extra-atmospheric kill vehicle, or EKV, which is one of those marvellous pieces of jargon associated with the Dr. Strangelove world of missile defence.

The tests in December were also delayed by inclement weather. Missile defence would appear to be a technological miracle that requires a homing device in the target, decoys on the right side of the rocket and fine weather before the intercepting missiles can be used.

I am humble enough to recognise that those technical problems might be overcome, but to what end? The standard response is to counter the rogue states, which appear to be defined as those which refuse to recognise US hegemony. Admittedly, many are nasty regimes—North Korea, Iran and Iraq, for example—but so are many American and British allies. The key might lie in what constitutes a threat.

The US Administration appear to rate as a threat those states which they know or suspect to be developing such missile technology. Traditionally, in this country and in Europe we have not restricted implied threat to capability but have linked it to intent to use the technology. Why should one of the three states that I have mentioned seek to threaten the US with an ICBM, in the knowledge that the retaliation by the US to an attack with weapons of mass destruction would be terrible and total? The events of 11 September demonstrate that there are far more devilish ways to wreak havoc than using an ICBM, without attracting the national annihilation that would surely follow such an attack.

The cost of missile defence is soaring exponentially. The Pentagon has claimed a cost for the life cycle of missile defence of $43 billion. Others place the true cost at anywhere between $60 billion and $120 billion. The cost of just one component—the space-based, infra-red, missile-heavy satellites, the eyes in the sky for the system—have increased already from $10 billion to £23 billion. That gives some idea of the way in which the cost of the technology is racing ahead of all the computations. The emergency funding remitted to the US Executive after 11 September was $40 billion, $20 billion of which has already been spent in Afghanistan, so I wonder how sustainable those huge costs will be.

The British Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Michael Boyce, commented on 28 July 2001:

> "There is no way I'm in a position to suggest we can pay for any missile defence from within the existing budget".

As always, he was being remarkably frank. What would our Chancellor have to say about a British commitment to spiralling expenditure on missile defence? I raise that point because it is not only an American issue. If anyone doubts that, I refer them to the legislation sponsored by Representative Allan in the House of Representatives, entitled the Missile Defence Burdensharing Act 2001, which seeks hefty compensation from allies for any extension of missile defence to cover their countries to meet the purchase and research and development costs of missile defence.

It is remotely possible that we could overcome the challenges of technology and cost, but what of the politics and the alleged destabilising effects of missile defence? We must consider those issues in the context of the present US Administration's unilateralism and, in particular, its military application. The US Department of Defence issued a document entitled "Joint Vision 2020" on 30 May 2000, which stated:

> "The label full spectrum dominance implies that US. forces are able to conduct prompt, sustained and synchronised operations with combinations of forces tailored to specific situations, and with access to and freedom to operate in all domains—space, sea, land, air and information."

That is a statement of intent for total and unbridled American power. Many people will go along with that and I can understand the Americans wishing to do so, but I question whether it is in the British national interest. For example, is it in our interest to see the militarisation of space?

We should set that declaration against America's actions in a wider context under the present Administration. For example, they have announced withdrawal from the anti-ballistic missile treaty; brought the biological weapons convention review conference to a halt; renounced international efforts to negotiate a verification protocol to the biological weapons convention; abandoned Kyoto; refused to reconsider the comprehensive test ban treaty; rejected the International Criminal Court; discarded the convention on the prohibition of land mines; gutted the United Nations conference on small arms; dismissed the UN convention on the rights of the child; boycotted the comprehensive test ban treaty review conference in New York; supported a continuing unilateral embargo on Cuba; and have now announced plans to place weapons in space.

Is it any wonder that China is set at least to quadruple its force of ICBMs and equip it with multiple warheads, as reported by the CIA? Is it any wonder that Russia is feeling peeved and let down after the American admission that instead of negotiated weapons removal, the weapons will merely be mothballed? That is the context—the background for the decision. America is embracing the concept of missile defence in the context of a rapidly fading credibility as regards its commitment to any international agreements.

I ask hon. Members not to take only my word on these matters.

> "President Bush has dismissed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty as a relic of the Cold War. He's right. The treaty was signed in 1972 by President Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev—names from another time, another world. Unfortunately, Bush's idea of an anti-missile defence system is even older than the treaty that he is trying to kill"—

those are not my words but were part of an editorial in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on 13 December 2001.

On the same date, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* stated:

> "Thus the President has created several bad outcomes: abandoning yet another international agreement at a time when the US is relying on world-wide coalition against terror; making Russia, which sees the ABM treaty as the last vestige of its superpower days of glory, very upset; making its NATO allies nervous, and setting the US on a course to spend anywhere from $60 billion to $200 billion in the next 10 years on a missile defense system."

Again, those are not my words but those of a very sensible middle America and they are coming through strongly.

The key question for us is where does the UK stand? My argument is simple. We disingenuously await a formal approach from the US to use Fylingdales and Menwith Hill as part of the system, although we know that they are already being used under previous agreements. However, to use that as an excuse for avoiding debates such as this one is disingenuous.

We are giving slavish support to the US Administration, much to the consternation of our European allies—with all that that means for us in the short, medium and longer-term future. Perhaps more critically for most people in this country in this rather improbable doomsday scenario of rogue states launching missiles against the United States, we become a front-line target in a way that beggars belief.

We knowingly defy the sound logic of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. For 50 years, that logic has been based on three tenets: deterrence, multilateral arms control and national security. Missile defence actually turns those three tenets on their head. The silence of the Government on this issue hitherto can be interpreted only as a wish to curry favour with that most ideologically driven of American Administrations—an Administration who are, unfortunately, locked in a rather paranoid view of America's place in the world.

I have the greatest regard for the Minister of State. He knows that my remarks are not personal; I am making a necessary and legitimate political argument. Will the Minister, on behalf of the Government, act as America does and put our national interest first? I do not object to America putting its interests first. I have no locus in American politics, but we all have one in the politics and national interest of this country.

[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]

Missile defence is an offensive, not a defensive, system. It will lull not only Americans but Europeans and many others into a false sense of security. There is a strong view among strategic thinkers that missile defence makes a first-strike policy more rather than less likely.

If we have a special relationship with the United States, we should be using it to tell the Americans what we really think. We should tell them how they are wrong. We should be critical friends of the Americans; we should point out that NMD is not in the American interest and that they are using the wrong strategy against the wrong enemy at the wrong time, especially post-11 September.

I ask my right hon. Friend not to forget about one Labour Government who were under great economic pressure from the United States, but managed to stay out of the fold when they felt that the involvement of the British people was inappropriate. I refer of course to Harold Wilson when he came under that pressure during the Vietnam war. Harold Wilson resisted that pressure in far more parlous times—politically and economically—than the British Administration face at present.

With all humility, and with the greatest respect to my right hon. Friend, I point out that, although Harold Wilson was no angel, only fools rush in where angels fear to tread; angels would very much fear to tread along this path.

1.45 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I certainly do not speak as an angel but as a Minister. I do not know whether angels have ever been Ministers—after a long, hard search, historians might find one.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) on securing the debate, and I am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to set out the Government's position on this issue. I take his point that his remarks were not aimed at me personally, because our friendship goes back a long way. We have shared the same political enemies, but I distance myself from his hypercritical comments about our closest ally—the United States. The tenor of my speech will touch on some of those points.

The potential threat from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which include ballistic missiles, and their means of delivery is widely recognised and accepted. Since the events of 11 September, the possibility that terrorists could use weapons of mass destruction against the UK or our allies has understandably been a cause of particular concern. Many people say that the world has changed since that day, and I share that general view.

However, that certainly does not mean that we should relax our vigilance against other dangers, including the danger that could be posed by ballistic missiles. The events of 11 September show us that there are people who will seek to threaten the US, its friends and allies with all available means—in future, that could include ballistic missiles.

I do not want to be alarmist. Our assessment remains that there is currently no significant threat to the UK from ballistic missiles. Indeed, the threat from ballistic missile attack has diminished considerably since the end of the cold war. Furthermore, I can assure hon. Members that we continue to monitor developments closely. We are conscious, however, that the UK often deploys its armed forces to areas of the world where ballistic missiles are available to our potential adversaries, and where such weapons have been used previously. In parts of the world where tensions remain high, it is a cause of concern that some states are trying to develop or acquire ballistic missile capabilities of increasing range.

We need to tackle that potential threat. It is important to do so with a comprehensive strategy that encompasses diplomacy, arms control, export controls, counter-proliferation, conflict prevention, intelligence co-operation, deterrence and defensive measures. We are already working hard in all those areas with our allies, partners and friends. We must look to do more where we can. Furthermore, we must consider new elements for inclusion in that comprehensive strategy.

Before I turn to the detail of missile defence, I make it clear that the US agrees with us on the need for such a comprehensive strategy. There is no difference between us on that point. Missile defence is not a substitute for other measures as a response to the proliferation threat. I remind my hon. Friend that last February the Prime Minister and President Bush agreed in a joint statement that:

> "We need to obstruct and deter these threats with a strategy that encompasses offensive and defensive systems, continues nuclear arms reductions where possible, and strengthens weapons of mass destruction and missile proliferation controls and counter-proliferation measures."

It is of course right that diplomacy should form a central strand of our response to missile proliferation—as for any security issue. Work on conflict prevention and resolution can reduce tensions and increase stability, thereby removing the conditions in which proliferation thrives and the use of ballistic missiles becomes more likely.

It is for that reason that the UK remains strongly committed to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the biological and toxin weapons convention and the chemical weapons convention. We want all nations to sign up to those regimes but, more important, to implement them.

Specifically on missile proliferation, the UK has played a key role in working towards an international code of conduct on ballistic missiles. Once established, this will be the first step towards a set of international norms in the field of ballistic missiles.

However, the fact is that implementing non-proliferation and arms control agreements, and seeking to enforce them, is simply not enough. While those mechanisms continue to play a vital role in slowing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, they have not stopped such proliferation. That is the harsh reality that has to be faced up to, and it is why the UK and our allies also need to be able to deter and defend against these threats.

My. hon Friend raised the issue of the threat level and the relationship between capability and intent. Threat consists of capability and intent, and it is important to take that into account. However, we must recognise also that the development of ballistic missile capabilities is a fact, and that intent can change rapidly. We must therefore take the potential threat very seriously indeed.

It is against that background that the US missile defence proposals have to be judged, based upon the world as it is, not as we would wish it to be.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ingram: No, as I wish to consider a wide range of issues. I shall do my best to allow my hon. Friend to intervene a little later, but I want to deal with the issues raised in the debate.

The US has made clear its commitment to deploying limited missile defences against emerging threats. That is one element of its response to the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

For our part, we have consistently made it clear that we understand the role that missile defences can play. We welcome the US continuing commitment to consult with NATO allies, Russia, China and others on this important issue. That shows that the US is not proceeding in a unilateral manner. We will continue to engage actively and constructively in these discussions as close allies with common strategic interests.

The US has made clear its intention to conduct an intensive programme of research, development, testing and evaluation of a wide range of missile defence options. Some of those options are prohibited under the terms of the anti-ballistic missile treaty. That is why the US announced in December that it had given Russia six months' notice of its intention to withdraw from that treaty, as it was entitled to do under the terms of the treaty. The ABM treaty is essentially a bilateral issue for the US and Russia, and its future is a matter for them.

I shall develop that point a little further, as it is important to recognise that the strategic context is changing even as the process that I have just described continues. We have all seen in recent months the emerging strength and stability of the new relationship between the US and Russia, which I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton will warmly welcome.

President Bush and President Putin have stressed their desire to work together to establish a new strategic framework based on openness and mutual trust rather than on enmity. Both recognise the need to focus on tackling today's emerging threats, including international terrorism and the proliferation of ballistic missiles, and both have made it clear that this new relationship is strong enough to withstand disagreements on individual issues.

The Government welcome the fact that the US and Russia have committed themselves to significant reductions in their levels of operationally deployed nuclear weapons, and that they will this year continue discussions on future arrangements for transparency and verification of their nuclear arsenals. We see no reason why the process of nuclear arms reduction should not continue.

It has been suggested that US missile defence proposals could cause a new arms race. That is simply conjecture; it is not a proven case. I would argue that, in debating this matter, we have to distinguish between cause and effect. I recognise the view taken by my hon. Friend and others, but I would ask him to consider the opposite point—that missile defence can be viewed as a response to an existing proliferation problem, not as a cause of that problem.

Improved defences against ballistic missiles carrying weapons of mass destruction may indeed help to tackle proliferation by reducing the perceived value of pursuing such programmes for any state that has not yet renounced weapons of mass destruction capabilities, or which is seeking to acquire them in contravention of its international legal obligations.

We should not underestimate the extent to which proliferators—rogue nations and others—have been trying for many years to get hold of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, nor how great have been the efforts to prevent those weapons' non-legitimate use. We will continue to face that challenge, regardless of how the US decides to proceed with missile defence. The current context of world events shows that the threat will remain.

I would also point out that we understand the US argument that missile defences might actually reinforce deterrence. Not only would any attempted ballistic missile attack by an irresponsible state on the US meet with a powerful response, but defences would make a potential aggressor unsure whether his attack could succeed at all.

There is a wider point here. We need to get away from the idea that the concept of mutually assured destruction is relevant to deterring all the threats of the future. It has been argued that mutually assured destruction, or the balance of terror, was a logic which, although deeply unpleasant, led to stability between the two superpowers in the bipolar cold war world. The thousands of warheads aimed at each country's territory threatened the destruction of each country.

The cold war is over, and Russia and the US are no longer enemies. It is hard to see how the logic that applied to their cold war relationship is relevant to the future deterrence of multiple limited threats to the US. It is indeed ironic that many of those who vigorously opposed the deterrence logic of the cold war now object to the US seeking to explore alternative ways of deterring and defending itself against ballistic missile attack in a changed and changing strategic environment.

My hon. Friend raised questions about the efficacy and cost of the US missile defence proposals. He quoted extensively from expert witnesses to the effect that the system would not work. I could ask my hon. Friend what he is worried about: if the expert opinion is that the system will not work—and those eminent people seem to know better than anyone else—why is he worried about the US proposals?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The answer is simple. I believe that the money could be put to better use—in the military sphere, or in terms of aid or peacemaking. The amount of money involved is inordinate, given that the experts say the system will not work.

Mr. Ingram: I was coming to that point. The efficacy of certain US systems is, first and foremost, a matter for

[Mr. Ingram]

the US. That does not mean that my hon. Friend cannot comment on it, but it is a matter for the US and its people. Too much tends to be read into the success or failure of any given test. I am sure that my hon. Friend and his expert witnesses would accept that these are long-term programmes. They will need to be judged on final results, rather than on the smoothness of progress along the way. Indeed, I think that my hon. Friend recognised in his contribution that the experts may have got the matter wrong.

It is also up to the US Administration to decide how they spend their money, and to determine their relative priorities. Of course, as I recognised earlier, there are other means of delivering weapons of mass destruction, but it is wrong to think there are either/or choices here. Responsible states should consider their options for defending against all such possible forms of attack.

My hon. Friend commented on the view of the Chief of the Defence Staff. In that context, I should like to set out briefly the UK's own position on missile defence. We believe that it would be premature to decide now about acquiring such a capability, either for deployed forces—for which we already have considerable capabilities for passive force protection against weapons of mass destruction—or for the defence of the UK.

However, our options for the future remain open. We continue to assess the threat posed by ballistic missiles, and to assess ballistic missile defence technologies, which are evolving rapidly. As well as this national work, we fully support the ongoing NATO theatre missile defence feasibility studies, and we have a long-standing technical dialogue with the US on the subject.

Let me make it clear that it also remains the case that the US has not decided what sort of missile defence system it will ultimately seek to deploy. As I have said, it is currently considering a range of options. These include sea and air-based systems, as well as the land-based system that was at the heart of the thinking of the previous US Administration.

The simple fact is that the US has not yet asked us for facilities. Clearly, we will consider such a request if, and when, it is made.

As I said at the outset, the Government welcome this debate. It has allowed me to touch on some of the important issues that have to be addressed. I recognise that my hon. Friend has strong views on this subject—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 17 January 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Criminal Justice System

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

2.30 pm

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): I am grateful for the opportunity to outline what we have achieved so far to help victims and witnesses and to set out further planned improvements. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary are responsible for many important policy areas, which affect millions of citizens, but there are few areas to which we attach greater priority.

For far too long, the needs of victims and witnesses have been the secondary focus of the criminal justice system, and the Government are working to rectify that. We need the co-operation and support of victims and witnesses for the criminal justice process to work properly. In return, we have an obligation to ensure that they are offered the best possible support so that the often awful experience of the original crime is not made worse by the response of the criminal justice system.

I am aware of the critical comments made only last week by some of the country's most senior police officers. I accept some of their points, and others will be dealt with as we carry out work in response to Lord Justice Auld's important report on the criminal courts. We have, however, already made good progress on several issues, as I hope to make clear in this short opening speech.

First, I want to deal with what we have done for victims. Our most basic need when we are affected by crime—whether serious or less serious—is for immediate protection and support. We look to the police to assess what protection is required and then to provide it. They also play an important role in providing on-going support, but we now expect the voluntary organisation, Victim Support, to step in to offer the bulk of that assistance. To help it fulfil that responsibility, we have more than doubled its Home Office grant in the past four years. In May 1997, its annual grant was less than £12 million; today, it is £25 million. That has enabled Victim Support to establish two significant new services: a national telephone helpline for victims and a support service for victims and witnesses in magistrates courts, which matches the service already provided in the Crown court. Victim Support has also significantly strengthened its community-based schemes. With 15,000 volunteers nationally, it is the epitome of the giving society that we aim to nurture.

Another important need is for information. It is essential that all criminal justice agencies work together to ensure that victims are kept informed of how cases progress. The police, the Crown Prosecution Service and, in the most serious cases, the probation service have direct roles to play at different stages of the process. The police already have a victim's charter commitment to tell a victim when a suspect is charged, the date and result of the trial or hearing, and the outcome of any subsequent appeal. The charter also gives the police responsibility for conveying prosecution decisions to victims, although Sir Iain Glidewell's independent review of the CPS and Sir William Macpherson's report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence recommended that the CPS should take responsibility for communicating prosecution decisions directly to victims, rather than via the police. Arrangements to implement those recommendations were piloted in six CPS areas before a national programme of implementation began in April 2001. The scheme will roll out across the country on a phased basis, with full implementation planned for October 2002.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): My right hon. Friend has rightly pointed out that the police have an obligation to notify some decisions to the victims. The CPS now has an obligation to notify some of its decisions, which I think are called key casework decisions. The probation service has a responsibility, and Victim Support assumes another. That is four bodies, and the danger is that they become mixed up. Some people do not give notification, because they think that someone else will. I appreciate the need for some kind of evaluation of the national roll-out of the CPS responsibility, but is there not a case for a victims' champion, whose job is to take on all the responsibilities from those different organisations?

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I shall come to issues around the victims charter later. What is essential is coherence of proper co-ordination between individual agencies and people who deal with victims and witnesses. That would ensure a proper level of support and service that is understandable to the victims and does not make them feel worse than they do, directly or indirectly, as a result of the crime.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I declare an interest as president of Stroud Victim Support, which is a good organisation. I am interested in cases that the CPS decides not to pursue, a subject that my right hon. Friend may mention. There is a lacuna, in the sense that the CPS is unwilling to say why it does not pursue them. That can be hurtful and difficult to understand.

Mr. Bradley: I accept that point. It is essential that the reasons why a case is taken forward or not are communicated to individuals. Public confidence in the criminal justice system must not be further undermined through lack of intelligence.

I was about to say how the CPS system is meant to work. If the CPS decides to drop or alter a charge substantially, it should write directly to the victims to inform them of the reasons for the decision. In certain serious categories of offence that involve child abuse, sexual offences or racially aggravated offences, a meeting will be offered if further explanation is required. That is in addition to the existing victims charter commitment to meet families who are bereaved as a result of crime to explain prosecution decisions. It is a key initiative aimed at improving the quality of service to victims and contributing to increased public

[Mr. Bradley]

confidence in the criminal justice system. I hope that that goes some way to answering my hon. Friend's point.

Various agencies are involved, and the probation service is another. Since the mid-1990s, victims of offenders sentenced to four years or more for a violent or sexual offence will normally have been contacted by the probation service before the release of the offender. On taking office, we decided to put that work on a statutory basis in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The probation service is now in contact with the victims of all offenders sentenced to 12 months or more for a violent or sexual offence, unless the victim requests otherwise. The probation service will explain how the prison system works and answer any questions that the victim has. Victims will later have the opportunity to have their say about the release conditions of offenders. Many have genuine grounds for fear, and it is essential that those responsible for making arrangements for release are routinely informed of what those fears are. It does not give victims the right to decide whether a prisoner should be released, but there could be a good reason why an offender should be excluded from a particular town or city, for example.

The principle of allowing victims to give information, as well as any evidence that they might have, is important. Since last October, we have given them the opportunity to do so earlier in the process, with the introduction of the victim personal statement scheme. The scheme will ensure that victims' views are taken into consideration at all stages of the criminal justice process. It will outline the effect that the crime has had on their lives and might lead to their receiving help that would otherwise not have been available. For example, the police may see from the personal statement what kind of personal support the victim thinks that he or she needs, or the magistrates courts might use the information provided to decide that conditions should be attached to a defendant's bail. The statements will not give victims the opportunity to decide the sentence that a convicted offender should receive. It is important that that remain the responsibility of magistrates and judges. We shall evaluate later this year how effective the scheme has been, and shall make improvements if any are needed.

We have made improvements to the criminal injuries compensation scheme. Since last April, and following a public consultation process, changes have been introduced to improve awards, by up to 10 per cent., for victims of rape, sexual assault and child abuse, and for those who suffer serious multiple injuries in other cases. Awards are available, for the first time, to same-sex partners in homicide cases.

The changes more than maintain the scheme's position as more generous than any other in Europe. Those are just some of the developments that have taken place for victims.

Mr. Drew: I know that this is a common problem and it could be that my right hon. Friend will have to answer me in writing, perhaps after consultations. I have encountered at least two cases in which claimants have been told that, because they have previously been convicted of a criminal offence, they are not eligible for compensation or entitled to a lesser amount. Will my right hon. Friend clarify the rules?

Mr. Bradley: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I do not want to give misleading information about the operation of the scheme in individual cases—it is administered, as he knows, independent of Government—but if I can give him the precise details later in the debate, I shall. Otherwise, I shall write to him.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): What is the rationale behind discriminating against people who have already been convicted of crimes, in relation to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority?

Mr. Bradley: I have just made it clear that I shall clarify the position, and I shall do so, ideally in this debate, but if not I shall ensure that my hon. Friend receives a written explanation.

I shall try to highlight some of our future plans. At the centrepiece, as we trailed in last year's election manifesto, is a bill of rights for victims. After consultations on this and other issues last year, there was broad agreement with the principle, but a divergence of views on the content of the Bill. Those differences are being discussed across government and with victims' representatives. I intend to return to the House later this year to announce how we plan to proceed.

There was much greater unanimity on the idea of a victims commissioner or ombudsman. He or she would be appointed to champion victims' interests on a range of issues—not just those relating to the criminal justice system—and to investigate complaints when things went wrong, but also, in line with what my hon. Friends have said, to ensure co-ordination of activity and services. I would expect the commissioner to make recommendations to improve the response of every organisation that comes into contact with victims of crime. The detailed development work on the post is currently taking place and, again, I intend to inform the House of definite plans later this year.

I know that many right hon. and hon. Members are equally concerned about the victims of road traffic incidents and accidents. I am very grateful for the several hundred items of correspondence that we have had about this and to the many hon. Members who responded to the consultation paper to which I have referred. It may seem strange, as it did to me at first, that those injured in road traffic incidents, and the families of those who are killed, are not entitled to the same services as victims of crime. There are, however, complex issues to resolve before we can decide how they can be brought within the scope of current or planned services for victims. I am examining that question closely.

For example, after many incidents, it is decided that no offence under the road traffic legislation has been committed. If an offence has been committed, should the families of offenders who have died in an incident be entitled to receive personal support services, just as victims' families do? Those are the kind of detailed and sensitive questions that we need to explore. The matter is one of particular concern to me, and I assure hon. Members that I shall make progress on it.

Mr. Drew: My hon. Friend is getting through my checklist brilliantly, and there are not many more items left, but I wonder whether the Home Office has studied the role of insurance companies. I have evidence that they have deliberately delayed the pursuit of justice on the basis that it is better not to make a payment today, even if that means paying more eventually. That is a scandal that needs to be properly investigated.

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend raises an important point, and I shall reflect on it and pursue it as we develop the role of the commissioner and the rights of victims in the relevant cases.

I now move on to witnesses. Many victims of crime give evidence about the offence in court. I would like more to be given that opportunity, either because more offenders are detected, or because witnesses feel more confident about coming forward to give evidence. The attrition rate is simply too high, and, for some types of offences, unacceptably high. We are addressing that with determination.

We need to ensure that support is provided in court to enable witnesses to give evidence with as little stress as possible. During our first term, we conducted a major review of the needs of particularly vulnerable or intimidated witnesses. Their plight has long given rise to concern that too many cases are abandoned, or not even started, because the stress of the criminal justice process is too great for many victims and witnesses, both adults and children. For example, adult witnesses may be vulnerable because of personal circumstances, such as their relationship with the defendant or the nature of certain serious crimes such as rape. Some witnesses with particular disabilities are not regarded as being capable of giving evidence and so can be denied access to justice.

A witness who fears intimidation may not report the offence or may refuse to give evidence in court. The review made 78 recommendations for improvements in the criminal justice system—in the reporting of crime and the identification of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses and measures to assist witnesses before, during and after the trial.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Forgive me, but I cannot recollect the terms and recommendations of report. Were convicted criminals serving extensive sentences in prison who had been victims of crimes in the past covered by the report and identified as vulnerable victims?

Mr. Bradley: I do not have the report before me, but I shall give my hon. Friend a more robust answer later in the debate, or ensure that she receives the information by correspondence. I take her point, but I must ensure that I do not give her misleading information.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Minister is coming to an important part of the debate, in which I hope to be called to speak later. Does he accept that we are in a serious position, because the trend is that an increasing number of people are unwilling to give evidence? A key problem in clearing up a crime is that people are unwilling even to start the process of giving evidence, let alone continue through court to the end. If we could deal with that problem, the clear-up rate would rise and many other concerns would become a secondary consideration.

Mr. Bradley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is one of several reasons why cases are not being pursued as satisfactorily as they should be. The problem will be addressed in our general review of the criminal court process, sentencing and support for victims and witnesses. Unless we are given proper, robust evidence in court, trials of whatever type cannot be completed satisfactorily. Too many cases fail because of that, and we must address the problem, otherwise we shall not regain and rebuild public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a mirror image group of vulnerable witnesses who are eager to give evidence but whom the system debars, because it has concluded that they cannot give good evidence? To have better justice and better treatment of victims, we must improve the ways in which courts treat evidence from people with learning disabilities, for example.

Mr. Bradley: I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend says. We must consider all the physical and environmental conditions, the general organisation of our court system and the criminal justice system to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of justice and that justice is seen to be done. We should enable anyone, however they may be described, to give evidence, by putting the conditions in place to hear it. We are attempting to do that. I shall identify some measures that we have taken and those that we intend to take, but there are always new perspectives on such matters, so I would welcome suggestions from my hon. Friend and others. We want to ensure that more people who are guilty of offences are brought to book.

The recommendations, including those requiring changes in legislation, were all accepted and are at various stages of implementation. The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provides the legislative framework for action. The Act defines vulnerable and intimidated witnesses in sections 16 and 17 respectively and contains several special measures for them, including the use of screens round witness boxes; clearing the public gallery in sex offence cases and intimidation cases; assistance with communication; video-recorded evidence in-chief; live television links, and the removal of wigs and gowns. Under the Act, children under the age of 17 will automatically be eligible to apply for special measures simply by virtue of their age. The Act also specifies that a court must consider a witness's views about his requirements for assistance in court when it determines whether to grant him special measures.

Some provisions of the 1999 Act have already been implemented. Since September 2000, there has been a ban on defendants without legal representation personally cross-examining rape victims. That has put an end to the possibility of rape victims being put through the ordeal of the accused reliving his actions

[Mr. Bradley]

through the line of questioning. We have introduced further restrictions to limit the questions that a rape victim can be asked about their previous sexual history under cross-examination.

We accept that the target of implementing most of the special measures in the Crown court by the end of last year was too ambitious. The Departments and agencies involved agreed that more time was needed to prepare for the changes. An announcement on the final timetable will be made next week, on 24 January.

Our commitment to improving the treatment of witnesses does not end with the implementation of the 1999 Act. The willingness of independent witnesses to report and later give evidence in court can, as my hon. Friends said, be crucial in detecting and prosecuting offenders. The Institute for Public Policy Research published a report called "Reluctant Witness" last autumn. It concludes that we need to know more about why witnesses, with the exception of those who are particularly vulnerable or intimidated, fail to come forward and are reluctant to participate in the criminal justice process.

The first national witness survey was conducted in 2000 and found that 76 per cent. of witnesses were satisfied with their overall interaction with the criminal justice system, but that only 61 per cent. would be happy to repeat the experience. We need and plan to do more work on that, and some of the measures that I described should help. As hon. Members have said, however, that is just a start and more needs to be done.

I am sure that hon. Members will recognise from that summary of our current initiatives and future plans our commitment to improve the status of victims and witnesses. We are actively working on combating persistent offenders, tackling repeat victimisation and encouraging the use of restorative justice when circumstances warrant it. Taken as a whole, that package of measures lays the foundations for a criminal justice system that gives victims and witnesses the priority that they deserve and for maintaining our acknowledged position as the European front-runner in victim care.

I have acknowledged that much more needs to be done, but I hope that hon. Members recognise that sound measures are in place and that good progress is being made. I am determined to drive the agenda forward, and I know that I have support throughout the House for that.

2.58 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I am grateful to be called in this important debate. I thank the Minister for his comments, and I shall say a few words of my own. I shall be fairly non-partisan because people of good will should have common cause on such issues.

I begin by declaring an interest. I have been a solicitor for more than 30 years and initially practised in criminal law. I sit as a Crown court recorder and as an acting district judge, which is the same as a stipendiary magistrate. For over 30 years I have witnessed, sometimes as an advocate, but equally often in a judicial capacity, the situation in our courts.

When I first began in practice, my firm impression was that scant regard was paid to the interests of victims or witnesses in the criminal justice system. Regularly, the first contact that a witness or victim—they are often the same person—would have with the case, after making their initial statement, was when they arrived in court to give evidence. Arriving at a strange court, quite often, in the old buildings, they had to wait in a confined and cramped area. There were often no separate waiting areas for the different parties in the case, and the witness or victim might find themselves standing next to the defendant or his or her family or friends. Little was done to care for the interests of the witness or victim in those days. It is to the credit of successive Governments and of all those in politics that there have been steady improvements during the past 30 years.

In 2002, more people than ever before who witness a crime do not bother to report it. They pass by on the other side. That is significant, and a point made tellingly by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) a few moments ago. We live in a society in which there is a tendency to pass by on the other side. I read that only one third of those who witness an act of vandalism report it to the police, and that only one in six of those who witness an assault bother to report it to the police. I read also that a majority of those who attend court, even now, say that they would be unwilling to act as a witness again in future.

We are bound to ask ourselves why that is. It is, perhaps, a sad reflection on the nature of the society in which we live, in which, over some years, there have been constant improvements. Is such a lack of engagement caused by a general loss of confidence in the criminal justice system, or by a decline in the general feeling of civic responsibility? Is it because more and more people in society do not think that it is worth becoming involved in the criminal justice system? The trend is worrying. It is strong today and, oddly enough, was not as strong 30 years ago; yet one would think that the situation would be the other way round.

I shall talk about some nuts-and-bolts issues that have arisen from my experience in the courts. I shall begin with a few words about witnesses—who can be victims as well—and the sort of problems that they may face. I qualify what I am about to say by remarking that there have been tremendous improvements in the past few years. Courts throughout the country, successive Governments and the voluntary sector in general have all been trying hard to improve the situation. I do not intend to be heavily critical.

From a witness's point of view, problems can arise inside or outside the court. I shall deal with problems that arise inside the court first. Before a case is fixed for trial, a pre-trial review takes place, when the court fixes a day and sorts out administrative matters. Over-listing of cases has been a problem in our courts. The more cases that are listed for trial on a given afternoon, the greater is the likely number of witnesses whose presence is required but who are not called to give evidence. It is difficult for the courts, because quite often a trial is listed at 2 o'clock and by 2.15 the defendant has pleaded guilty, so there are two or three hours spare. The problem of over-listing must be considered.

Witness availability is a problem. I and those who practise in the courts have noticed that quite often on a pre-trial review the dates to avoid for defence witnesses are not brought to court. Sometimes even the dates to avoid for Crown witnesses are not brought to court. A trial date is fixed and some form of difficulty arises.

In court, we have all heard bullying questions by advocates that make witnesses wonder, "Is it worth the candle to come here?" There is a fine line to be drawn between tough questioning, which must be carried out on behalf of a defendant, and bullying questioning, where there is a clear duty on the judicial authority to intervene to protect the witness.

In the past, there has not been the facility for anybody to say to a witness, after they have completed an afternoon in court or finished giving evidence, "Thank you for coming." It has not been possible to write to the witness after the case to say, "You came as a witness: this is what our verdict was", "This is what the sentence was", or "This is what is happening about the appeal." The follow-through was missing.

A witness may come to court and find that the case has been adjourned. How can that be? Trials are fixed for 2 o'clock and 3 o'clock. The witnesses in the 3 o'clock trial have to arrive at 2 o'clock. The advocate stands up at the 2 o'clock trial and says, "My Lord, this is going to take the whole afternoon." The next trial then has to be adjourned. That happens not infrequently. The average time that a witness has to wait in a case is up to three hours. Moreover, 40 per cent. of witnesses do not give evidence on the day that they are called, and any witness who turns up is almost inevitably bound to lose money.

Even in the best-ordered world, there will be problems in terms of witnesses. It is good judicial practice if a case cracks—as is the phrase—for the judge or magistrates to have the witnesses in to say, "We are so sorry that the case has fallen away this afternoon. These are the reasons why, and we would like to apologise on behalf of the court system." Many judges do that, and it can make a difference. I understand that a majority of witnesses say after a court experience, "I don't really want to do this again." That is a pity.

The Minister mentioned the witness service, which can help to solve some of the problems to which I have referred. The service run by Victim Support helps witnesses and victims and their families before, during and after the hearing. Trained volunteers in every Crown court centre in England and Wales, and some magistrates courts, give free support and practical information to witnesses.

In my constituency, there is an effective and innovative witness care service with dedicated volunteers supporting witnesses. They do little things such as taking them to court before the hearing and telling them, "This is where you'll come in", "This is where you'll sit", "This is where we get a cup of coffee" and "This is where the refreshments are." That service was launched in October 2001. A few weeks ago, I received a letter from its organiser that read:

> "Judging by the positive feedback from the Court users, it does make one wonder what victims, witnesses and families did before".

It has proved to be a great success and I congratulate all those connected with it—not only in Woking but elsewhere.

In some cases, the victims and the witness can be one and the same person. The Minister knows that the Labour party's manifesto for the last election promised to legislate for a victim's bill of rights, but we do not think that we heard that in the Queen's speech. However, I believe I heard the Minister say a little earlier that such a measure was at the front of his mind and that he proposed before too long to return to the issue and make an announcement about the way in which the Government would proceed. That will be welcomed on both sides of the House.

The Minister referred to the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, which contained some measures that have helped victims, particularly those who might feel intimidated in court and who hitherto have felt intimidated. One is section 24, which provides for witnesses giving evidence by live link. That is quite a useful tool in one's armoury from time to time. Another is section 23, which provides for screens to shield the victim from the defendant. These measures are coming on stream in our courts and should be used with care and sensitivity. It is important that any witness—or a victim giving evidence as a witness—should be properly tested in court as to the truth or accuracy of their version of events. Nevertheless, the introduction of screens, when appropriate, is something that we can all applaud. There is also, as the Minister said, the banning of cross-examination of rape victims by a defendant, another forward-looking measure.

The Minister rightly referred to victim personal statements, which again are coming on stream. I believe that they were introduced in October 2001, so it is too early to say what effect they will have, but as the Minister said, in such a statement the victim has a chance to say how he or she has been affected by the crime, and the statement will become part of the court papers. We know the extension of this in relation to road traffic accidents and bereaved relatives.

Permitting a victim to make such a statement gives a clear signal that we believe that victims' rights and views are important and that they are not to be forgotten in a criminal trial. It is something that can also be relevant in a pre-sentence report. A judge or magistrate will put a defendant back in custody or on bail for a pre-sentence report following conviction. That will happen quite often. The pre-sentence report is likely to refer to the victims' personal statement, and I believe that the judge or magistrates, when sentencing, will be able to take it into account. I hope that I am not wrong on this; I must wait for guidance from those who tell me what I must do in court. However, I believe that those who pass sentence will read the victims' personal statement, which can be relevant. It is not often, for example, understood by those who do not take an interest in the criminal justice system that victims of burglary can, for months or years, be frightened of going back into their home. How helpful it is for a court to know the effect of a crime on a victim.

I want also to mention briefly the question of compensation. The rule now is that where there is an assault, and in other cases too, compensation should be awarded to the victim. I like the idea of courts awarding compensation against defendants in favour of victims, even a nominal amount against defendants of limited means. It does not stop a victim claiming relevant compensation. Victim personal statements are a very good idea and a great addition to our system.

[Mr. Humfrey Malins]

We have already mentioned the victim support scheme. It is a great scheme that has been going for many years, staffed by more than 14,000 volunteers throughout the country. It has helped more than 1 million victims a year and it involves more than 1,000 staff. We all know the good work that the scheme has done and still does.

I think that it is the view of victims—it is certainly mine—that there is one extra little way in which to support a witness. Quite often, a nasty assault—a sexual assault or crime of violence, for example—involves a defendant and victim who live in close proximity. Statistically, that is likely. My experience, which I think is shared by others, is that there is a housing issue when the defendant comes out of prison. It is quite possible that the victim will remain frightened if the defendant is still three doors away. I do not know whether this could or should be put in statute, but I hope that in future local authorities will take a sympathetic view to requests for housing transfers.

Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that when I tried to persuade the Government last year to require local authorities to move someone whom the police had said should be moved for their own protection, they said that no, they would rather leave it to the local authority's discretion? My experience, like the hon. Gentleman's, is that the best will in the world on the part of local council officers and police officers often does not deliver the ability for someone to be housed away from where they feel vulnerable for months or even years. We might have to return to a situation in which the law makes people provide alternative accommodation, because the best will and intentions do not appear to be capable of delivering.

Mr. Malins: The hon. Gentleman makes a very strong point, and if I may say so it is typical of him to have spotted and done work on such an important point. I feel that he is right to suggest a move from just an expression of hope that local authorities will act to some statutory or other back-up. The position for a witness in such a situation can be very worrying. As the hon. Gentleman says, such things can take months, and months are long periods if one is living close to a person who has caused harm and fear to oneself.

I turn briefly to the criminal injuries compensation scheme. The Minister rightly said that that scheme, which has now been in place in one form or another for 36 or 37 years, is probably the most generous in Europe. It has been reformed and, although it is not perfect, it is probably the best in Europe, providing for the payment of moneys to blameless victims of crime at taxpayers' expense. It paid out about £200 million to 46,000 victims in 1998-99, and continues to do well.

Having said that, I think that there is one small problem with the scheme, and I hope that it strikes a chord with the Minister. I believe that if someone who receives, say, £15,000 compensation for injuries is on benefits, their benefits can be stopped because the award is higher than the capital allowance for people in receipt of means-tested benefits. Such a person might have to spend their compensation on rent and subsistence until most of it has gone. That is slightly worrying, and I hope that the Government will examine it.

I have spoken for a little while about victims, and I mentioned Victim Support. All of us will want to pay tribute to the work of local victim support schemes in our own constituencies. In Woking, and throughout Surrey, dedicated volunteers provide excellent help.

I return to my central point. I am concerned that at a time when the Government, with support from politicians of good will, are trying not only to increase and extend protection for witnesses and victims, but do everything in their power to encourage witnesses and victims to come to court to give evidence and do their civic duty, there is a growing trend among people to say that that is not worth the effort. That distresses me immensely. The success of our criminal justice system depends on everyone co-operating and doing their bit. If the Government, through these measures and other action in the next year or two, can help to reverse that trend so that there are more people who feel properly part of the criminal justice system, the Minister and the Government will have done a good service for the country.

3.20 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): The comments that I make today relate to the 80 historical abuse investigations that have been undertaken by police authorities throughout the UK during the past two years. I am chair of the all-party group for abuse investigations that was formed this summer. It has approximately 60 members from the Commons and the Lords who have a collective concern about the way in which these cases are investigated.

My interest in these cases and their victims started in 1997 when two people came to see me at a surgery. They told me that they were concerned about their friend, who had been accused of sex abuse. They were certain that that individual had not committed the alleged crimes. We all recognise that that is a perfectly natural response from the friends and family of any individual accused of committing sex abuse. However, mindful of the fact that juries make decisions about the guilt and innocence of individuals, I said that I would raise several questions to ascertain the validity of their comments. I tabled a significant number of parliamentary questions during the course of 1997 and 1998 relating to sex abuse inquiries in the UK. Unfortunately, the only statistics available at the time related to Merseyside, which has investigated sex abuse cases with a degree of thoroughness almost unmatched in the UK.

During the early part of this year, I met with Mr. Terence Grange, chief constable of Dyfed and Powys police, who is the lead chief constable on sex abuse matters. He prepared a report for me after contacting all police authorities to ask them about the scale of their sex abuse inquiries. For the record, I am sure that hon. Members would like to know how many victims of care home abuse there are in each of the major police authorities in the UK. Cheshire has identified 500 victims of sex abuse in care homes during the past 20 years; Devon and Cornwall has identified 369 victims; Gloucestershire has identified 150 victims; Greater

Manchester has identified 322 victims; Gwent has identified 500 victims; Humberside has identified 100 victims; Kent has identified 47 victims; Lancashire has identified 182 victims; Leicestershire has identified 73 victims; Merseyside has identified 697 victims; the Metropolitan police have identified 196 victims; North Wales has identified 500 victims; North Yorkshire has identified 100 victims; Nottinghamshire has identified 13 victims; South Wales has identified 569 victims; South Yorkshire has identified three victims; Staffordshire has identified 260 victims; Suffolk has identified 12 victims; Surrey has identified 25 victims; West Mercia has identified 286 victims; West Midlands has identified 138 victims; Wiltshire started its inquiries in 2000, but I have been unable to find out whether it has identified any victims.

I realise that it will be difficult for hon. Members to hold those statistics in their minds, but I know them extremely well. They beg several questions about the way in which the police have pursued investigations of this kind and their failure to identify victims. I have already mentioned Merseyside police authority, which has so far identified 697 victims. That should be compared with South Yorkshire, where, apparently, there are only three victims of historical care home abuse, or Nottinghamshire, where there are 13. That begs questions about how the investigations are pursued by the various police authorities.

Merseyside police authority assures me that there have indeed been 697 victims of care home abuse in the past 20 years. If that is right, and if it is also true that we in the north-west are not genetically predisposed to abusing children, one must assume a similar number of victims in every other authority in the country. In other words, it is probable that at least 600 people in each authority have been abused while in care homes in the past 20 years. Many of them have not been identified through the processes employed to date by the police. We have let those people down terribly. Of course, it is possible that the police authorities of Merseyside, north Wales and south Wales have identified people who are not in fact victims.

So who are these victims and how are they identified? Some 80 per cent. of those who have lived in care homes in this country in the past 20 years are convicted criminals. That is a dreadful statistic, and a travesty of the care home system that the young and the vulnerable have enjoyed in the recent past. Police authorities identify victims by working with social services departments to produce lists of those who have lived in care homes. Then, they seek and find those victims wherever they may arise. The vast majority have been in prison or are currently serving sentences. Indeed, I have visited a number of them.

The victims are identified with the help not only of social services but of solicitors, who run advertisements in newspapers stating, "Have you been the victim of sex abuse? If so, you could be eligible for compensation. Please contact us." In fact, a solicitor in Manchester is currently dealing with 700 such cases, at a cost to the state in legal aid of between £18,000 and £24,000 per individual. On average, between £30,000 and £40,000 is obtained per individual. Of course, it is not necessary to prosecute one's case in court to obtain compensation. The level of compensation reflects the degree of abuse to which the victims were allegedly subjected. So solicitors work with the police, who work with social services, to identify the victims.

As I said, the victims tend to be found within the prison system, and I want to spend a few minutes discussing the way in which the police conduct interviews within that system.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Lady has clearly done a lot of work, but I wonder whether she has addressed the important point that many who are convicted of sexual abuse are convicted of offences against numerous individuals. Does she know how many people have been convicted of, say, more than 10 or more than 50 offences against different people? Such a person is far more likely to be guilty than the person whose conviction is based on a single allegation, which is much more likely to have been invented without supporting evidence.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: It is a sad fact that I probably know more about these investigations than anybody else on the planet, and I can give the hon. Gentleman a detailed answer. As I said, the only information that I have been able to obtain is from Merseyside police authority. I shall ask Terence Grange, whom I am meeting later on, if it is possible to apply the statistics to which he refers—they are very useful—to all other authorities.

The historical perspective is useful. When the police started to investigate the crimes, they found that if they identified two victims and placed them against one accused in court, they could lose, and statistics demonstrate that they did lose a number of such cases. Police now seek out multiple accusers, so typical cases have at least five—sometimes 12—identified victims against one abuser. There is a direct relationship between number of accusers and successful prosecutions.

Let us go back to how individuals are interviewed in a prison context. I was in a prison recently, and the police arrived to carry out an interview with an individual whom they believed had been a victim of abuse. The prisoner is not informed that the police are visiting, and has no idea that he or she will be interviewed. They are told only shortly before they arrive. The police can arrive in numbers of three to six. The day that I visited a prison in the north-east, six police constables had come to interview an individual who did not know that they were coming.

The nature of the interview is that the police present themselves and say that they would like the individual to assist them with their inquiries. Most prisoners have only ever seen police officers attempting to see them end up in prison for the crimes that they have committed. I urge hon. Members to consider that the police believe that such individuals have been subjected to the most horrendous abuse that we can imagine. One would think that a social worker or psychologist might be present, and that there might have been discussion with the Prison Service about the nature of the interview, bearing in mind that the prisoner may never in their life have disclosed information about the abuse.

However, six police officers stand over an individual in a room with square tables and chairs screwed to the floor, and they ask the individual to help them with their

[Mrs. Curtis-Thomas]

investigations. In such a context, can hon. Members imagine how long it sometimes takes for the police to obtain statements from criminals? I visited one gentleman in the north-east who, while in 10 different prisons, had received 12 visits from the police because they were keen to obtain a statement that he had been abused. They were searching for additional victims to support the allegations of other victims.

Victims are therefore interviewed by the police in the most deplorable circumstances. Furthermore, the conversation that takes place between the police and victim is not recorded. Contemporaneous notes taken by the police, and subsequently written down more fully, are the only evidence recorded. That gives me cause for concern. The people involved are gravely worried about the nature of that conversation in a cell with no independent witness.

It has been alleged that police encourage vulnerable victims to give false evidence by offering preferred parole conditions and informing them of possible compensation—£30,000 to £40,000 per individual. Victims might be informed that an allegation could help in their application for parole because they could claim that sexual abuse was the reason why they had led a life of crime.

Having made their statement, victims must go to court. They will have little idea of the environment in which their case will be heard and certainly will not have received the support that other victims, who do not find themselves in prison, enjoy.They arrive at court to give their testimony and then leave. I have been unable to determine whether any of them receive support, but many have made substantial accusations of abuse and have been left unsupported by the system. However, if the case is proven, they can expect substantial compensation and many people believe that availability of compensation is significantly distorting the number of allegations of abuse that are being made in this country.

I have said enough about the matter. I have written to the Ministers concerned about my worries and have read every royal commission report and document on the criminal justice system in the past 20 years. I shall conclude by referring to several pieces of text that clearly identify my concern and put it into context.

First, the opening paragraphs of the royal commission on criminal procedure, which was chaired by Sir Cyril Philips and presented to Parliament in January 1981, state:

> "In announcing on 23 June 1997 the Government's intention to set up a Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure and defining its terms of reference, the Prime Minister told the House of Commons that the time had come for the whole criminal process, from the start of the investigation to the point of trial, to be reviewed. In recent years, he said, some reforms had been introduced into the system, and many more proposed, but the approach had been piecemeal and no complete review had been mounted in this century."

The last century, of course. They continue:

> "Consideration, too, of the changes in public opinion lay behind the decision. For some years anxiety had been manifestly growing about the continuing rise in the level of crime, about robbery, drug-peddling, street crime, fraud the use of firearms and terrorism. There were ignorance and confusion also about the ways in which crime was investigated and prosecuted, and about whether, if these were improved, they could bring the growth of crime under control. On one side, it was asserted that the job of the police in fighting crime and of ensuring that offenders, and particularly dangerous professional criminals, were brought to justice was being made unwarrantably difficult by the restraints of criminal procedure; and on the other side that the use of the powers of investigation by the police were often open to grave question."

The powers of investigation by the police are still open to grave question. Despite the best efforts of the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department, the confidence of the public in the criminal justice system continues to fall.

As a result of the royal commission that was established in 1991, every word of police interviews with all suspects is tape-recorded. We have heard of a case this week in which a man was released after serving 27 years in prison, 10 of them as a consequence of refusing parole and refusing to admit to the crime of which he was accused. The requirement to tape suspects' statements meant that they were entitled to a fairer and more transparent trial. The time has now come to tape-record statements from witnesses when the only prosecution evidence is verbal testimony, which is frequently given to the police in the most draconian environment that can be imagined, with no independent witnesses. The only loser in the current criminal justice system in such cases is the person who has been identified as the possible accused.

3.39 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The issues raised by the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) are hugely important. I am aware of the work that she has done, and have great respect for it. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) has been involved in the same issues. Although my question might have appeared harsh, it is important that we should understand that the victims of abuse need maximum protection and support.

I am extremely sympathetic to the hon. Lady's case, particularly on her last point. It is wrong for vulnerable people to be interviewed and questioned without such an interview being attested as a properly conducted interview. I hope that the Government will legislate for that in due course.

I welcome the debate, not because we should delight in having to have it, but because the matter is so important. Unequivocally, I do not disagree with anything that the Minister or the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) has said. I shall make no partisan or party political comment, because the more we collaborate to increase the effectiveness of the response of all parties—whoever is in power—the better we serve our constituents.

I come to the debate as one who formerly prosecuted and defended as a lawyer. Before I was elected, I was a youth leader in south London and often worked with young people who were both victims and criminals. I have several times been a witness in court and, although I am a politician with the sort of experience that we all have, I do not find it easy. Giving evidence at the Old Bailey is not easy for the best prepared of us, let alone for those who have never been inside a court in their lives.

I have also been a victim. For a time, I was burgled so often—I think it was eight times in two years—that it almost became commonplace. Just in case criminals are listening, my house is now much more secure: since the security measures and protection system have been in place, I have not been burgled, so they should not try it now.

Like most people, I am often a victim but do not report it because I do not have that mindset. If my tyres are slashed, as they were last year, I do not immediately think that the key thing is to report the crime; I want to get the vehicle back on the road. Sadly, my constituency—in which I rejoice and of which I am very proud—has very high crime levels, including violent crime, and that has been so for as long as I have been its Member of Parliament. I come to the debate with experience—not something that I have sought—as the friend of people who have been murdered. I have seen somebody one week and discovered that they were not there the next. I have had to support their relatives, fiancés, girlfriends and children. I have been in the public galleries of courts such as the Old Bailey with families whose child has been killed and who have felt totally alienated from the criminal justice process because they have never had a formal chance to say anything as the case is processed and there is or is not a conviction followed by a sentence. People feel as though nobody has taken account of their feelings.

In a sense, I have been privileged to be in the sad position of standing alongside the families of people such as Stephen Lawrence and Damilola Taylor in the borough in which I am one of the Members of Parliament. I came to know very well the family of 17-year-old Jamie Robe, who was killed gratuitously in one of the streets in my constituency on a warm summer's night. On their behalf, and on mine, the message, which has been confirmed by the Minister and by the hon. Member for Woking, is that the criminal justice system is in many places less and less able to deliver justice because people are not giving evidence. That makes it impossible to secure the convictions expected in a just society that upholds people's rights and liberties.

One example focuses the debate for me, but it may focus other issues as well. I was closely involved in the Jamie Robe case when, at the police's request, I sought to persuade people to give evidence when they were nervous about it. They carried out their civic duty, but their experience was not happy. Before the case, the assurances that they sought about their protection as witnesses could not always be given. During it, things that they were led to believe might happen—appearing behind screens, for example—did not happen, and the anonymity of names and addresses was, by accident, lost earlier than planned.

Subsequently, two families in which witnesses were protected had to move from the area and, in effect, change their identities. One family quickly felt unsupported by the system. Members of it got into personal difficulties that led to the loss of their home, which resulted in their having a poor mental state and wondering whether they had done the right thing. The other family had to give up a small business to move, and they found it hugely difficult to get business going again. They lost a huge sum of money trying to relocate the business, which was almost impossible.

I give that example because we must address such problems. That is why I intervened on the hon. Member for Woking. Every week in my constituency office, the member of staff who looks after housing casework—a young graduate in his first job after attending Cardiff university—has to deal with people who are desperate to move because they are vulnerable or threatened. He and I often struggle for weeks, with the best help that he can get from police and housing officers, to put them somewhere where they and their families can feel safe.

That is not acceptable. People regularly come to me suicidal or threatening serious violence, because they feel that those are the only ways in which they will be noticed. I say that simply to point out that I share the experience of the Minister, who represents another inner-city constituency, and that of colleagues who represent less urban deprived communities—the Wokings, Sloughs and Crosbys of the world. Those places are not perceived as great metropolitan centres, but they have the same tensions, as I know from the cases that we have read and heard about. Your city must have the same problems, Mr. Hancock. The issue is not unusual. It is countrywide.

We should seek to achieve maximum lay participation in the criminal justice system whenever it is needed. That is a great principle, and it ties in with the debate about the future of the criminal justice system, which I welcome. The more that citizens feel ownership of the system, the more confidence there will be in it and the more comfortable people will be. That means that jury trials must stay, as they are a way to engage the citizen. The number of lay magistrates must be increased rather than decreased, as they must play a part.

That participation also means that we have a duty to be witnesses when that is required of us. It is our civic responsibility. The hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) made the important point that we have a duty to support those who need support when they can be witnesses. I have received, as I imagine have colleagues, a helpful reminder from Mencap about how important it is that people with learning difficulties should feel able to take part, as they are often keen to do so. The same would apply to those with mental illnesses.

We have civic responsibilities, but we have a mutual responsibility to support each other as well. The hon. Member for Woking reminded us of the Christian principle that we have a duty not to pass by on the other side, and that also applies to other faiths. Many people choose to do so, whether they see someone vandalising a train or misbehaving on the tube or the street, because they are not willing to become involved in the process that taking action would imply. A councillor colleague whom I respect greatly, told me when we were discussing this debate a few days ago that police officers had told her that they often tell people not to give evidence, because it could put them in too vulnerable a position. If that is so, it is a pretty worrying state of affairs.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: My question relates to people with learning difficulties. The hon. Gentleman would, I am sure, be interested to learn that discrimination against people with learning difficulties extends to people who live in care homes. I referred earlier to the trawling inquiries launched by police authorities, but they involved cases that arose only in care homes where there were no people with learning difficulties.

[Mrs. Curtis-Thomas]

I wondered whether similar investigations had been undertaken concerning people with learning difficulties, but they have not. I suggest—I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees—that people with learning difficulties are more likely to be vulnerable to such abuse, yet they remain the least defended.

Simon Hughes: I agree. I imagine that we all have constituency experience of people with learning difficulties who have made allegations of abuse against those with responsibility for them, whether in a day centre or a residential setting. I hope that the hon. Lady and her colleagues will be able to make sure that such people are properly supported. Everyone deserves to be supported, but the more vulnerable people are, the more support they need.

Mr. Kidney: Before the previous intervention, the hon. Gentleman spoke of police officers who portrayed themselves as being on the side of potential witnesses by advising them not to be witnesses because the process was so terrible. Does he agree that the police are part of the process, and that it is important that officers should be willing and able to take up people's complaints? If they do not, they will act as gatekeepers, but keep the gates closed.

Simon Hughes: Absolutely. We have a duty to the police, too, as they often put themselves in the front line; they should feel confident that the system works. They are often as exposed as we are. Police officers do not often live in the communities that they police because they do not feel safe there. That is another change of the sort described by the hon. Member for Woking that has happened during the past 30 years.

Let us be blunt: it is not acceptable, from the playground upwards, to grass on people. That is the culture that we have to deal with. In my community, to grass on someone is as serious a crime as any, but we must be intelligent when trying to deal with it. If we are in a pub or club and someone we know knifes or shoots someone, it is not easy to go to the police station and say. "I know who it was."

Someone whom I knew well was killed some years ago in a bar in Tower Bridge road. The bar was completely packed, but not a single person was willing to come forward to say who had done it. The whole community knew who it was, yet not a soul was willing to say so. They did not do their duty. Although I could have given his name to the police, I was not there and could not give evidence, nor could I tell his family or his girlfriend about the incident. It is good that the matter is now on the Government's agenda, and I pay tribute to my colleague, the Deputy First Minister of Scotland, who has made sure that it is on the Government's agenda there. All our constituents should be reassured by that.

The Association of Chief Police Officers, led by the eminent and respectable chief constable of Thames Valley, who is soon to retire, published a report last week. It made it clear that we are in a pretty desperate state across the nation. I refer hon. Members to the section headed "The Search for Truth", which gives facts and figures on the views of victims and witnesses. The subtitle is

> "The impact of 'the game' played in court on victims and witnesses".

It includes a section on the number of people who go to court and come away unhappy because of the intimidation and inconvenience. It mentions the downward spiral in public confidence, and states that two out of five witnesses had told the British crime survey in 2000 that they would be unwilling to do it again. It also said that 53 per cent.— I think that that is what the hon. Member for Woking was referring to—of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses said that they would not be happy to do it again. That is the level of lack of confidence.

The Metropolitan police are carrying out a survey, for which the deadline for responses is, I think, tomorrow—I shall try to get mine in on time, and I encourage others to do so; I hope that late submissions will occasionally be accepted. Locally, the police and the criminal justice system are alert in trying to bring about improvements.

I intervened on the Minister to say that we must have the objective of increasing the success rate of the criminal justice system. In a written answer to me on 19 December 2001, at column 482W of *Hansard*, the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs gave the most recent clear-up figure across England and Wales as 24 per cent., but said that it was down to 15 per cent. in such areas as the Metropolitan police area.

One of our objectives must be to increase clear-up, as the current rate is clearly unsatisfactory. A second objective must be increasing the credibility of and confidence in the criminal justice system, a third maximising lay participation, and a fourth presenting opportunities for citizenship education. If people reach adulthood with an understanding of their responsibilities as well as their rights, they will be more likely to participate.

I have a practical suggestion: when we write to ask people turning 18 to fill in the electoral roll, it would be a good time to reinforce the work that is done in schools, and is being included in the national curriculum this year, and to explain that among the obligations of being an adult, one can vote, one may be a juror and a magistrate, and one may be expected to be a witness. Perhaps Ministers or their colleagues at the Department for Education and Skills could consider how that might be set out on the reverse of the form that people are sent on reaching 18.

Alternatively, as people were placed on the electoral roll, from which they could be identified, they could be sent a special letter, perhaps from the Government, the local Member of Parliament, the local council leader, Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all. Perhaps it might be better if it came from footballers, rock stars and people who are paid more than us, but it should be from someone who might make the recipients think that it was important.

I hope that we always make it clear that a crime against a person is more serious than a crime against property. Property crimes are bad, but those against individuals, whether threats or actions, are more threatening. Property crime can be awful, but it is never the same if no one is threatened or harmed.

As a caveat, I hope that we do not regard looking after defendants' rights as being incompatible with the present objective. The hon. Member for Crosby made that point well. That is why I consider jury trial important and something that should not be eroded. The two principles are not incompatible. We must be careful about issues such as double jeopardy and the suggestion that we might change the law to allow people to be prosecuted again after acquittal.

I take the view—although it is not a theological one and I could be persuaded differently—that if we propose to take that course, we might need, in the first place, as was originally proposed, to allow it only in homicide cases. Also, although I know that my view is controversial, the change should not be retrospective. I know that that would mean that when someone had been acquitted or the case had been discharged, the matter could not be brought back to court, and that that might even apply to the Stephen Lawrence case, but breaking the line on retrospective legislation would bring us big difficulties.

I end with some proposals. I would happy to elaborate on them privately to the Minister; since other hon. Members want to contribute, I shall merely list them now to put them on the record.

First, if there is to be reform of government, I hope that Ministers will study the idea of creating a ministry of justice, though I appreciate that that is not a central Home Office responsibility. Modernising government is a laudable objective, but the one Department that the Government refuse to examine is the Lord Chancellor's Department. That may be something to do with the Lord Chancellor's view on the matter, but I would like to persuade colleagues who know him and love him dearly that modernising government should include his Department and the creation of a ministry of justice.

Secondly, I do not believe in royal commissions for everything. I am not going to argue for a royal commission in this case because there are dangers in taking that road. We had the Philips report, we moved on and the Government wisely suggested a national police forum to consider police issues. However, there is a case for a standing body to give accessible advice on criminal justice system issues.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that establishing a facility to identify research undertaken by offices in the criminal justice system would be a sound proposal? Such a body could ascertain whether procedures were effective and efficient and achieved the aims set out?

Simon Hughes: I certainly agree. The National Audit Office is carrying out a review, and it is a good agency.

I hope that a lot of issues can be brought together when the Government complete their current work and plan legislation for next year. I will be keen to persuade them to introduce, under the auspices of the management of the criminal justice system, a victim service, which would do what the name implies, a witness service, a defendant's service, a legal service and so on. All parts of the system would be represented and would contribute to the exchanges and improvements that the hon. Lady hinted at.

The Government explored many issues in the consultation paper that they properly commissioned to review the victims charter, and the results are being considered now that the consultation has finished. The answers to their questions are that there should be a victims ombudsman, victims of road traffic accidents should be included in the scope of the charter, we need further measures—we have explained what they are—to support the victims of hate crimes. The Government also asked whether the victims of non-violent offenders who are sentenced to 12 months or more should be informed of their release from prison. The answer is yes, if the offenders fall into particular categories. Generally speaking, sex offenders, for example, have not committed a violent offence, but we need to debate the point. We also say yes to a victims fund, to improving the way in which matters are organised in court and to whether it is better to have rights rather than standards, although there are difficulties in getting them to work. Finally, there is the controversial issue of whether victims should become civil partners in criminal proceedings. That issue should stay on the agenda because it is worth continuing to consider it.

I hope that the Government will find time this year to implement the recommendations of the "Setting the Boundaries" report on sexual offences because it contains a lot of good material that would help a lot of victims. It is a worthwhile document, and its recommendations would increase confidence in the criminal justice system.

We all share the next concern, which the hon. Member for Woking expressed well. We should continue to reform the courts so that victims and defendants do not need to be together and do not accidentally bump into each other on the way to the same phone. That is extremely harrowing and off-putting. We should reconsider whether the obligation to rehouse can be made much more effective than it is at present.

The position on prosecution decisions is not absolutely clear, and I should like it to be made explicit that the public interest consideration that the Crown Prosecution Service always takes into account should include the question whether a prosecution serves the victim's interests. A warning might sometimes be better because it would not put the victim through the trauma of appearing in a case.

Assistance should be given to those who are vulnerable when they give evidence, and we should ensure that the protection that people need is sustained before court, in court and after court. There are a variety of cases in which cross-examinations by defendants should be prevented or carried out independently to avoid abuses. We may need to prevent addresses from being made public later in the proceedings. We must organise some court hearings so that the public gallery does not look down on the person giving evidence so that he is intimidated from upstairs. That is often enough to make people not give their evidence, change it or give only half of it.

People must know before they sign up to go to court whether screens will protect their identity. It is no good saying that they might or might not and that it will be decided on the day. In theory, it is decided before, but it is often decided only on the day on which the trial begins, which is a hopeless situation for the vulnerable and inexperienced.

Lastly, following conviction, there must be continuing support that does not drop away, advice to families and victims on the legal remedies that might be

[Simon Hughes]

found if they are unhappy with the outcome, and improved information about release arrangements for prisoners. To be fair, the Government and services generally do well in that respect. In fact, people suffer more from not knowing about the system rather than from any failure in the system itself, but it could be improved. The Government, the Conservative party and my party share common ground about the idea that there should be indeterminate sentences for the most serious offenders. In that way, the court could review whether it was safe to release someone, taking into account all the circumstances, which cannot possibly be done at the beginning of the sentence.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share my views in such an important debate. I would be happy to discuss the issues further informally, so that we can deliver as much as possible in the shortest possible time.

4.6 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I shall deal with three points. First, I shall make some practical suggestions about victim and witness support. Secondly, I want to deal with the question of road traffic victims. Thirdly, I shall consider the impact of the Auld report on the debate.

Before I entered Parliament, I worked for 20 years in a solicitor's office. At the beginning, before the Crown Prosecution Service existed, my work included acting as prosecutor for the police in magistrates courts, so I had access to the range of the prosecution process. Later, when the CPS was created, I was a regular defender of people in magistrates courts and, with barristers, in the Crown court. I have lived with the system for 20 years. As we have an adversarial system, there was always a prosecutor and a defendant, each of whom had legal representatives and their case. Those who did not fit neatly as part of the prosecution or defence case had an uncomfortable experience.

I suspect that victims became unhappy in the late 1980s and the 1990s because they were to an increasing extent squeezed out of the system, which at the same time became very professional. It gained the CPS and its legal input for the prosecution, and defence lawyers with legal aid and expert witnesses. Victims rightly felt aggrieved that they did not have such benefits.

We should give some credit to the Conservative Government who, in the 1990s, recognised that the situation was unfair and began the debate about victims and witnesses and their position in the system. I give them that much credit, although I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister that the real action was taken after 1997 by the Labour Government. I give the Minister and his predecessors credit for their excellent work in supporting Victim Support, in setting such ambitious targets for witness support schemes in every criminal court in the country, and for the proposals that they set out in "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead". Some of those are in force, such as the victim personal statements, some have been legislated for in the 1999 Act, and some we await legislative time to complete. Therefore, the story is so far so good, but there is some distance still to go.

I want to commend a couple of instances of witness support from my own constituency. Like the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), I have seen a good witness support scheme, in Stafford Crown court. The scheme was established before 1997, to the great credit of those who were involved, which is why I give credit to the previous Conservative Government. In recognition of the issue, well-intentioned people in Stafford, as volunteers at the outset, established a witness support scheme. Eventually, funding was found for a paid co-ordinator. Two weeks ago, I met the co-ordinator—who still works in the organisation—and asked him how the scheme was going. It is a superb success, providing all the services that the hon. Member for Woking found in the court that he visited, and I pay tribute to the people who run it. Almost every witness who has entered that court has been helped by that service. Such schemes should be duplicated throughout the country.

The second instance is a very interesting story. I assure hon. Members that it is relevant, and I shall come to the end of it in a moment. It comes out of the creation of the antisocial behaviour order and the discontent that has been expressed in the year since it became available because people do not apply for orders. The problem in Stafford was that the police often felt that the council should pay for the court case and that the police would help to arrange it, and the council felt that the police should pay for the case and that the council would help to arrange it. Between them, neither dealt with a single case. Under pressure from lots of people, myself included—I do not take credit for this—the local council looked for a solution.

A group of enterprising women in the west midlands set up a company that they called ASBO. It offered a service to local authorities and to police authorities that wanted to deal with antisocial behaviour but were not getting round to it. The local authority grabbed the offer with both hands, set the company up with a contract to deal with a specific number of antisocial behaviour cases in Stafford and left it to it. In just 12 months, the situation has been transformed. Where very many communities were complaining about antisocial behaviour, there are now very many communities that are wholly behind ASBO. People willingly go to court and give evidence and successfully obtain antisocial behaviour orders, eviction orders and injunctions.

I was so impressed by how good it was getting that I asked to go to one of ASBO's regular witness meetings. It let me attend, and I walked into a room crowded with the witnesses in the cases that ASBO was running. One of the women introduced everybody and we went round the room hearing who the witnesses were and which instance of antisocial behaviour they were involved in. It was the first time that some of them had realised that they were not the only people complaining about an instance in their neighbourhood. The person from ASBO then reported on every single case, saying that an injunction had been obtained, there was to be a pre-trial review, an order had been obtained, the case was to be next week and so on. It was a very moving occasion because of the great will in that room to do good—that was very satisfying.

I recently read with some amusement of one neighbourhood in which antisocial behaviour has been so successfully cleared away from a street—I say that glibly, but it means removing people, often with dependent children from their homes, so there are severe consequences for the misbehavers—that the remaining residents, thrilled that their community had returned to normal, raised a petition to the local council to change the name of the street. They wanted the surname of the woman from ASBO who had helped them so much to be the name of their street. The story demonstrates a practical way of helping witnesses to stand up for themselves.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) was right to point out that support for witnesses does not begin in a courtroom or even in the court building. It is a process that—this might raise some eyebrows—starts before people become witnesses. The Government are right to promote community values, so that people have a feeling of ownership and responsibility for the area in which they live. Those who feel strongly about that should be encouraged to join neighbourhood watch schemes, so that there will be a pool of people available to be witnesses if witnesses are ever needed. When witnesses are needed, it is vital for the police to be able to respond.

My reason for asking the hon. Gentleman about the police and their role is that in Staffordshire, much as I support and take every opportunity to help my local police, the force changed its call handling system some years ago and became hopeless at responding to complaints from members of the public. That was a reason, as the hon. Member for Woking asks for reasons, why people thought that it was not worth bothering to be witnesses; they did not think that they would receive a response to their complaint. When there are witnesses, it is important for people to support them, as ASBO does in Stafford—they find that encouraging.

The hon. Member for Woking was right to remind us more than once that sometimes victims and witnesses are the same people. It is important to bear that in mind. Nevertheless, in the case of victims there is, in my experience, a lot of muddle about who is responsible for telling victims what. That is why I asked the Minister about co-ordination, and about who would be the person with whom witnesses could keep in touch, to give them a consistent message about what was happening in cases in which they were involved.

I mention some points about victims that have been put to me by RoadPeace. I am not a member of RoadPeace, but it is an organisation that I know and admire. It is one of several broad-based, enthusiastic and professional organisations concerned with the interests of the victims of road traffic offences. It made the point, as I have, that victims do not fit into an adversarial system.

RoadPeace also made a point, which I had not thought about, about victim personal statements. I had thought that they were wholly a good thing, but RoadPeace contrasts them with a defendant's plea and mitigation after conviction. No one knows in advance what someone will say in their mitigation and it is accepted by the court, or challenged, on the spot. However, victim personal statements are given in as witness statements, often at quite an early stage in the process. RoadPeace asks why defendants and their legal teams should have access to victim statements about how vulnerable they are, even as they are planning their tactics for their trial and their cross-examination of the victims. If that point is correct, it needs to be examined urgently as part of a review of how the new victim personal statements are working.

Simon Hughes: It was our policy at the last election—which I know was controversial, especially with lawyers—that, after conviction but before sentence, a victim or their relative should have the chance to make a statement to the judge or bench, in front of the lawyers. Such people could thereby express their feelings of exclusion, and that would also address the point that the hon. Gentleman has just made. Will he reflect on whether we should go further than written victim statements? I am not critical of them, but I do not think that they allow for a victim's need to be heard as part of the legal proceedings.

Mr. Kidney: I am happy for the way in which victims make their views known to the court to be part of any review, but at the moment I am asking the Minister to take account of when those views are made known during the trial process.

I have two practical suggestions. The first is about witnesses. There should be an established local scheme, for which I think that local authorities should take responsibility, for supporting witnesses in the way in which ASBO has done so effectively in Stafford. Secondly, we should look at the status of victims in the criminal justice system, and how they can fit into an adversarial system. Perhaps, instead of a two-sided system, we want a three-pointed one in which there is a formal place for victims.

Turning to road traffic victims, when someone is killed and the police pronounce that it is a murder, there is huge coverage in the media and, quite rightly, an extensive police operation, using all the necessary resources. If someone is convicted of murder, there is a severe sentence of life imprisonment. Most people think that every consideration should be given to the bereaved during every stage of a murder investigation and trial. Each year about 800 homicides occur in our country, while at the same time 3,500 people are killed on our roads. That puts into perspective the importance of what people are saying about road victims not being listened to.

When the Government consulted on their victims charter, more than half the respondents were road victims, and nearly all the respondents mentioned the position and plight road victims. With sad regularity, MPs such as myself hear complaints from families of those who have been killed on the roads. They complain, for example, that the family were given no information about the legal processes, that they were treated atrociously at an inquest, or that they had no involvement in what charges were brought and that, later, charges were reduced or dropped. Families often express dissatisfaction with the sentences passed in cases in which a loved one died. It is no wonder those people say with more regularity than most that they lack trust in the system.

Mr. Malins: The hon. Gentleman will know that, in road traffic accidents in which there is a death, sometimes the only charge that can be brought is one of careless, inattentive driving. Sometimes the person who has had a temporary lapse of judgment feels the most

[Mr. Malins]

tremendous remorse, and no sentence can properly compensate the family. Those are difficult cases to sentence.

Mr. Kidney: The hon. Gentleman is dealing with just one part of the process, because he has picked up on the last point that I mentioned, but that is only one of many complaints. There is a huge debate, with the lawyers on one side saying "It's only carelessness. There but for the grace of God go I. How can we be responsible for the consequences?" On the other side, organisations such as RoadPeace say that the consequences are so serious that people should be more responsible when they are behind the wheel. What the judge said in sentencing Gary Hart last week was helpful to the RoadPeace case about how dangerous is the vehicle of which people are in control on a road in modern society.

I have outlined some of the reasons why people do not trust the system. Sadly, some people have expressed the strong feeling that when they go through the criminal justice system as the loved ones of a deceased person they suffer all over again. Surely we want to change that.

I know that we are waiting for the Government's proposals following last year's review of road traffic penalties, which might have some impact on my last point about sentencing, but again I make two practical proposals to the Minister. First, everything that the Minister has said today about treating victims better must apply to the victims of road traffic accidents. Secondly, I hope that the Government involve in any body that they set up—for example, any board to implement the victims charter—organisations such as RoadPeace, which have a distinctive point of view that needs to be heard in the nitty-gritty of administering the system.

My last point relates to the Auld report. I have not brought it with me because it is so big and heavy, but it has some relevance to today's debate. We are debating victims and witnesses. What we have seen from the case of the man who spent 27 years in prison—it has now been accepted that that was a miscarriage of justice—is that defendants can be victims too. That is relevant when we hear the Government's ebullient views about how they will stop defendants taking advantage of delay through the right to elect trial and how they will allow more hearsay evidence and make known more freely defendants' previous convictions. I shall listen to the Government's arguments on these points with an open and fair mind, but I hope that we do not lose sight of the common-law principle that people are presumed innocent until proven guilty. There is a purpose behind that principle; it is followed so that innocent people are not convicted and do not suffer great miscarriages of justice. I hope that the Minister is willing to consider that as the Government develop their legislative proposals.

The Auld report contains only a small reference to witnesses and victims, partly because Lord Justice Auld acknowledges that it has all been said elsewhere. He says that witnesses in court should be able to refer to documents more freely to refresh their memory. He agrees with the reform of hearsay evidence to enable witnesses to tell their story naturally. In the longer term, he looks forward to greater use of video-recorded evidence. In the case of victims, he has great praise for the proposals in "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead" and he commends victim support, but he recommends against a special status for victims in the trial process. However, that recommendation does not spoil my earlier point about a special status for victims in the criminal justice system before trial.

We are also still waiting for the implementation of the recommendations on sentencing in Halliday and for the proposals following the sexual offences review, so a big programme of legislative reform is coming. I put some practical proposals to the Minister. First, when the Government have finalised, if they had not already done so, a full set of proposals in response to Halliday, the sexual offences review and Auld, can we have a debate in Parliament in Government time before we reach the legislative process?

Secondly, can we have pre-legislative scrutiny of what is to come? Even as a loyal Government Back Bencher, I do not want vital reforms to the criminal justice system to be thrust upon us in a big Bill with a timetable and a plea for my loyalty. I am having to think carefully about some big issues such as the right to jury trial. I hope that the Minister thinks that that is a constructive suggestion about how to satisfy people who might otherwise be slightly uneasy.

If anything, my hon. Friend the Minister slightly undersold how well the Government have done since 1997. As he said, there is still more to be done, some of which requires big and courageous decisions, if I can say that without alarming him. I hope that he will take the right decisions each time so that we get a system of which we can all be proud.

4.25 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I am grateful that we are having this debate. I want to concentrate on one aspect of victims and witnesses.

I start with a reminder that the best way to make the experience of the criminal justice system better for victims and witnesses is to make progress on the prevention and detection of crime. About 10 days ago, I was taken aback when one of my constituents said to me angrily, "That Victim Support organisation phoned me up about my burglary and the police hadn't even been round to see me." Sometimes providing appropriate support for victims of crime when there are insufficient policing resources to do anything about it can provoke rather than support victims.

I know something about this issue because I am chair of the Voice associate all-party parliamentary group, which focuses on dealing with abuse of people with learning difficulties. I should first say on behalf of Voice that all its members welcome the huge progress that has been made in recent years in improving support for people with learning disabilities who are victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system, especially through the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, the follow-on report, "Speaking up for Justice", and the action for justice programme. Nevertheless, although we have worked out what needs to be done and developed an action programme to do it, vulnerable witnesses are the least likely to be satisfied. In the witness satisfaction survey that the Minister quoted, which shows that 76 per cent. of witnesses were satisfied with their experience, only 64 per cent. of vulnerable witnesses, and even fewer witnesses with disabilities, were satisfied.

The largest source of dissatisfaction for the group about which I want to speak is that their case never gets heard. That is what creates the most distress, anger and bitterness. We were told a story at our annual meeting, which took place in the next Room, that brought me to tears—not something that happens often in this august Palace. The chief executive of Voice read out a letter from a young woman who had been a victim of rape in the day centre that she attended. The letter, which was sent to the manager of the day centre, was expressed simply—she is a woman of low IQ—but clearly. It basically said, "Why did you let it happen? What are you doing about it? Why has nobody prosecuted or sacked the person who did it to me?" I cried because the letter that she received back was along the lines of "How nice to hear from you. I'm glad you're getting on with your present life" and other patronising, jolly comments. It did not even contain an acknowledgement of what had happened to her. That was more powerful than other accounts that I have heard from parents and relatives about a person they care for being ignored.

The case had not been brought to court because, although the woman was capable of writing that letter, she was not a reliable witness. Not only that, but the person who was supposed to be managing the care centre ignored the fact that she had been the victim of an appalling attack. That is the experience that most families have of the criminal justice system. It is not acceptable in a civilised society that someone who has learning disabilities is not allowed the basic rights that other victims have—to have their case heard and for the person responsible to be prosecuted and, if found guilty, sentenced appropriately.

The first thing that we must do is examine ways of ensuring that people with learning disabilities are not ignored and that they have their voice heard at the beginning of the process. I urge the Minister to try, in guidance and so on, to give wider recognition to the role of carers and family as interpreters for people with learning disabilities.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I am listening with great interest and sympathy to my hon. Friend. A number of my constituents have found themselves in a similar position. I applaud her proposals for an appropriate support infrastructure at the beginning of the process when someone initiates a complaint. Does she agree that there is an acute shortage of suitably trained staff in police authorities with an understanding of the range of learning disabilities and that there is an absolute unwillingness to develop those services because such cases will not be supported by the Crown Prosecution Service?

Fiona Mactaggart: My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) anticipates my comments on those organisations and on training, but I want to start by referring to the role of families. In many cases, only someone with whom the victim has a long-term relationship can help them to communicate. People often develop established ways of communicating with their family, carers and so on. Allowing family or carers to act as communicators at all stages in the process can enable people with learning disabilities to give best evidence, to make their points and so on. It is a real problem that some of our current arrangements do not allow that to happen.

On the point made by my hon. Friend, the wider issue is training, training, training at every level. I have spoken to the chair of the Judicial Studies Board, who is proud of the fact that judges receive half a day's training on disability. If they receive half a day's training on disability, how much training do they receive on learning disabilities and ways of communicating with people with learning disabilities? It is not enough. Unless we introduce serious training on how to communicate with people with learning disabilities for police, prosecutors and judges, we shall fail to deliver justice.

There are honourable exceptions. In places such as Hampshire, the police are focusing on delivering training and certain CPS offices are doing the same thing, which proves that it can be done. That is, however, not the norm, and it is time for it to become the norm. My biggest plea is to resource that kind of training so that every police force and every CPS office has a policy, an awareness programme and a designated officer. Simple schemes would deliver justice to people with learning difficulties.

Other things would make a difference. Others have referred to the current consultation on sexual offences. In the cases that are currently hardest to prosecute because there is a question whether a witness is capable of giving good evidence, there is a need for a new offence. There are cases in which there is not an appropriate offence under which one can successfully prosecute. We should introduce an offence of having sex with a person with a learning disability who cannot consent. That would overcome some evidential issues about the quality of communication of a witness with a learning difficulty.

I was interested to hear the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby because I became chair of the all-party Voice group following a grotesque example of institutionalised sexual and other abuse in a care home for people with learning disabilities on the boundaries of my constituency. The difficulty was finding an appropriate offence with which to charge the perpetrators. The main perpetrator committed suicide while he was in prison, and his wife, who was also involved, was charged with low-level offences because it was difficult to obtain evidence. We need a range of offences that are appropriate to the ways in which people with learning disabilities are treated.

The matter is urgent because we are getting better at protecting children from sexual abuse, and I am afraid that those who have been preying on children are now turning to people with learning difficulties, who are less well protected.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Is my hon. Friend aware that individuals who are identified as sex offenders and put on the sex offenders register can subsequently enter care homes and perpetrate abuse against people who are vulnerable and not in a position to raise a complaint against them?

Fiona Mactaggart: I am shocked, but not surprised, to hear that. We are trying to do the right thing, but we are

[Fiona Mactaggart]

failing. Much of what has been done is excellent, but there is much more that must be done. We must make it possible for witnesses to give best evidence, create appropriate offences and support victims and witnesses more effectively. I raise these points because I have worked out that, as a Member of Parliament, one achieves the best effects if one keeps one's foot on the accelerator and uses every available opportunity to bang on about things. Good policies are being pursued by Departments, but I suspect that the life of a Minister is often rather lonely, in that no one really notices the good things that are being done. All that happens is that people such as me complain, saying, "Look at our crime rates in Slough! Please change the world." As several hon. Members have said, there is a good framework of policies and we are making real progress, but we need to keep our foot on the accelerator.

We also need better information, particularly on this group of victims. National statistics should be kept on the number of offences involving victims with learning difficulties that have been investigated, and on the number of prosecutions that were not pursued. I have met many people whose lives were blighted because a prosecution was not pursued, and who genuinely believe that, although there was a chance that a conviction might not have been secured, the experience of being believed sufficiently to warrant bringing a prosecution would have proved therapeutic in itself. We need better statistics, so that we can identify why prosecutions are not made, and to use such statistics to inform the training that I have demanded. There is a real need for such information.

Finally, we should apply more pressure by creating a presumption that cases involving a vulnerable victim will go to trial unless detailed reasons to the contrary are spelt out to a judge. Perhaps an independent advocate should also be involved. I understand entirely that such cases are very difficult for the police and the CPS to deal with. Compared with cases in which the victim can give best evidence easily, it is more difficult to secure a successful prosecution. There are good public policy reasons for persisting with such prosecutions, and we need to create a mechanism that ensures that it is harder to abandon them. Requiring that reasons for abandoning such cases be given to a judge and involving an independent advocate might increase the number of prosecutions. I can promise hon. Members that such a measure would effect an enormous improvement in the experience of these vulnerable victims and witnesses.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): We are stretching a point, but I call Mr. Edna Garnier.

4.43 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): To call me Edna would be stretching a point, Mr. Hancock.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): I apologise; I meant to say Edward.

Mr. Garnier: I begin by apologising to you, Mr. Hancock, and to those right hon. and hon. Members who have attended the entire debate, for my late arrival. My excuse is that I was participating in a conference of the parliamentary all-party group on Spain elsewhere in this Palace, under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). As one knows, to cross the right hon. Gentleman leads to all sorts of adverse consequences.

I want to make a number of points, but I shall do so quickly as I realise that I am trespassing on the time of this Chamber. I did not hear the beginning of the speech of the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), but I was certainly interested in the last part of it. As she perhaps knows, legislation is about to come into force that will assist with the further protection of vulnerable people in our courts, so it may well be that some of her fears have already been dealt with.

I hope that the Minister will encourage his colleagues in the Home Office to introduce fewer criminal justice Bills. There is far too much criminal justice legislation, which churns its way through the House largely inadequately scrutinised. That is not a party point; it attaches with equal force to the Government whom I supported prior to the arrival of the Labour Government in 1997. There is simply far too much criminal justice legislation. Most of it is useless in that it seeks to correct the mistakes of the previous year's Bill. I urge the Government to be more cautious in the way in which they pour legislation through the sausage machine.

I ask the Government to consider urgently the codification of the criminal law, which would prevent many of the problems from which courts suffer. I urge the Minister and his shadows on my side of the House—I excuse my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), who as a Crown court recorder has some experience of the criminal courts—to make a point of looking at, visiting, and sitting with judges of the Crown courts and magistrates, so that they see the practical, day-to-day consequences of criminal justice legislation.

Again, I express my apologies for my late arrival and interruption of what must otherwise have been an entirely happy and harmonious occasion.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): I do not think that the hon. and learned Gentleman went that far, or spoiled the ambience too much.

4.46 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley: I start by thanking everyone for the high quality of their contributions. That is often said at the end of a debate, but this occasion can genuinely be said to have been a thoughtful and important debate, setting the context in which we are introducing many new policies and proposals. They will lead to legislation, but I hope that that will have a purpose and a meaning, tackling many of the issues that have been raised today.

I accept the reason given by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) for not being present throughout the debate. I think that he might have obtained great value had he been able to be here, because I know of his genuine interest in these matters. I take his point about introducing legislation that is practical and that will impact on the efficiency and co-ordination of the criminal justice system by examining what is happening now. Part of my job is to do exactly that, and I want to do it more so that I understand more detail of how the system currently works. The changes that we make should impact on the criminal justice system with the sole purpose of restoring confidence in it and making the system fast and effective so that the stages between detection, charging and ultimate court decisions take place as effectively and efficiently as possible. That is how the public will have confidence in the system.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Will my right hon. Friend the Minister give way?

Mr. Bradley: I shall, just once.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I am grateful for that.

In relation to the cases that I raised earlier, will my right hon. Friend examine the role of the police and the prompting and initiating of proceedings in the absence of contemporaneous or timely complaints by the victims concerned? Will he examine also the role and regulation of prison visits in that context, and the potential role of criminal justice, injuries compensation and civil litigation in the motivation and initiation of those cases? Importantly, will he examine the efficiency and effectiveness of police interviewing, file preparation, quality assurance and—bearing in mind the comments made about people with learning difficulties—training issues? Will he also examine the experience, expertise and tenure of officers engaged in specialist investigation work to ensure that they are adequately trained? Will he reflect on noble cause or simple corruption cases to ensure that they are monitored and managed according to risk in the context of the investigations to which I referred?

Mr. Bradley *rose—*

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. I think that there is some pay-back on both sides, given the length of that intervention.

Mr. Bradley: Thank you, Mr. Hancock. Perhaps I may respond to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) and to her speech. I am aware that she has met my right hon. Friend the Minister of State with responsibilities for crime reduction, policing and community safety to raise all matters in relation to the investigation and the wider context of these important issues. I pay tribute to her for the assiduous way in which she is pursuing them. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State is considering them. I shall ensure that the proceedings of this debate are brought to his attention and that these matters are pursued.

Several hon. Members have asked about the service now provided through Victim Support for victims and witnesses. We have rightly paid tribute to that organisation, and have had good examples at a local level of the work that its 15,000 volunteers undertake. Other organisations also work effectively for victims—for example, Victims Voice and RoadPeace, which has been mentioned. We must consider how in our review of the victims charter we can support such groups, to ensure that their invaluable work is properly recognised.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), leading for the Opposition, raised a number of matters from his valuable experience about the way in which the system works. Sir Robin Auld, in his independent report, identified many of the issues, such as some of the reasons why trials crack. We are in a consultation process. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will contribute to that process. I know that he will join in the debate when we introduce the White Paper and, subsequently, legislation on these matters. It is important that we address the way in which cases are managed and attempt to make their administration more efficient so that justice is seen quickly to be done.

As regards intimidation in the courts, I recently launched a website which was a virtual walk-through of a typical court to enable the public to see how a court is laid out, what the processes are and who undertakes what, so that they can familiarise themselves in advance of being in a court room. As the hon. Member for Woking rightly said, it is an intimidating place. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) gave the example of the Old Bailey. That is at one end of the spectrum, but even at local level a court can be extremely intimidating. We hope that, through such information, we can take some of the mystery out of the process and help to make it not a pleasant experience, but one that people can cope with far better when they have a better understanding of the procedures and the supports that exist for them before and during their time in court.

Simon Hughes: Will the Minister talk to his colleagues in other Departments about the idea of a pilot scheme to televise magistrates courts proceedings and proceedings in other courts where juries are not involved? I share with him the view that the more people see and understand those proceedings, the more likely they are to feel comfortable. It would be hugely educative and no detriment to justice. Jury trials, I think, are different.

Mr. Bradley: I shall consider that point and what further mechanisms we can introduce to demystify the process and provide information to the public so that they understand and have confidence in the system.

I was asked about housing and the intimidation that can arise when someone is brought back into the local community where a crime has been committed. I am carefully considering resettlement arrangements to ascertain how agencies can work together to improve the process from prison back into the community.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey raised a series of matters in a thoughtful contribution. A context has been given to our debate on the criminal justice system through our responses to the Halliday and Auld reports and the sexual offences review. There will be big opportunities to debate those in greater detail. I will not respond now to the hon. Gentleman's checklist of issues for debate, but opportunities for debate will be offered in the coming months. I welcome the checklist, however. We will have consultations on sentencing, court reform and sexual offences, and respond to them by introducing White Papers and then legislation in the form of separate or combined Bills.

Although I accept the point about the extent of legislation, the issues that move forward the modernisation of the criminal system and law are important. Where that progress is appropriate,

[Mr. Bradley]

opportunities must be taken. I agree that to introduce legislation merely to plug weakness in previous legislation is not satisfactory. We must address that by ensuring that proper scrutiny and opportunity for debate exist before Bills are introduced.

Mr. Kidney: May we take that as an assurance that there will be debate in Parliament before legislation is introduced? The Minister said that we would have a full debate on the proposals. As regards pre-legislative scrutiny, does he think that he will be able to issue Bills in draft to allow that to happen?

Mr. Bradley: I am sure that the business managers would not want me to pre-empt the timetable. I fully appreciate the need for scrutiny and, where possible, pre-legislative scrutiny, so I will consider opportunities for debates on broad issues. However, I cannot give assurances because I am not in charge of the timetable for such debates.

Simon Hughes: Will the Minister give way one more time?

Mr. Bradley: Yes.

Simon Hughes: This is not a point of contention. Picking up the points made by the hon. Member for Stafford and the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), it seems that the Government will have one piece of legislation that deals with sentencing and criminal justice reform. That is an improvement. It is better to have what we need and to go through the consultative and pre-legislative process before legislation is introduced. In the end, that will give us better legislation and a speedier process. I support the two contributions and am willing to participate in trying to get things right between now and the other side of the next Queen's Speech.

Mr. Bradley: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments. My objective is to ensure that the legislation that is introduced is coherent for sentencing and court reform and addresses the problems in a way that makes sense out of the system.

I was concerned to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey about what his councillor friend said that the police were saying. I will look into that if the hon. Gentleman writes to me with specific examples. That situation is not satisfactory and we need to ensure that witnesses are supported at every opportunity so that they can give evidence in court and prosecutions are effective.

As always, the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) made important points. I assure him that RoadPeace is part of our deliberation on the victims charter and that we are engaging, as far as we can, with such organisations to ensure their views are taken on board. I was particularly interested in his comments on antisocial behaviour orders. A common criticism is of the time that it takes successfully to bring cases to fruition. I know that a review is under way to try to make the process more effective, but I will consider the hon. Gentleman's example because we can learn lessons from the project.

On personal statements, I hear the point about where they are brought into the process. The statements may be updated at a later stage because they are not a one-off opportunity. Again, because we are evaluating personal statements, we shall take the comments on board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) and others have highlighted vulnerable witnesses' needs, and in particular those of people with learning disabilities. I support the view that training in these matters is of paramount importance. As I said in my speech, I shall be making further comments on the report "Speaking up for Justice", and I hope that the issues that have been raised today will be addressed at that time. I understand the need to recognise and support the role of carers and parents in that process, and the point, which runs throughout the criminal justice system, of ensuring good practice at local level. To obtain the most efficient and effective system, good practice must be rolled out throughout the country to ensure that people do not work in chimneys or in a vacuum away from agencies and other parts of the criminal justice system.

This has been an invaluable debate because it has set a clear context for our further deliberations on the criminal justice system, which I welcome. This will start a dialogue among us all as important policies and issues are brought before Parliament in the coming weeks and months. I welcome the recognition of these issues, many of which are not party political. We are all interested in ensuring that we have a criminal justice system that will be a credit to the Government, and that our constituents understand and feel part of it. The point about citizenship is extremely important because people must feel that they are part of that system, that they understand how it works and that there is integrity in the court and sentencing system. As a consequence, there will be a greater readiness to participate in the system, which is for society's general benefit. We have made a good start in that process, and I look forward to the further debates that we shall have on the reports, reviews and policies that we will be bringing forward.

Finally, I thank all Members who have contributed to our proceedings.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): I thank all Members for their care and thought during the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 22 January 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Auld Report

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Wills.]*

9.30 am

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): It is my pleasure to lead a debate about the Auld report, "Review of the criminal courts of England and Wales", published in October 2001. The report is now the subject of consultation that will continue until the end of January. The report is substantial in every sense of the word, and it should be given serious consideration by all who are interested in the criminal justice system.

Sir Robin Auld is an experienced and senior Appeal Court judge. He benefited from the assistance of 12 consultants, and he found many commendable ways to consult during his investigation. He made the usual written requests for evidence and received more than 1,000 submissions from individuals and organisations; he consulted online, with a website that attracted yet more submissions; he held review seminars throughout the country, as well as a conference in Cambridge; and he visited Scotland, Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Canada. He fully reviewed previous inquiries and reviews, he consulted on the Government and Law Commission proposals that were being evolved at the time, and he commissioned as much research as was necessary to inform his final conclusions.

Lord Justice Auld's report is a significant piece of work. Its significance is heightened by the failure of two Government Bills on mode of trial, in debates on which opponents argued forcefully that the Government should await the outcome of the report before pressing on with their proposals. Ironically, although it was opponents who endowed the report with greater significance, it was the Government, not they, who would have benefited from waiting.

Sir Robin was asked to report within a year of December 1999. His report was published ten months later than that, so he was certainly able to give a considered view. Today's debate is timely because it comes just before the end of the consultation period, and it is right that we have the opportunity to respond to his recommendations and conclusions during that time. I had not anticipated that our debate would take place the day after the appearance of newspaper reports that the Government had changed their mind on one of the report's most important recommendations—on trial by jury in what are called either way cases—but the debate on those recommendations is better held in public.

I hope that the news reports are accurate. Although I have in the past argued and voted against both of the Government's previous proposals, I did not enjoy being a rebel. A journalist told me yesterday that I am "not one of the usual suspects" among Labour Back Benchers, and I would be delighted if I could return to the mainstream. I assure the Minister that I do not bear a grudge.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Does the hon. Gentleman, like me, hope that in the debate the Government will give us an accurate idea of their policies?

Mr. Kidney: Answering that delivery with a straight bat, as the consultation period has not ended, I would be disappointed if the Government leapt in and announced that they had made up their mind before people had the opportunity to have their say. I expect them to wait until after 31 January to give their final opinion—although I welcome the news reports and hope they are accurate.

Today's debate will probably focus on the controversial issues of jury trial and the proposed third tier of criminal courts. None the less, much of the report is welcome and we should not lose sight of its many excellent recommendations which I hope the Government will accept and implement as soon as time permits.

In answer to his own criticism that the present system is complex and lacks overall direction and management, Lord Justice Auld proposes a single line of national management through a new national criminal justice board, which would implement decisions at local level through a series of local boards. He also recommends a criminal justice council to ensure that the system lives, breathes, consults, gives advice and provides accountability. Finally, he recommends that our criminal law should eventually be codified—a long-term project to which all political parties probably subscribe.

I agree with Lord Justice Auld's view that there are four essentials to the efficient and effective disposal of criminal cases: a strong and independent prosecution; efficient and properly paid defence lawyers; ready access on the part of defence lawyers to their clients in custody; and a communications system. I applaud that analysis, which I hope will form the basis of the Government's plans.

I am interested in Lord Justice Auld's proposals for graduated sentencing discounts, under which people will receive greater discounts on their sentences the earlier they admit their guilt. I also note with interest the proposal for judges to give advance notification of the likely sentence in the case of an early guilty plea. Both proposals would provide a great incentive for defendants and their teams to deal expeditiously with the case. Another welcome aspect of the report is its helpful review of the rules of evidence, trial procedures, improvements to court services and jury service. That part of the report includes perhaps the most controversial proposal: that we ensure ethnic minority representation on juries in cases in which the parties identify that a race issue may be involved. Finally, the report contains a welcome set of proposals on bail decisions, not the least of which is the recommendation that we use plain English to explain them.

I turn now to my opposition to changing the provisions for trial by jury in either way cases. Lord Justice Auld presents a full analysis of the arguments for and against making such changes and the reasons why people take one position or the other. By way of

[Mr. Kidney]

shorthand, I shall say that I am in the camp that has a constitutional objection to making any changes. I am with Blackstone in regarding jury trial as a bulwark of our liberties, and I fear that allowing an over-mighty Government to dismantle one of those liberties will harm to our democratic society. I shall take a few minutes to explain why I disagree with Lord Justice Auld, who recommends a change.

Sir Robin Auld says that it is a matter of principle that the court, not the defendant, should decide the venue and manner of the trial. That sits strangely with his suggestion that the defendant could have the power to opt for trial by judge alone in the Crown court. Indeed, Auld goes further, recommending that defendants should be able to opt for trial by a district judge and two lay justices if the Government disagree with his other recommendations for changing trial by jury. His views on those matters are therefore inconsistent: he says that it would be a principle of the system he recommends that the defendant should have a choice, but adds that the court should make the decisions.

I have two further objections, which are not my own in the sense that Lord Justice Auld identified them. The first is that he cannot say where the public view lies on whether jury trial should be retained or changed. On page 187, he says:

> "I have been unable to gauge from my Review what the public at large think about the issue."

The second of the two shortcomings that he identifies is a lack of current and comprehensive data bearing on the issue. He states on page 192 that much more research is required. Some of the practical difficulties recognised by Auld himself tend to undermine his conclusion.

My final objection arises from the recommendations on appeals. Lord Justice Auld recommends—on page 622—that there should be one system of appeal based on the current system applied to Court of Appeal hearings. What is serious about that is that having lost the right to elect a trial by jury, a defendant who is tried against his wishes in a magistrates court would also lose the right to appeal to the Crown court for his case to be reheard in front of a judge alone. That raises the stakes even higher in deciding whether to allow a defendant to retain the present right to elect a trial by jury in either way cases.

One recommendation with which I strongly agree is that the ability of a magistrates court to try a defendant against his or her wishes and then to commit to the Crown court for sentence should be abolished. When we last considered a mode of trial Bill, I moved an amendment to that effect on Report; I called it the Scottish amendment, because that is a rule of the Scottish system. The Government were not willing to accept it, but now that it has the backing of Lord Justice Auld, I hope that they will do so.

That reform could be implemented without changing the right to elect jury trial and would improve a position that the Government find intolerable. They allege that some defendants use the system to cause delay and extra expense. The requirement would oblige magistrates, if they accept responsibility for trying a case, also to accept responsibility for imposing the sentence. That, combined with Lord Justice Auld's proposed reforms for the efficient allocation of cases and ending committal hearings, would end the Government's objection.

The other issue that has become controversial is Lord Justice Auld's recommendation that there be a unified criminal court system, which everybody agrees with. However, he proposes inserting a third tier between the magistrates court, with which we are familiar, and the Crown court, called the district division. There, a district judge of the criminal court would sit with two lay justices and deal with certain cases of intermediate seriousness, however defined. That is an interesting suggestion.

When Lord Justice Auld consulted on that proposal via his website, many found it interesting and the response was benign. However, I understand that adverse opinion is beginning to form and opposition is growing. Magistrates in the Stafford area dislike the suggestion, giving two reasons for doing so: first, they could not spare the time for the longer cases that would go before the district judge; secondly, losing those cases to the district judge would mean that they were required to deal with less challenging and interesting cases, and so would no longer derive the satisfaction from their work—which most do voluntarily—that they now do.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I apologise for having been a few minutes late for the start of the debate. In his discussions with lay magistrates in Stafford about the hybrid court—professional judge or district judge with two lay justices—has the hon. Gentleman heard a concern that I have often heard expressed by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), that the district judge will deal with matters of law in the absence of the two magistrates, so that the tribunal is split in terms of knowledge? The district judge might be aware of previous convictions and of evidence that he has ruled inadmissible, of which the two lay magistrates are unaware because they do not take part in that decision.

Mr. Kidney: I confess that magistrates have drawn to my attention neither that problem, nor the other oft-quoted objection, that they would be overborne by the extra professionalism of the district judge and that they would not be able to have their say. As neither has featured in my discussions with magistrates, I cannot confirm the hon. and learned Gentleman's comment.

However, drawing on my 20 years' experience as a solicitor in the criminal courts, I have considerable sympathy with the idea of district judges having a more proactive role in relation to the magistracy. It would be a healthy experience if many more lay magistrates were exposed to the practices of the district judge in dealing with cases expeditiously but with no loss of quality in decision making. A good outcome of any reform would be a higher profile for district judges in the magistracy sector of the criminal court system.

I see that the Chamber has filled up quite well with hon. Members who, I hope, have strong points of view that they want to express. I am happy to conclude by commending the report, which is a fine one. I agree with it on many points.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): My hon. Friend is a great expert at playing devil's advocate with respect to the Auld report, and he has set out many of Auld's arguments. However, given that since 1996 any abuse—or so-called abuse—of the process has been eradicated by plea before venue, and given that setting up a third tier would be immensely expensive and result in a system far slower and less efficient than the current one, what is the point of it? Can he summarise that?

Mr. Kidney: I accept the thrust of my hon. and learned Friend's intervention. I would be happy with a unified criminal court system that retained two tiers, in which the magistrates courts and Crown courts retained all their existing powers and defendants still had the right to elect trial by jury in either way cases. I accept my hon. and learned Friend's point that plea before venue has mostly eradicated the problem that the Government say they have identified. I accept, too, that complete eradication would be achieved by accepting the remainder of Lord Justice Auld's recommendations on discounts for early sentence, early allocation of cases and abolishing the committal procedure.

On jury trial and the district division, Lord Justice Auld identifies plenty of improvements that I support, short of the two changes I mentioned. In that, too, my views accord with those of my hon. and learned Friend. What I propose, short of making those two changes, can fulfil the Government's aim of a modern, efficient and fair system of criminal justice, which would command even greater public confidence than at present. I look forward to hearing other hon. Members' views.

9.47 am

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on securing this debate, to which I shall make a brief contribution.

I am one of those who rushed to get my copy of the Auld report as soon as it was published. I searched for a crumb of comfort to support my efforts to reverse the decline in the local magistracy, which in my constituency has almost completed its course. Anyone visiting Morley five years ago could, with local people, representatives of the local weekly newspaper and others, have popped into the magistrates court in the town hall and seen local justice in action—but then it was decided that the courtroom had to close. On 1 January this year, the bench was moved to a new building in the centre of Leeds. The Morley bench was subsumed into the Leeds petty sessional area and, like other things that have been deemed too anachronistic to be efficient, was consigned to history.

I do not argue that by accountants' standards local magistrates courts are a cost-effective way of listing proceedings and arranging court timetables. I note with some satisfaction that the Auld report mentions the fact that Lord Beeching did not get the chance in the 1960s to take an axe to that part of our justice system, so—at least until recently—we have had something left to try to preserve. I am not one to preserve a thing for the sake of it, and I acknowledge that the Auld report raises issues that need to be considered by the Government in relation to the sensible and necessary reform of the administration of local justice.

In our local process, magistrates court closure was seen as a foregone conclusion, with the arguments stacked up in favour of a single course of action. The court system was an important aspect of local life for our community—presumably, it still is in other parts of the country—and the consultation process should have been more genuine and open. The only people who seemed to be important in the process were those who were professionally engaged in it; users and the general public were not sufficiently consulted. There should be greater public involvement in such situations. If the process is perceived to be obscure and remote, fewer people will be encouraged to join the magistracy.

I am concerned about the dispersal of magistrates into a wider stream in which issues of community or locality cease to be important. Some 66 per cent. of the membership of the Leeds bench, which has 309 magistrates, live in the petty sessional area, whereas 90 per cent. of the membership of the now defunct Morley bench lived in that area. It should be borne in mind that magistrates can live up to 15 miles outside their commission area, never mind the petty sessional area. Although some people would not draw any conclusions from those figures, I would argue that locality was a major factor in recruitment. It is a question of finding people willing to serve their community.

The Lord Chancellor has said that he wants each bench broadly to reflect the community that it serves, and I agree. However, Leeds has a population of 750,000 and can be described as a community only in the broadest sense of the word. Cumbria, as detailed on page 83 of the Auld report, has a population of 500,000 and six magistrates courts, while North Yorkshire has a population of 742,000 and nine magistrates courts. Imagine the hue and cry if someone proposed the amalgamation of all those courts into just two centralised courts. People would say that the magistrates and those attending the courts would have too far to travel. That would also be my view.

Some might say that the Lord Chancellor's wish that benches should broadly reflect their communities cannot be fulfilled. I agree, but only because Leeds is treated as a single community for administrative purposes. That administrative consideration is of little or no importance. There are as many communities, not merely geographical ones, in Leeds as there are in any rural area. A one-size-fits-all approach for urban dwellers is not good enough.

I hope that a way ahead will emerge from this thoughtful review of the criminal courts. I want a modern bench that reflects the need to administer justice fairly and efficiently and can meet modern challenges. I do not deny the need for certain benches to develop specialties, and I strongly support the creation of drugs courts. However, there must be a solid link between benches, which deal with 90 per cent. of all cases going to court, and local communities. Local knowledge is important in drugs cases and antisocial behaviour orders: it is important not only for the families of victims, but for those of addicts, who, after sentences are meted out, are often called on to help in the process of rehabilitation.

There is, as I have said, a direct link between locality and the ability to recruit magistrates. I wonder to what extent making the administration of justice more remote will help recruitment. We seem to be making justice more professionalised and centralised, and I am not sure whether that is right. The basic principle of the lay magistracy—that we should be judged by our peers—is

[Mr. Colin Challen]

at stake. In these changing circumstances, we need a clear understanding of precisely how to plan to enhance the recruitment of magistrates to ensure that no locality or community is under-represented.

9.54 am

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I am grateful to be called so early in the debate. Given the number of people in the Chamber this morning, I will be as brief as I possibly can.

I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on securing the debate. I understand that the slot was originally reserved for a debate about relations with China. Many look forward to seeing the standards of justice that we in this country take for granted applied there. As a member of the Great Britain-China Centre, I will be able to talk with greater confidence about the system of justice in this country if some of the most controversial aspects of the Auld report are not implemented in law.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the most publicly controversial aspect—the middle tier of the proposed system. The report suggests a criminal court with a professional district judge sitting with two lay magistrates to deal with the intermediate level of criminal offence. As I said in an intervention, even on the face of the proposals, there are difficulties inherent in setting up that intermediate system. I do not want to take up too much time on the subject now that I have flagged it up.

I salute the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) for all that he has done to draw the Government's attention to the unsatisfactory nature of their proposals on the reform of the jury system. He did so in the last Parliament, in which there were two Bills that dealt with the jury system, and has done so on every other subsequent opportunity.

It is fair to point out that Lord Justice Auld's proposals go much further than the Government did in their two unsuccessful mode of trial Bills. As well as the deprivation of a right to jury trial, Sir Robin urges judges to consider factual questions for juries being answered publicly, and suggests that the judge be permitted to produce a final verdict based on the answers. It would therefore, he argues, be unnecessary to trouble the jury with the law. Such a procedure would allow the prosecution as well as the defence to appeal a verdict considered to be perverse.

I declare my interest as a practising member of the Bar, although I do not carry out any criminal work except as a Crown court recorder, when I take a rather more detached and neutral view of proceedings. Sir Robin's undeniably radical proposals might benefit some lawyers and produce unending litigation in the courts, but they are not good for justice or the appearance of justice. They would not permit or allow justice to be concluded speedily in any given case.

Many people want one thing from our criminal justice system, which is finality. Although at the moment, and I dare say in future, many defendants charged with criminal offences will be deeply annoyed that they have been convicted at the end of a trial, whether in front of a magistrate or a Crown court judge and jury, they none the less enter into the court process with a degree of consent. If Sir Robin's proposals are taken up by the Government, many defendants, innocent or not, will not trust the system as they do now, and we will lose something important.

Any system invented by man is imperfect, and it would be foolish for any advocate to suggest that the existing criminal justice and jury system is beyond reform. I do not suggest that. Instead, I suggest that when the Government finally consider the consultation process and the content of the report, they think about the point of our system and what benefit will come to it and society as a whole if it is amended in the radical way proposed by Sir Robin Auld.

Opinions differ about the value of the report. Some people make fairly trenchant criticisms of it from start to finish. I do not belong to that camp: I think that Sir Robin and his fellow commission members have done a superb job. Whether they have in every respect come to the right conclusion—or, I should say, a conclusion with which I agree—is another matter, but I do not denigrate their work or the motives with which they approached a mammoth task.

However, I am sceptical about the Government. Since 1997, they have not demonstrated a hugely intelligent attitude towards the legal affairs side of public policy. The cruelly named Access to Justice Act 1999 showed the Government's cynical nature and their ability to misuse the English language in a way that would do credit to characters in Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-four". The 1999 Act did not give access to justice: a more proper title would be the Denial of Access to Justice Act. It showed that in matters of public policy on legal affairs, the Government are economically illiterate, politically inept and intellectually confused. That series of epithets can be translated to their approach to the jury system.

The two failed Bills on mode of trial debated in the last Parliament were a political disaster. Their only good point is that they enable me to praise Lord Williams of Mostyn, a man with whom I often worked at the defamation Bar. He showed that if a bad case needs to be argued, a good advocate is needed to do it. When Lord Williams was Attorney-General in the last Parliament, he showed how to do one's best with terrible material. His speech in the main debate in Committee in the House of Lords showed his skills as a performer. Fortunately, however, the jury—the membership of the House of Lords—was not persuaded that the case stood up.

The Government sustained two bruisings in the last Parliament. A combination of skill, luck and sheer guts on the part of Labour Members resulted in the lowest Government majority for a Second Reading since 1997. While still a huge number, the majority of 75 was a tremendous result for the Opposition given that the Labour majority at that time was 166 or 167.

If the rumours reported in *The Times* yesterday are to be believed, there are signs that the Government's ineptitude is decreasing. Comments on Government proposals or initiatives do not seem to get into the newspapers nowadays unless the Government put them there, and I have no doubt that Mr. Alastair Campbell or one of his lesser satraps was busy over the weekend briefing the press about what the Government intend to do this week. I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that the rumours in *The Times* yesterday came from Government spin doctors and represent the nearest thing to the truth that the Government recognise.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Before the hon. and learned Gentleman leaves the interesting question of the relationship between Sir Robin Auld and the Government, he will recollect the main problem that the Government had with the mode of trial Bills 1 and 2. First, they introduced the all-important reputation clause into the first Bill, so that magistrates would be enjoined to take reputation into account in deciding whether someone had a jury trial. Subsequently, when for obvious reasons that measure was defeated, they shifted completely and decided that magistrates should not take reputation into account. That process receives a resounding raspberry from Sir Robin Auld in his report; he roundly criticises the Government's procedure. From his examination of the report, can the hon. and learned Gentleman say what Sir Robin Auld suggests is the best course between those two, or is the report completely silent?

Mr. Garnier: The hon. and learned Gentleman demonstrates the third of my criticisms of the Government: that they are intellectually confused. No paragraph or page in the report answers his question. The Auld report is silent on that issue. That may be because Sir Robin was not hugely impressed with the Government's performance during the last two Bills. I do not want to ascribe to one of Her Majesty's Lord Justices of Appeal any political motivation or view and, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, I am confident that Sir Robin approached the matter wholly dispassionately.

However, I am concerned that it has taken many years, a great deal of parliamentary time, much anguish among those who care about our parliamentary system and—perhaps this is a small point—much public money to reach the conclusion that we suspect that the Government have reached on jury trial. I welcome any sinner that repenteth, and if the Minister tells us that the Government are rethinking the Auld report recommendations or their views about jury trial, I will be the first to congratulate them. However, they are in a mess of their own making.

I have dwelt, perhaps for too long, on the controversial element. Now, I shall draw out some practical issues that have worried me as a practising member of the Bar and a Crown court recorder. In view of time and the look of horror on your face, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will confine myself to the issue of pre-trial preparation in criminal cases.

The plea and directions hearing procedure—commonly called the PDH—is one in which the parties to the criminal action—the Crown Prosecution Service and its representatives, and the defendant or defendants and their representatives—appear before a Crown court judge to describe, orally and on paper, issues that are likely to come up in a forthcoming trial. An indication of the plea and the issues to be tackled at trial may be given and witnesses are required. It is a hugely valuable but much misused process.

It is misused predominantly because those who appear in PDHs are woefully underpaid for their work. Were PDHs properly and directly controlled by the judge, and were their importance heightened so that failure to comply with directions could give rise to adverse consequences for the CPS or the defendant, the pre-trial preparation of even the most simple cases, and certainly of the most difficult ones, would be greatly improved. It does not take long for a court to gain a reputation of making it clear that sloppy preparation will not do and might lead to adverse consequences for the defaulting party; nor does it take long for the Crown Prosecution Service office to realise that if it appears before his honour Judge Such-and-Such without having got its tackle in order four, five or six weeks before the trial window, it will not have a trial, and the Government will be down on the CPS for failing to meet whatever target the Government have invented for that particular week.

I urge the Government, instead of wasting their time and my money and that of my fellow citizens on building middle court—echoes of the middle kingdom—buildings, to concentrate on the nitty-gritty of the part of the administration of justice system that is susceptible to change and in which change will produce beneficial results, not only for the Government and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but for the wider citizenry. That will improve the willingness of witnesses and defendants to come to court, to do what the court asks, and to play their part in the criminal justice system.

If they stick to the simple things, the Government might have greater success. If they get stuck in grandiose schemes, they will merely make fools of themselves—or even greater fools of themselves than they have in the past few years.

10.10 am

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I welcome this debate, which gives us an opportunity to recognise the immense contribution made by Lord Justice Auld, even if we do not sympathise with the line that he has taken. He has produced a major report that is clearly and powerfully argued.

The timing of the debate is fortuitous. New Labour fought the 1997 election in defence of the right to elect for jury trial, which the then shadow Home Secretary strongly opposed any attempts to remove. Having been elected, the Government reversed their position and decided to put two Bills through Parliament—both of which, happily, were defeated—to abolish the right to trial by jury. Labour's manifesto for the last general election contained a commitment to abolish the right to trial by jury. We now learn through the columns of *The Times* that the Government propose to abandon that position too. That shows an appalling lack of consistency, other than to betray whatever pledges they were elected on. I hope that the Minister will not try to seek safety in silence. If the Government's spin doctors can inform the press about their position, Ministers can inform the House of Commons.

I approach the debate with some apprehension, because I suspect that I am the only Member here who is not a lawyer and has no legal qualifications. My first mention of lawyers in the House when I was a new and junior Member was to quote Falstaff, who said,

"let's kill all the lawyers".

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

I wondered why there was a chill throughout the Chamber, then realised that on that occasion, too, I was the only non-lawyer speaking on a legal matter.

Mr. Burnett: The Minister is too self-effacing to make this admission, but I shall do so on his behalf. He is not a lawyer.

Mr. Lilley: In that case, I look to him for a healthy dose of common sense.

Although I am not a lawyer, I participated actively in our discussions of these matters in the last Conservative Cabinet. Those discussions must remain confidential, but suffice it to say that the outcome was, to my satisfaction, that we did not commit ourselves to the abolition of jury trial, although we consulted on the Narey report.

Mr. Garnier: I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend, who has hardly started his remarks. We did not want to get rid of trial by jury, but neither, according to its manifesto, did the Labour party. Its manifesto said that it would

> "remove the 'widely abused' right of defendants alone to dictate whether or not they should be tried in crown courts."

It made no mention of abolishing trial by jury. The problem that the Government face is that they have said one thing but want the world to believe another.

Mr. Lilley: I am afraid that Lord Justice Auld intensified that problem by equating the right to jury trial with the right of the defendant to elect for jury trial. He said that there was no right to jury trial until 1855, and that it was only when people had the opportunity to escape the panoply and problems of jury trial that that right could be said to exist. That is of course nonsense created by those who wish to pretend that it is a relatively new creation and has nothing to do with the traditional rights of the Englishman to be tried by jury for any serious felony.

I claim no great legal expertise, but I am conscious that, although the general public are unaware of most of our judicial principles, there are some that they value and in which they have great confidence. Above all, they would have confidence and trust in the system of jury trial in the event of their facing a serious charge. I was therefore very reluctant to contemplate any attempt by the previous Conservative Government to diminish the right of access to jury trial, and I was even more hostile to this Government's including such proposals in a Bill. I was also suspicious of the provenance of the arguments in favour of such proposals, which are redolent of bureaucratic and professional disdain for lay involvement in the judicial process.

It is natural for members of a profession to feel that their own expertise outweighs the contributions of lay people, but I fear that such feelings are in part responsible for proposals that the judicial establishment has outlined time and again in various reports, culminating in that by Lord Justice Auld. His report is underpinned not just by hostility to the right of defendants to elect for jury trial but by a deep mistrust of jury trial as such. My suspicion is that this marks not the concluding stages of an argument that will be resolved, one way or another, by deciding whether defendants should have the right to choose jury trial, but the beginning of a process that will erode the use of juries altogether.

I am afraid that close reading of Lord Justice Auld's report has enhanced my suspicions. It is true that it contains valuable proposals on improving the way in which juries work and on increasing public participation in juries. Those of us who believe in juries should not pretend that they are perfect and incapable of improvement. Instead, we should endorse, support and adopt proposals to improve the working of jury trials, and advance our own. However, the report also contains proposals that would further erode the use of juries. Under them, many issues would be deemed too trivial for juries to consider, and would be considered instead by the new tier of district courts. Others, however, including fraud, are deemed too complex for juries. Lord Justice Auld proposes not only that fraud be removed from the purview of juries but that all cases of similar complexity be so removed in the long run. As my hon. and learned Friend said, juries would no longer have the last word on the question of guilt or innocence; instead, their conclusions would be subject to review by judges. Young people, too, would be removed from the purview of juries. Lord Justice Auld is eroding the involvement of juries in our judicial system in a number of ways, and undermining the very principle of such involvement. If, according to his logic, most cases are either too trivial or too complex for juries, what role is left for them?

The Government's case for abolishing the right to choose jury trial, which Lord Justice Auld endorses eloquently and emphatically, rests on a number of presumptions, including that the right of election is a powerful tool that is widely manipulated and abused by experienced criminals to escape their just deserts, and at great cost to the taxpayer in the form of expensive trials. Lord Justice Auld endorses the argument of Ministers that by removing that right they can simultaneously prevent such abuse, ensure that criminals get their just deserts and save large sums of taxpayers' money. Moreover, they assert, as has Lord Justice Auld, that it is wrong in principle for the defendant to choose the venue and that that decision should be made by the system.

Those points are blown apart by the evidence. Above all, it cannot simultaneously be true that experienced and hardened criminals are manipulating the system to get off lightly and that if we removed that right it would make great savings to the system, when it is revealed that those savings come largely from those people facing shorter prison sentences or none at all. The Government, Lord Justice Auld and those who defend the proposition cannot have it both ways. Nor can they have it both ways by saying that it is a matter of principle that decisions about venue and mode of trial be taken by the system on objective criteria, not by the defendant, and yet proposing, as Lord Justice Auld has done in a further effort to narrow the scope for juries, that the choice of mode of trial, in the case of the new trials for fraud and complex cases, be given to the defendant, to sweeten the pill. If it is wrong to allow defendants the right of choice in normal either way cases, why should they be given the right of choice where attempts are being made to prise jury trials further out of the system?

We must examine the report extremely cautiously and not allow it to weaken further the role of juries in our system. I asked a question about how many people had served on juries during the past 12 months, and the answer was 187,000. That is very considerable lay participation. Those people, by and large, take their role seriously and are, overwhelmingly, satisfied that, despite their loss of time and remuneration while serving, they have done something worth while and contributed to the justice and civic fabric of society. If we reduce such people's involvement in the judicial system, and the prospect of involving them, we lose a very valuable point of contact between the ordinary public and the judicial system.

I return to the positive aspects of the Auld report. Lord Justice Auld has proposed means of encouraging more people to participate in the jury system. Some three times as many as that 187,000 people had to be invited to serve on juries before a sufficient number who were willing to do so could be found. We must make serving on a jury easier and more of an obligation. Lord Justice Auld highlighted an inherent unfairness in the system, a comment endorsed by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), which would be made far worse were the right to elect for jury trial removed. That is where the lower court, having heard a comparatively minor case because it deemed it within its competence, and having convicted the defendant, subsequently passes him to the Crown court for a more serious sentence because it decides that the case was more serious than it initially led people to believe.

We must remove that manifest unfairness, which made the Government's previous proposal intolerable. Far better to leave defendants the right to elect for trial by jury, with the knowledge that if they opt for the lower court, they will be sentenced within its sentencing powers with no subsequent right for the lower court to refer to the Crown court. That is a proposal in Lord Justice Auld's report that I hope that Parliament and the Government will endorse and implement in due course.

10.23 am

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I declare an interest straight away. I am a lawyer, although not a criminal lawyer.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney). He has a record of steadfast and principled opposition to the Government's previous attempts to abolish jury trial for either way cases. I pay tribute to him and to the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), who is also here in the Chamber. It takes great courage, as I believe you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for a Government Back Bencher to oppose his Government's proposals.

Whichever way it goes, Sir Robin Auld recommends that a defendant should no longer have an elective right to trial by judge and jury in either way cases; that allocation should be the responsibility of the magistrates courts alone. There will be serious argument and, no doubt, lengthy appeals from magistrates' decisions in borderline cases, but it is important to state a few principles—principles to which the former Home Secretary and the former Attorney-General adhered before 1997.

In proposals to end the elective right to jury trial in either way cases, the public's confidence in our legal system is at stake. In this country, a person who is in serious difficulty with the law—an offence meriting up to two years' imprisonment is serious—knows that he automatically has the right to opt for trial by jury: his guilt or innocence will be determined by ordinary people. I stress that the public can and do identify with and relate to juries.

I know that time is tight, but I must emphasise that minorities, especially those from ethnic minorities, have little trust in our criminal law system, as the Lawrence inquiry report makes clear. Abolishing jury trial for either way cases will do nothing to build up the confidence of ethnic minorities in our system. It will further erode that confidence.

I shall deal as swiftly as possible with one or two points arising from the report. First, the Government must have some views on availability for jury service. Presumably there will be exclusions for lawyers and employees of lawyers, especially if there is a conflict of interests, and for the police and employees of the police, but do the Government expect there to be other exclusions? I suspect that there will be exclusions for members of the armed forces. Will there be exclusions for Members of Parliament? Perhaps it would be a good thing if we did jury service.

The Government must also have some ideas about their ambitions for the middle tier—the district judge, who used to be known as a stipendiary, sitting with two lay magistrates.

Mr. Kidney: I do not want to lose the hon. Gentleman's point, but I am interested in the Liberal Democrat view. All the classes that he mentioned, including politicians, are currently subject to disqualification. Sir Robin says that we should sweep all that away and decide each on a case-by-case basis, considerably widening the jury service base. What does the hon. Gentleman think about that?

Mr. Burnett: I would like as many people as possible to be eligible for jury service, but clearly, where there is a conflict of interest, it would not be practical for certain people to serve on juries.

To return to the point about the middle tier and the Government's ambitions in that respect, their view is presumably that the judge or district judge should decide questions of law on his or her own, with the lay magistrates and the district judge deciding questions of fact. Do the Government believe that it can be appropriate in any circumstances for a district judge to decide questions of guilt or to be a party in a triumvirate that decides questions of guilt or innocence if he is aware of, for example, the defendant's previous convictions? I am anxious to hear the Minister's response to that.

Lord Justice Auld proposes a system in which a district judge will sit with two lay magistrates. From which category of society will those lay magistrates in the middle tier come? I suggest to the Minister that they will be older, retired, eminently respectable individuals. They hardly comprise a representative group. The Government's programme of closures of rural magistrates courts has led to several retirements from the bench in my constituency: for example, a young

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mother in a one-car family is unable to afford the daily four-hour travelling time from her house to Plymouth and back. Where will they find magistrates who are able to sit for three or four days at a time? That duty will fall on retired middle-class people—an admirable group of people, but not representative. An exclusive group will not encourage confidence in justice.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Are the hon. Gentleman's concerns addressed by the wording of Sir Robin Auld's report on that critical point? About magistrates, it states:

> "There are many who, for one reason or another, are not restricted in their employment or other commitments who may well relish the opportunity to sit on longer and more substantial cases."

Does the hon. Gentleman have confidence in that assertion?

Mr. Burnett: As usual, the hon. and learned Gentleman hits the middle of the target. The quotation begs the question that I have raised. Drawing from a small pool of unrepresentative individuals is likely to do nothing to encourage confidence in the justice system.

Before the Government make their decisions on the Auld report, I hope that they will put certain information in the public domain. We want to see open and intelligible costings, especially in connection with the establishment of the middle tier. Will the Minister encourage his colleagues to avoid specious comparisons with the Scottish system? Will the Government provide detailed reasons why there would be time savings if a middle tier were established? May we also have an accurate record of the effect of the changes made in 1996 that allowed heavier sentences to be imposed when defendants plead guilty at a late stage?

I commend to the Government the study by Professor Vogeler on the matter of guilt decisions in Germany, where a system similar to the middle-tier system prevails. Interestingly, that report concludes that lay magistrates play little rôle in making guilt decisions, which are invariably made by the professional judge.

Finally, I ask hon. Members to consider the way in which they would elect for trial if they were charged with an either way offence. I know what I would do.

10.33 am

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on securing today's debate and on the way in which he opened it. His speech was thoughtful and reflected the hard work that he has put into this subject over several years. We look forward to hearing further from him when these matters are debated in the House. I also pay tribute to the work done by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) in the last Parliament on a subject about which he feels passionately, as do many other hon. Members.

I declare an interest in these matters as a solicitor of many years standing, a recorder of the Crown court and a deputy district judge, formerly a stipendiary magistrate. I speak from experience. However, I am told that I must be careful not to suggest any policies on behalf of my party, particularly any that might involve money. If I do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, take no notice.

The Auld report is a huge undertaking of more than 650 pages. I congratulate Lord Justice Auld on his tremendous work. His report is full of the most thoughtful and interesting ideas and proposals, and although many of us disagree with some of the proposals, it is right that we all pay tribute to his work and that of the others associated with the report, which gives us all the opportunity to delve into the minutiae. Like all Governments, the present Government legislate too much on criminal justice matters. I hope that when they legislate on the major issues contained in the report, the House will be given ample time to discuss them.

Speaking not for myself alone but for my party, we were delighted yesterday to read press reports that the Government are likely to backtrack on jury trials. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said, the Conservative party is united in believing that jury trial is a shield against an over-mighty state. That is a matter of principle to us—and to me. We fought long and hard in the previous Parliament against the two Government Bills on mode of trial, both of which were poor. The best arguments came from those opposed to the Bills.

If the proposals suggested by Lord Justice Auld are introduced, we will have a problem because jury trial will be weakened and that will be a bad thing. If we have fewer jury trials and more professional judges, it will bring us more into line with the systems of our European partners, but it will result in the citizen gradually and subtly being removed from the judicial process. It is the place of the citizen in the judicial process for so many years that has created a sort of confidence in the system. Like the hon. and learned Member for Medway, I ask whether it is necessary to change the system. Why are the proposals likely to be taken up by the Government?

I do not think that the so-called tiers of courts and the removal of the right to jury trial are necessary. It is understood that jury trials are expensive. I heard a year or two ago that jury trials cost about £8,000 a day, but I do not measure fairness or justice by how much they cost. It is said that the right to jury trial is widely abused by defendants, but that is not my experience. Things have changed in the courts: the introduction of the plea before venue has altered things dramatically, and the Narey courts with early indicated pleas have helped. Early guilty pleas entered in magistrates courts work well.

Do I, when I sit in court, occasionally see what I regard as an abuse by a defendant? Yes, but not very often, and when I see it, I scratch my head and think, "Perhaps this is an abuse, but it is a small price to pay for the greater good, the jury system in which I believe our citizens have the greatest possible confidence." I do not believe in the theory that a trial before a jury is better, any more than I believe that a trial before lay magistrates or a district judge is better. That is not the question. The question is whether millions of our citizens instinctively feel that they would be happier with something that has been enshrined as a right for so many years—trial by their peers. If the answer is yes, as I believe it is, the arguments for change must be compelling before we interfere dramatically with a system that has worked so well.

The two Government Bills on mode of trial in the previous Parliament were deeply flawed. The question arose whether a person's reputation would be affected by a decision on whether they should have a jury trial. Another issue was whether the powers of punishment available to the magistrates court would be sufficient. The Government proposals were weak and were seen to be so by all those who helped to ensure that they did not reach the statute book.

The matters of the unified criminal court and the middle tier involving a district judge and two magistrates are difficult. I understand that Lord Justice Auld suggests that the district judge should be accompanied by two experienced magistrates. The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) and the hon. and learned Member for Medway made a most interesting point—who would those magistrates be? Trials before that jurisdiction will not last an hour or two, as they do before a district judge sitting alone; they will last a day or two, or three. We all know that people who are available for two or three days at a time come from a limited sector of society.

I am concerned about the observation that the judge would be solely responsible for law, but an equal finder of fact. One can envisage all sorts of difficulties. If during the case the advocate for the defendant said that a point of law had arisen, the lay magistrates would retire. The point of law—which would of course be about the ability of the defendant's advocate to lead the defendant as a man or woman of good character—would be put. The district judge would make a ruling having heard about the defendant's background, and that ruling would stand. Back would come the lay magistrates. At the conclusion of the case the district judge would go out with the lay magistrates jointly to consider the verdict. Is that not rather odd—very artificial? The district judge would know things that the lay magistrates would not.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: In those circumstances, what would happen if the lay magistrates said, "We think that there is a strong case, but we are not going to convict because this is a man of good character," when the chairman knew perfectly well that he was not? Would he say, "Well ... up to a point?" *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Malins: The hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right. The district judge could not say, "Just between you and me, I heard something earlier that might make you take a different view." It is a difficult question.

I am worried to see that in cases before the district judge and two lay magistrates, the judge would be solely responsible for sentence. That would be unfortunate for the magistrates sitting with the district judge. The more I study the proposals, the more I think that, as well as damaging the jury system, they have the potential to damage the lay magistracy. I strongly support our lay magistrates: they do a wonderful job. I think that we have got the balance between lay magistrates, district judges and trial by jury about right. If, as I suspect they would, the report's proposals damaged the lay magistracy, that would be a sorry state of affairs. Lay magistrates have the huge advantages of being local and not being professional.

Having spoken about jury trial I shall conclude with a few observations about other contentious aspects of the Auld report. I do not wish to express any particular views about them today—I just want to draw attention to them, as they will be debated at some length later. I hope that the Minister will explain to us more about the position on juries. Also, I want him to take back to Government Departments the message that when the Auld report comes up for debate, many of the issues will on their own merit a day or two of debate.

The report refers to double jeopardy—an issue with which we are all familiar. The Select Committee on Home Affairs, whose report on double jeopardy and reform of the law I commend, spent weeks on it. Whether a further charge should be permitted for circumstances in which scientific evidence can clinch a case is a big question. The declaration of previous convictions is also worth a day and a half on its own. To what extent should we trail or permit to be trailed before different courts the previous convictions or behaviour of a defendant?

An aspect of the report that troubles many of us is the comment about perverse verdicts. Lord Justice Auld says that

> "juries have no right to acquit defendants in defiance of the law or in disregard of the evidence".

That is an interesting proposition. In my view, the point of a jury is to produce a verdict that it believes to be right. It is well argued that if a jury comes back with a verdict that the judge does not like, that is the end of the matter and it is not open to the judge or the state to say, "I do not like this verdict. The evidence suggests that it should have been different." I take no position on the point, but I draw attention to it as a very contentious subject of future debate.

Finally, there is the question of ethnic minority representation on juries. The Government's proposals on jury trial might act against the interests of ethnic minorities in inner cities, especially those who for obvious reasons feel disadvantaged. We should examine with some care the proposition that when race is likely to be a relevant issue, a jury selection including up to three people from the ethnic minority group should be made. That is a matter of some difficulty.

To sum up, first, we must and will fight for the maintenance of trial by jury. Secondly, we must not make wholesale changes in our criminal justice system unless there is a compelling reason to do so. Finally, when the matters contained in the report come before the House, the Government must give time for them to be debated and argued properly.

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): I would like to start, Mr. Cook—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. Perhaps it would be to the benefit of all hon. and right hon. Members to recall that the House in its wisdom, or otherwise, decided last Wednesday to reinstate the position of Deputy Speaker in Westminster Hall. That position is held by Nicholas Winterton, John McWilliam, Edward O'Hara and me. The title will be displayed in front of the Chair for those who cannot

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remember it. For other members of the Chairman's panel, the term Chairman or the Chairman's name would be adequate.

Mr. Wills: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That had slipped my attention. I will not fall into that error again.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on securing an important and timely debate. It is important to give a full airing to all the issues, and I welcome the opportunity to reply to the debate, to which I have listened with great interest. Reform of the criminal justice system is vitally important and inevitably provokes intense interest, and often controversy. We are listening carefully to all the responses to Lord Justice Auld's review, which was published in October. We have conducted consultations in Bradford, Cambridge, London, Exeter, Birmingham, Manchester and Cardiff, and we have heard some lively views—many of which have been repeated here.

Every speaker today has paid tribute Lord Justice Auld's work, which represents the most extensive review of the criminal court system for 30 years. It is some 700-plus pages long and contains more than 328 recommendations, many of which are radical and fundamental. It is an important contribution toward the Government's aim of establishing modern, efficient criminal courts that suffer few delays, are in touch with the communities that they serve and respond to the needs of their users. I must put on record the Government's gratitude to Sir Robin for his extremely thorough and thoughtful work.

When the report was published, we made it clear that we would, before we made any decision, listen carefully to the views of public, the political parties and all those working in the criminal justice system, in order, as far as possible, to gain a consensus for enlightened and effective reform. As all hon. Members are aware, the consultation period ends on 31 January 2002. For that reason, if I may respond to the intervention from the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett), it would be wrong of the Government to reach or announce any decision before that date.

Mr. Burnett: Will the Minister tell me the genesis of yesterday's article on the front page of *The Times*, headed "Ministers' revolt saves trial by jury"? Where has that come from?

Mr. Wills: I will deal with yesterday's papers in a moment. First, I shall finish my point about the fact that we shall not respond in substance until the consultation has concluded and we have had a proper chance to consider all the views.

That process is taking place not only in Westminster Hall. We are receiving representations from members of the public and from people who are involved in the system throughout the country. We want to give proper consideration to every view, and we are not yet in a position to form an opinion. We also wish to consider Sir Robin's recommendations in the light of other reports on the criminal justice system such as "The Way Ahead", which we published last year, and the Halliday report.

While I cannot make substantive comments on Lord Justice Auld's review, it would be helpful if I set out the Government's underlying approach to the criminal justice system.

Mr. Lilley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wills: Yes, but if I give way to many more interventions, I shall not be able to respond in great detail.

Mr. Lilley: The Minister said that he would respond to the question about *The Times*. As I understand it, the Government have always said that their commitment to abolish the right to choose jury trial would not depend on the Auld report—they had already reached a final decision on that. If they have now changed their mind, the Minister should be aware that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 just men who need no repentance. Can we be sure, however, that the repentance is final—or will their reneging be further reneged?

Mr. Wills: I am always happy to give way, but the more Members intervene, the less time I shall have to respond to the concerns that have been raised. I shall come to that point, but it is worth first explaining our underlying approach.

We want a criminal justice system that is in touch with the communities that it serves, that is efficient, fast, fair and responsive to the needs of all who use it, that is co-operative in its relations with the criminal justice agencies and that uses modern and effective management to reduce unnecessary delays and remove them from the system. Those aims will be paramount when we decide our response to the Auld report.

Several hon. Members mentioned the reports in yesterday's press, which still seem to be of intense concern. The Government cannot dictate what newspapers publish—*[Laughter.]* Astonishing though that may be, it is the case. Nor can we prevent papers from speculating about Government policy; that is how they sell themselves, and they will continue to speculate, no matter what the Government say or do. I must, therefore, disappoint the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier): he cannot take such reports as evidence that we are thinking again, because we are still thinking about the matter for the first time and shall not conclude that process until after 31 January.

Mr. Burnett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Wills: Yes, but I have only five minutes to respond to a lot of points.

Mr. Burnett: Does the Minister refute the article by Frances Gibb and believe that she had no grounds whatever for writing it?

Mr. Wills: With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, I have clearly set out the Government's view on such newspaper stories. Our position is still being formulated and will be made clear at some point after 31 January, when consultation concludes.

In the four minutes that remain, I shall briefly respond to some of the issues that have been raised. Inevitably, much attention was focused on the recommendations for juries, and I shall have to confine my remarks to that issue. The overwhelming bulk of the discussion focused on the proposed abolition of the defendant's right to elect for jury trial in either way cases.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) mentioned some other recommendations, which have excited little interest in popular debate. The recommendation on so-called perverse verdicts, for example, has not surfaced at all in any of our roadshows. We have real doubts about the proposals on perverse verdicts, but we are keen to find a way forward. Difficult issues have been raised, and we are listening carefully to all the views that are being expressed.

The hon. Gentleman raised another important issue that has not been widely mentioned: the ethnic composition of juries. Again, we have concerns in principle about that, and particularly about the effect on random selection, which is a cornerstone of the jury system.

I turn briefly to concerns about Lord Justice Auld's views on the abolition of the defendant's right to elect for jury trial in either way cases, which clearly excite a great deal of comment. We are still considering the matter carefully. It is clear from our manifesto that we share Sir Robin's concerns, and we agree with the principles behind his recommendation. We are, however, aware of the sensitivities that surround the issue, and we are deeply and acutely aware of its importance to the public. We must consider our decision on Sir Robin's recommendation with particular care, and the views that have been expressed with great force today will contribute to our consideration.

Several hon. Members mentioned the unified criminal court, but we have not reached a decision and are currently seeking views. We are encouraging wide debate on the matter and, indeed, on all the other recommendations. Sir Robin's proposal for an intermediate tier to form part of the unified criminal court is thought provoking. We are considering it carefully and intend to continue to listen carefully to views on how to proceed.

I shall refer briefly to the future role of magistrates. It is worth stating again that we share the view expressed by almost all hon. Members who spoke of the central importance of the lay magistracy to our criminal justice system. Sir Robin endorsed that view in the report. We remain fully committed to maintaining lay magistracy and community justice as a cornerstone of our criminal justice system.

The debate has been extremely useful and vigorous—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. Time is up.

Coastal Flood Defence

11 am

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise the important issue of coastal flood defence in this Chamber. A casual onlooker might be entitled to wonder why I, with one of the most inland constituencies in England, am doing so. My defence could be that Parliament should consider all matters of public interest and that our island is small enough for a problem in one area to translate into another area and be of common concern. To borrow and slightly modify the concept of John Donne, no man is an island unto himself, and what goes on in Waveney—I see the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) arriving—or Boston is of as much concern to me as it is to the constituents of the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds).

In these days of hypersensitivity to matters of personal interest, I can say that I have no conceivable constituency interest to advance or declare on the subject and I must make time for those present with such interests to participate. However, there are three good reasons for my involvement with the topic. First, under the Conservative Administration, I was the Minister with responsibility for flood defence and coastal protection immediately prior to the current Minister. There are now not too many Tories in such a position. I am glad that the Minister is present and will respond to the debate. I have some reasonable idea of the general structure of the making and execution of policy on the subject. Although it is characteristic of neither the Minister nor, I hope, myself, we could trade insults about our comparative performances or the weaknesses of the planning structure. However, I want to secure for all hon. Members a constructive and forward-looking debate on an important topic.

My second reason is personal. Although I have lived in my constituency in Northamptonshire for 34 years, I was born and grew up in Essex. I never lived on the coastline, but I know it well and know some people who farm locally. My mother is now in her 90s and has a fund of ready stories. It may amuse hon. Members to know that she claims to be the undefeated ladies' golf champion of Mersea island. Today's subject affects that island very much. She won the championship in 1939 and the course was closed for the duration of hostilities. It has not reopened and has been largely subject to inundation, so she remains triumphant.

Be that as it may, I was in Essex as a boy for the disastrous floods of 1953, which caused great loss of life and may be said to have had an indelible effect on attitudes in the east of England. Even when the water subsided, the immediate tragedy began to heal and houses and lives were rebuilt, so far as they could be, there was a need for careful land restoration and the reconstruction of sea walls. In Essex alone, there are still 300 km of sea walls for coastal protection.

My third reason for bringing this matter to the attention of hon. Members is that, as farmers and constituency MPs in the midlands, our prime concern is inland flood defence. We were much exercised by the floods of Easter 1998, which involved some loss of life locally. However, it is impossible completely to divorce coastal management from the upland areas. Rivers such

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as the Ouse and the Nene—we pronounce it "Nen" west of Northampton—rise in my constituency and flow to the North sea. Heavy rain in the midlands might easily lead to surcharged rivers, and if a change in the wind direction followed there could be a storm surge of 5 m or 6 m from the North sea up the coast. If those two pressures met, the water would have nowhere to go, which would inevitably lead to terrible damage in urban areas. That may be an extreme case scenario, but it is not inconceivable. That is why there is a common interest in getting our flood defences right.

All those factors have been known for the past half-century, since the 1953 floods, but they have been made worse by the combination of global warming and the tilting of England towards the south-east. That has led to constant changes in sea levels, which is another reason for my concentrating most of my remarks on the south-east. However, I am aware that there are important coastal defence and coast protection issues in other areas.

The Hadley centre for climate prediction, which is associated with the Met Office, forecasts that sea levels will rise by an average of 24 cm in the next 50 years, owing to the thermal expansion of the oceans and the melting glaciers. If the tilt effect is taken into account, the sea levels in Scotland will rise by about 16 cm, while those in southern England will rise by 31 cm. In imperial measurements, that is more than a foot. The figures are entirely consistent with existing data, which suggest that sea levels are rising between 4 mm and 7 mm a year. That constitutes a perceptible yearly increase and raises questions about the long-term viability of the Thames barrier as a flood defence. This is a serious issue, which brooks no ministerial complacency.

I share with colleagues my single favourite lobbying postcard, which reached me 10 years ago. I never entirely understood why I received one. It is the only lobbying postcard that I remember to this day. It was a colourful card with a picture on it, which came from Friends of the Earth. Its message was clear. Under the heading "Global Warming: Doncaster Races", it showed a horse passing the winning post—one needed a second or two to notice that it was a seahorse.

I turn from the general agreement about the pressure on coastal protection and defence to the action required by the Government and public authorities. Those matters are in one sense less complicated than they are with inland flood defence, because with inland areas the Minister must deal with the mish-mash of various responsibilities, the need to tune the various interests together, and the possibility that the disputed ownership by a district council of a particular culvert may nullify the benefit of a scheme. Those issues need attending to, but we cannot discuss them all this morning. On the coast, the main players are the Environment Agency, the local coastal protection authorities and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs itself. The Department is the facilitator and ultimately the grant-giver for schemes, although private local providers of protection and secondary sea walls, often to their own property, including agricultural property, are important.

Incidentally, I have one concern in all the statistics on which the Minister may like to reflect. As I was putting together briefing material for this debate, I found that it is still difficult to differentiate between internal flood defence and coastal protection. I have already explained why they cannot be treated as separate issues, but in terms of planning and the effort going into the two, perhaps more thought should be given to drawing out the statistics so that they are easier to use. I am aware that it is possible, inadvertently, to stray into adding the two together and confusing the result, but this morning we should concentrate on the sea, coastal defence and coastal protection.

Shoreline management plans were a positive development in our time in government and were designed primarily by coastal protection authorities under the aegis and encouragement of the Government. I hope that the revised plans will be published after the current sheaf of consultation exercises, and that they will be put in place as soon as practicable.

Before I deal with what the Government should do I will suggest two things that they should not regard as solutions to the problems. Action must depend on local conditions and, wherever possible, local consent. The Minister will know from his broad agricultural remit that he can get a great deal out of farmers with their consent. It is much more difficult to impose solutions on them without their consent. He may also know that I am wary of sweeping solutions in this context. Unusually perhaps for someone on the Conservative Benches, I approve of some remarks that he made in March last year. He said:

> "We cannot completely surround the country with a wall of concrete. That is not only unrealistic, but undesirable. It would have consequences, given that our coastline is dynamic and erosion is part of a natural process."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 6 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 61WH.]

So far, so good. Nothing that the Minister said then is wrong, but I am worried, when he speaks in those terms, that he may have set up an Aunt Sally. Who is in the list, defending every inch regardless of cost? When Ministers set up an Aunt Sally, it is often to knock it down.

That introduces two apparently seductive concepts. I acknowledge that both may have a role, but they do not amount to a comprehensive solution—the Minister is a prominent activist in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, while I am a modest member, but I have every respect for it. The first is managed retreat—letting the sea in. I can remember touring the first experiment on the Essex coast, which was interesting and, in certain respects, encouraging. It may have a role in particular cases, although, as I said, farmers are unlikely to agree with it wittingly and willingly in the absence of adequate compensation or inducement.

I am aware that the Minister has published consultations on this exercise. However, the experiment is limited to matters of local adjustment, as set out in his consultation paper. If I may use a slightly risky analogy, it is a little like straightening out the western front in 1914-18, removing the salients and producing a more defensible position, rather than retreating comprehensively to a completely different line of defence.

The second somewhat seductive concept is closely related to managed retreat: it is soft defences. I well remember seeing those on the Norfolk coast, where the eroded beach was described, in a very attractive phrase, as being "nourished" by artificial offshore reefs. The beach was visibly regenerating and looked a lot better. That is a good thing, and I am not suggesting for a moment that it is not, but it is not the solution in every situation. I leave the Minister with the thought that he must acknowledge the need for what the Prime Minister once memorably described as hard choices. In this case, that must mean some hard sea defences as well.

On positive suggestions, I shall deal first with the regulatory and appraisal process. Farmers in the eastern counties are concerned that the present Minister's environmental enthusiasms might make things unreasonably difficult for the conduct of traditional activities and practices. There is a general problem for any farmer involved in environmentally sensitive land. I declare an interest in that an environmentally sensitive area impinges on my farm, for which I get a modest acknowledgment payment. It is one thing to have one ESA, but there can be a series of overlapping responsibilities and farmers' problems with them often rise not in arithmetic but geometric proportion to the number of requests and requirements involved. When I prepared for the debate, concerns were expressed to me about the fact that the Government are interpreting the European habitats directive as strictly site specific. It was inferred that proposals for even simple maintenance of existing sea walls at a landowner's own initiative and cost might not be permitted without exhaustive inquiry and regulatory investigation.

A wider concern—bringing in the Department's role—is whether provisions for cost-benefit analysis of schemes, which are currently subject to consultation, adequately score the value of agricultural land with reference to not only its current productivity once European subsidies are taken out—not all crops are subsidised—but its much higher capital value and its potential for diversification. In my general approach to such issues, I have some sympathy with the Dutch. They have extended their country and improved the protection of residents at huge capital expense and are unlikely to want to give the land back to the sea. As Mark Twain put it rather more succinctly across the Atlantic,

> "land, they're not making it any more."

If it is being made, however great the costs, we must think long and hard about a general retreat from the land frontier.

My final point centres on the objectives of the coastal protection process. Whatever our different views on the value of agricultural land, there is an important human interface. I will always remember inspecting the crumbling Norfolk cliffs at Happisburgh and being made uncomfortably aware that any major sea incursion through the cliffs could surge straight through the broads. Once the sea got through the cliffs, there would be little to stop it.

The Association of British Insurers, which briefed me for the debate, said:

> "We believe that Government investment in flood defence is vital if affordable flood insurance is to be available".

In other words, an individual's ability to protect themselves economically depends on there being a Government commitment, just as an individual's physical security also depends on that commitment.

The ABI goes on to recommend an increase

> "in the Environment Agency's annual capital spend of at least £145 million per annum."

For the avoidance of doubt, I remind the Minister that that includes internal flood defence as well as coastal protection—an area in which we need to draw the figures out more distinctly. That line of figuring is consistent with DEFRA's published research, which shows that a range of incremental spending of between £84 million and £204 million per annum will be required to bring defences up to the Government's standard, which is a 100-year return frequency, or to put it another way one flood every 100 years, in densely populated urban areas and to make allowance for the climate change to which I referred.

I welcome the fact that after what was a sluggish start by the Government, Ministers are getting round to claiming, if not necessarily delivering, extra funding. One or two of my hon. Friends may have something to say about the split between coastal and inland areas in that respect. I have done battle with the Treasury in my time and I know, as the Minister does, that it is always easy to find a more pressing need and to put off this sort of thing in the hope that we will not have a problem in the next year.

I warn the Minister in all friendliness and seriousness that whether the issue is inland or coastal flooding, he must be prepared to contemplate and effect a serious and sustained capital programme. That would entail not a dramatic change from one year to another, but building on the shoreline management plans and the greatest priorities indicated by his studies. At the same time, I hope that he will remain sensitive to environmental concerns, as the idea of willy-nilly capital work without paying those any regard has long passed. He must also have regard to the worries of farmers, landowners and others who live in the areas at risk.

I conclude, as I began, by recording that when all is said and done almost any problem of flood defence or coastal protection comes back to individuals. They may live in directly affected areas, they may be at risk and some of them may be less mobile or less able to manage the situation than others. Many of our citizens live under the shadow of those risks and we cannot honestly tell them that we can remove all of them regardless of the cost or environmental impact; no one is asking for that. It is helpful to ventilate the issues and local problems and to hear the Minister respond to them. Even if the issue is not one that hits the headlines day to day, we are uncomfortably aware that one day it may do so dramatically. It behoves us all to do our best to ensure that, if and when such a day arises, we have got our defences in order.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I remind hon. Members that the common convention at these sittings is for the three Front-Bench speakers, and three are present today, to commence their winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the termination of the debate. I hope that hon. Members will bear that in mind and make their comments pertinent, clear and concise.

11.24 am

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) for securing the debate, especially given that his constituency is about as far from the sea as one can get.

My constituency is the most easterly in the country and Lowestoft is Britain's easternmost cardinal point. We are therefore as exposed as anywhere to the ferocity of the sea. Those of us in low-lying East Anglia look with more than a keen interest at predictions of the impact on our region of global warming and rising sea levels. Ironically, Kessingland, one of the lowest-lying stretches of the 20 miles or so of coastline in my constituency, is one of the very few areas where accretion is occurring. Some of the people of Kessingland say that it will eventually replace Lowestoft as the country's most easterly point. We shall have to wait and see about that. The two main areas of Waveney that are under attack from the sea both feature sandy cliffs. One is to the south of Lowestoft between Lowestoft and Kessingland and is largely open countryside. The other is to the north of Lowestoft at the village of Corton, which is the main subject of my speech.

In general national terms, one cannot disagree with the assertion that it is simply not possible to build a wall around the entire coast that would withstand the power of the sea. The cost would be phenomenal—unaffordably so—and no party could responsibly commit itself to such a project. Moreover, as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds points out, it would be environmentally undesirable. Previously in this Chamber I have made the RSPB's case for the need to take steps to manage our coasts so as to ensure the continuation of sufficient wetland habitats, of which we have many in East Anglia. Today, however, I want to concentrate on people in communities by the coast and their homes and livelihoods. Although the macro arguments appear simple and support the national criteria against which plans for coast protection schemes are judged, when one looks at particular pieces of coast the situation becomes real in human terms and those national policies are truly put to the test.

The principle that operates is that the cost benefit—the value of what is saved—must exceed the cost of the works that are carried out. That is not a problem in relation to settlements of the size of Lowestoft, which always meets the criteria and is well protected so that people feel safe. In respect of large stretches of open countryside, I can understand why farmers say that they do not want to lose land to the sea. When I was leader of Waveney district council, a farmer came to the town hall with a bill for £1 million, claiming that we had let some of his fields slip into the sea. However, it is unrealistic to think that we can build walls to protect such areas.

The anxiety comes with villages on the coast the inhabitants of which tend to feel that they are particularly exposed. The village of Corton has a sea wall along its whole length, but in recent years some parts of it have suffered collapse and damage. Villagers' worries are manifested in overflowing meetings at the village hall, which I have attended. People have been told that the wall is collapsing partly because the level of the beach has become lower, but they cannot understand why the groynes that were put there to help the sand to accumulate have been allowed to deteriorate over the past few decades.

Waveney district council has carried out two sets of work to contain the damage, on which, for two years running, it has spent two thirds of its annual £300,000 coast protection budget. Particular strain is often placed on small coastal district authorities in that respect, which is a problem that I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will discuss with his colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Such situations are urgent and the coast protection element of the standard spending assessment is not very large.

With a population of some 1,100, Corton village is not small. Nor is it a scattered settlement. It is densely populated, within a tightly drawn village envelope. It has a school, a post office, a shop, two churches, two pubs, a social housing estate, social housing for the elderly and private estates of bungalows. On its doorstep is a new, £60 million Anglian Water waste water treatment centre that has almost been completed.

A shoreline management plan was drawn up in the mid-1990s. The policy for Corton was to hold the line, and we should remember that those who live there, or who have businesses there, mapped out their futures on the basis of that plan. To me, it is unthinkable that a managed retreat policy will be adopted and that the village of Corton will be abandoned to the sea. Indeed, I am sure that it will not. No politician from whatever political party, whether local or national, would accept leaving such an important and sizeable village undefended to the mercy of the sea. As a former leader of Waveney district council, I appreciate that such decisions are difficult. I had to take a very tough decision on a hamlet, consisting of four or five houses further along the Suffolk coast, in a heritage coast area of outstanding natural beauty. Reluctantly, we decided to leave the houses to the sea, and I believe that a couple have indeed gone over the cliff. In fact, my hon. Friend the Minister once visited them. For many years, a picture of him standing on the cliffs hung on the walls of the local Labour party offices.

Corton also has a tourist industry. The three holiday camps and caravan sites that are situated between the main street and the cliffs are not shacks or beach huts, but substantial, good-quality buildings, many of which are built of brick and have been winterised. Such all-year-round holiday camps are popular with older visitors, and represent a substantial investment. They are a major part of the local economy and support hundreds of jobs. Further up the coast, just beyond the boundary of my constituency, a similar camp recently hosted the world indoor bowls championship.

Concern has been expressed that the coastal strip on which the holiday camps are situated might not meet DEFRA criteria in respect of a proposed local authority scheme. I am happy to say, however, that Waveney district council is now confident that it does meet the criteria for a 20-year scheme that would protect not only the holiday accommodation but the two or three private houses situated among it, near the cliff. The scheme, costing some £2.8 million, has been developed in consultation with DEFRA, and will be submitted to my hon. Friend the Minister in March or April. I ask him to be ready to consider that scheme, and I hope that he will look favourably on it and take a positive decision quickly, because the cloud of anxiety that has hung over the village of Corton for too long needs to be removed. I also ask that he remember that behind the holiday camp area lies the substantial village that I have described. It would be madness to allow the holiday camp to fall over the cliff over a period of two or three decades—what a spectacle that would present!—only for the cliff to recede to such a point that the village needed defending anyway. Given its size and importance, I cannot believe that Corton would fail to meet any criterion that was put in place.

Some concern has been expressed that a 20-year scheme is not long enough. In one sense, the proposed scheme is flexible, in that it involves boulders and additions can be made to it. Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that DEFRA does require local authorities to review such schemes every five years, and that they can be extended? Will he confirm that the matter will be considered again during, and towards the end of, the 20-year period, and that the holiday camp area of Corton will not automatically be abandoned after that time?

The proposed scheme is an appropriate level of spend to hold the line for a considerable period and will allow further assessments. We do not know what will be happening to the coast in 10 or 20 years, but if we can hold the line for that period, a calculation can be carried out in future.

In conclusion, I seek a favourable and quick response to the bid that will soon arrive in the Minister's Department so that work can begin this summer. I seek a recognition that villages of the size and importance of Corton with a holiday industry cannot simply be abandoned. People and businesses need all the confidence that they can reasonably be given. The Government must recognise that there are resource implications for local authorities, not only for their annual budgets but for individual schemes. For such an important policy, I hope that DEFRA is bidding, as the hon. Member for Daventry suggested that it should, for more resources in the comprehensive spending review.

We cannot predict the future configuration of our coasts. Where I live in Pakefield, south of Lowestoft, whole streets fell off the cliff in the 1950s. Today, the coastline and beach at Pakefield is another area of accretion. We cannot predict the future, but we must try to plan and gear ourselves up as much as possible to ensure that guidelines or criteria that exist at national level connect with the lives of ordinary people and the communities in which they live.

11.36 am

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on securing this important debate. Unlike him, I have every conceivable constituency interest in ensuring that the coastal flood defences and internal drainage boards work together and co-operate. Large areas of my constituency would be under the sea were it not for the excellent work of the myriad of agencies involved in coastal flood defence. I shall return to that theme. Much of the high-quality agricultural land was reclaimed during the past 400 or 500 years, and much of it by some extremely talented Dutch individuals. In the past, excellent work has also been done by my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell).

Many people, particularly those living in coastal areas that are directly affected by the sea, have no idea of the severity of damage that can occur. As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry suggested, the last time that a flood occurred on the east coast was in 1953. Several hundred people were killed in my constituency. It is important to realise that up to 10 km inland from the coast much of the land is at or below sea level. In an area such as east Lincolnshire, it is vital that we understand that river flood and sea flood defences are inextricably linked and that solutions to those problems need to be considered together.

Defences provide flood protection to an extensive area of low-lying coastal plane. It is both high-quality agricultural land and land for recreation and tourism. The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) said that Corton in his constituency had a tourist industry. He should see Skegness. Along the coast of east Lincolnshire, between Skegness and Mablethorpe, there are about 26,000 mobile homes, the vast majority of which would be affected were the sea to breach the defences. That would have a severe impact on the local economy and employment.

I want to deal with four problems which, I am sure, exist around the United Kingdom, but which are exacerbated in areas such as Boston and Skegness. First, there is a disparity between the standard spending assessment and the internal drainage board levies. Historically, particularly taking into account the gross domestic product inflator within the standard spending assessment, those figures have approximately matched each other. For the first time, during this financial year, the money transferred from the local authority for the internal drainage board levy has been more than the SSA moneys from the Government. That does not fit comfortably with the consultation document released by the Minister, which emphasises the importance of local consultation and of flood defences.

The problem will worsen over time. The internal drainage boards have said that their levies may well have to increase by up to 10 per cent. in the next financial year. The local authority—I am using East Lindsey district council as an example—can deal with the disparity in one of two ways. It can cut other local services or increase the council tax. I should have thought that the responsibility lay with central Government, and was not something to be funded by local government.

Internal drainage boards are, to my mind, closely linked to coastal defences, and it is vital that they should retain local control. I realise that some time ago the idea of the Environment Agency taking over control of the boards was discussed. I should welcome a reassurance that that is completely off the agenda.

The second subject that I want to raise relates to shoreline management plans. They are five-year rolling management plans that take into account longer-term coastal erosion, integrating the implications of climate change and the need to establish confidence in the planning process, including environmental protection, tourism and biodiversity. I do not think that a long

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enough view has been taken. I understand that Holland has a 1,000-year plan, in which it is made clear which parts of the coastline will have hard defences, which will have managed retreats and which will benefit from mudflats and salt marshes.

The Government need to consider embracing a much bigger strategic purpose, perhaps bringing together all the agencies that are currently involved under a broader remit. I learned quickly, in trying to marshal information for the debate, that no one agency has overall knowledge, even in one geographical area. The knowledge is split between district, county and town councils, environmental agencies, the internal drainage boards and a range of other institutions. That state of affairs needs to be examined, because it results in a fragmented, not holistic, approach.

The third matter that I want to mention is environment. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry has alluded to some key issues. However, it is not always appropriate to build higher and higher defences against rising sea levels. Also, gradual land tilting is occurring. Some options, although not always appropriate, deserve sympathetic consideration. There are circumstances in which managed realignment of defences would have a significant environmental impact, creating important wildlife habitats such as salt marshes.

A good example can be found in my constituency at Frieston Shore, where a recent and continuing partnership between Boston borough council, Lincolnshire county council and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has secured objective 5b funding from Europe for a flood defence scheme, as match funding. That should be considered in the rest of the country. However, it must happen on a voluntary basis. Some valuable agricultural land abuts sea defences and, historically, many farmers have themselves provided those defences. There are now too many obstacles to stop them providing or improving sea defences.

The fourth and final matter that I want to raise is economic regeneration. There has been great concern, in my constituency and elsewhere, about the availability of long-term flood insurance. I understand from the Insurance Institute that it is prepared to provide insurance up to the end of December of this year. Nobody seems to know what will happen after that. That is directly related to the Government's commitment to providing sufficient funding and an adequate strategy for coastal flood defence. The Government need to ensure that insurers know the difference between coastal flood defence and river flood defence. There is a marked difference between development and building on river flood plains and on areas of land behind adequate coastal flood defences.

In an area such as Boston and Skegness—which has an ever-increasing population of people who retire from the midlands, and where local authorities and others have an ever-increasing ambition to diversify the economy away from its traditional agricultural base—there are great worries about achieving sufficient planning permissions for development to bring businesses in from outside. While the Environment Agency has played a constructive role, it has in the past year or so hindered exciting developments that might bring economic growth and regeneration to a depressed agricultural area.

I have to inform the Minister that, in the view of the IDBs in my constituency, the drainage system is so efficient—because it has been there for so long and the individuals and systems are so expertly positioned—that it is difficult to envisage any circumstances in which flooding would occur as a result of precipitation alone. The danger in an area such as east Lincolnshire is from the sea.

In conclusion, too many bodies deal with both coastal flooding and internal drainage—it is a fragmented responsibility. That was highlighted by the Select Committee on Agriculture in 1998. Nothing seems to have been done about it. There is growing concern about offshore dredging and dredging for aggregates. Dredging alters wave patterns and creates faster and greater erosion than has been the case historically. A breach occurred in my constituency last year at a nature reserve called Gibraltar point, which is an unprotected area. I should like the Minister to take the thought away—I do not expect him to respond today, but hope that he will do so later. We need a national strategy and we should take a leaf out of the book of the authorities in Holland. We should have a longer-term view—perhaps a 1,000-year programme, or at least a 500-year one—across the United Kingdom. Uncertainty inhibits economic regeneration, so it would be helpful to have greater clarity about responsibility and about funding.

11.47 am

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) for his graphic demonstration of altruism in raising the issue. He has a landlocked constituency, unless things are getting very much worse and more of the Arctic circle is melting than we had believed. He also introduced the debate with his usual entertaining literary allusions.

Fortunately, my constituency does not have cliffs with houses crumbling into the sea, although it is on the coast of West Sussex. A great many of my constituents live along the shoreline. The Minister and I have debated flooding on many occasions, although we have previously concentrated on river and inland flooding, and today's debate is about coastal flooding. I have a plea to make. In the past year, there has been much debate in Parliament, and much media focus, on inland flooding and river flooding. For some of us, river flooding is not such a big problem—although we have a little of it—but coastal flooding is an ever-present threat. May I remind the Minister, therefore, that the danger of coastal flooding has not gone away, but has merely been overshadowed by what has happened with our rivers? The vast majority of resources were rightly targeted at the great devastation that occurred in many inland parts of Sussex, particularly at Chichester, Lewes and Uckfield. That was much reported in the media, but it did not help us.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): My constituency is historically affected by both inland and coastal flooding. I am pleased to say that the Minister has taken a specific interest in Robertsbridge, which has been among the worst affected inland areas in the south-east in recent years. I am cautiously optimistic that a long-term solution will emerge, but less optimistic about the coastal problem, particularly at Pevensey bay. I pay tribute to my county councillors, particularly Councillor Roger Thomas, who has been a doughty fighter for flood defences. The residents of Pevensey bay are concerned about the lack of an overall flood defence strategy, particularly because the Institution of Civil Engineers has pointed out that the flood defence programme is a second-class operation.

Tim Loughton: I think that I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention; Sussex Members constantly try to outdo each other about the severity of their flood problems. My hon. Friend's constituency lies further along the coast, but Shoreham beach in my constituency—a densely populated spit of land with many thousands of residents—is very low lying. The Shoreham and Lancing coastlines are all low lying but densely populated. We are not talking about pleasure beaches, holiday homes or caravan sites, but about the thousands of people whose homes are located within several yards of the sea, and they are exceedingly vulnerable. The Sussex coastline, from Brighton to Bognor Regis, is a built-up, urban strip, where the vast majority of people in south Sussex live.

The Minister knows that my constituency and the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends in that area are bordered to the north by the downs and to the south by the sea, where it is impossible to build. We are squeezed between those two natural features. If sea waters rose significantly, large parts of my constituency would be engulfed. We would require not what is called a managed retreat, but a retreat for many thousands of people.

I acknowledge that much has been done, particularly by the Environment Agency. For instance, some extra boulder protection has been put down along Shoreham and Lancing beaches over the past few years. However, that work is often delayed or subject to stoppage. Typically, if storms further up the coast at Selsey flooded a caravan park, the local authority would take emergency action, which would drain its flood defence coffers. Whenever that sort of thing happens, long-term defence work, which affects many more homes, is put on hold, and work that is desperately needed remains undone.

I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry on the grey area between flood defence and coastal protection, which causes a great deal of buck passing between the various agencies involved, including local water authorities, the district or county councils and the Environment Agency. Much of that is a legacy from when the Environment Agency took over from the National Rivers Authority. We have debated before with the Minister the problems caused by the fact that many responsibilities still lie with dozens of residual bodies. I am afraid that that anomaly is still being exploited by many authorities who do not want, simply because they do not have the resources, to pick up the tab for defence work or repairing damage.

A classic example is Shoreham harbour, which skirts Shoreham beach, which is, as I said, very low lying. At the end of one road, several people's gardens are literally falling into the harbour and have been doing so for some years. It will not be long before they have no gardens left and the houses start to come under attack. The harbour authorities, the Environment Agency and the district council all say that that is not their responsibility, so who is responsible? Residents cannot get proper insurance cover for the damage, so they are stuck between a rock and a hard place— or, in this case, a rock and the very wet place that their homes are rapidly becoming. There should be greater guidance—we have discussed that before, but seem to have made no progress—in determining and defining who has responsibility for certain areas of our coastline, particularly in areas such as my constituency on the Sussex coast.

We need to ensure that local authorities receive a proper share of funding for flood defence work. Some years ago, Adur district council received less from central Government for its flood prevention work and coastal defence work than did Crawley borough council, which is some 20 miles north and well inland. In 1998, the Home Office cut the emergency planning grant to West Sussex county council by 31 per cent. The budget was already under enormous pressure because of the extra costs of social services caused by the ageing population of a county such as West Sussex, but the county council had to find more money to pay for flood protection and emergency flood work, and the extra costs incurred by the floods in Chichester and Selsey.

I wish to air a specific point about Worthing. I am advised by the chief executive of Worthing borough council that the council can obtain grant aid only for the prevention of erosion. Worthing has a long, exposed shingle beach, but cannot obtain grant aid for the provision of splash walls to prevent flooding from overtopping waves. Whether flooding occurs because something has been eroded or because there is low-lying land just beyond the beach with vulnerable houses does not really matter. Because of a funding anomaly, however, Worthing borough council cannot perform essential flood defence work on the promenade. That affects our tourist industry, which has suffered greatly anyway. Worthing's name comes from the Anglo-Saxon for seaweed, so the town has a long tradition of looking to the sea.

Pair trawling also has an impact on Worthing's coastline. The natural defences just off the shore have been smashed up—the boulders and the kelp beds have gone—by that very rough form of fishing. That leaves even lower our natural defence against water coming over on to houses just beyond the shore.

We have heard much about shoreline management plans. There should be much more action on those and results should be forthcoming. In July 2001, the Government issued planning policy guidance note 25, which deals with deterring the building of housing in areas at risk of flooding. It is absolutely right to attempt to do that, but our problem in West Sussex is that 46,000 houses are being imposed on us. We have the sea and the downs and very little land in between on which to build those houses. The land most vulnerable to those building proposals comprises the strategic gaps of which few are left and which are the only things that split up the vast coastal urban strip. Those areas are the most environmentally vulnerable to coastal flooding. It is nonsense that we are being forced to build houses and simultaneously being told that we cannot build them

[Tim Loughton]

where they are most likely to be built. That is a real problem in my constituency and in neighbouring ones in Sussex.

In conclusion, some progress has been made, largely through the efforts of the Environment Agency. I pay tribute to Peter Midgley MBE and the agency's Worthing office. They have done a lot to help in difficult circumstances. The Government get flood defence on the cheap. They expect local authorities to do much without properly funding them. Given that 5 million people and 2 million homes are vulnerable to flooding, the Government must take the issue much more seriously, particularly in areas where the coastline is densely populated. In my area, where there is precious little land for alternative development, a small rise in water level combined with the lack of sustained proper defence work will bring untold misery to many thousands of people who will be displaced. I ask the Minister to take that on board and to tackle the problem that I raised in regard to Worthing, which does not get the funding that it needs, because of an anomaly in the nature of its coastline.

12 noon

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): It is an unexpected pleasure to be able to participate in the debate. Although I am very interested in the subject, I had intended to be merely a passive observer because my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) was due to participate. Unfortunately, he is involved in Committee proceedings.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) for raising this subject, which is dear to my heart. I say that not least because I represent North Cornwall, which has the most famous and most attractive coastline in the United Kingdom. However, it regularly reminds us not only of the beauty of the sea but of its ferocity, and we heard again this weekend about a tragic loss of life in my constituency. An unexpected huge wave can cause devastation. At the time of this weekend's incident, I was a bit further down the Cornish coast and witnessed some of the biggest waves that I have ever seen—and I have spent most of my life living close to the sea in Devon and Cornwall. It is important for us to remind those who go to the coast only during the traditional summer holiday period that the sea is extremely frightening for those who live by it or have their living upon the waters.

In that context, I am reminded of the headline comment in the 1998 report of the then Select Committee on Agriculture, which stated:

> "It is time to declare an end to the centuries-old war with the sea and to seek a peaceful accommodation with our former enemy."

The Minister will agree that that view is overly simple and that we must be more sophisticated. The sea is still an enemy in some parts of the country. As several hon. Members have said, the Dutch would never take such an open-ended approach; they would be much more resilient and more selective in their attitude.

The hon. Member for Daventry referred to fact that the south of England—I say England advisedly—is going down and that, in relative terms, the north of England is going up. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) advised me that Cornwall is the only part of the south that is going up, which may have something to do with our Celtic history. The problem, however, is that we are not going up as fast as the sea level is likely to rise, and relativity is important. All the contributions so far have been made by hon. Members representing constituencies on the eastern and southern coasts, but people in the south-west and many other parts of western Britain are just as concerned about the effects of global warming.

The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) mentioned a village in his constituency that was threatened by the encroachment of the sea. In my youth, I went to see the south Devon village of Hallsands, which had succumbed to coastal erosion not long before and had mostly disappeared. One can still see some of the houses; indeed, in my childhood, one woman still lived at the top end of the village. Interestingly, the causes of coastal erosion in that case were not merely natural. In the 1930s, speculative developers who were building new docks in Devonport in preparation for rearmament got consent to extract a lot of gravel from the seabed immediately off the coast from Hallsands. It is interesting that the trigger for natural disasters is often man-made. That is why I welcome the new generation of thinking, which has moved us on dramatically.

In recent years we have recognised the connection between the hierarchy of decision making on international global warming—the hon. Member for Daventry mentioned that subject—and joined-up government at a national level. I pay tribute to the Minister, who has been at the forefront on the subject for many years. I say that in relative terms, although it may seem like many years to him. As hon. Members from both sides have said, joined-up government is critical. We have suffered too much from diffusion of responsibility and buck passing.

We also need local consent not only from farmers and landowners but from residents. My constituency contains communities where the residents do not feel that they have adequate influence on the decision-making process. That is partly because it is to some extent outwith normal local or central Government responsibility, with agencies and quangos involved, and there is difficulty in identifying precisely where decisions are taken. Anyone who thinks about the three levels of decision making will see the obvious links. It is frustrating for members of the general public to find that the links are not always as overt and effective as they would hope.

During the first Parliament after I came back to the House in 1992, I chaired the all-party coastal group, which has been sadly eroded although it has been connected with another maritime group. During that period when I worked with hon. Members from all parties, I was struck by the extent to which we had simply failed to pinpoint where the initiatives would be taken, where the priorities would be set and where the funding would go. There has been some improvement, to which the Minister will no doubt refer, but we have not reached a satisfactory conclusion. Some parts of the country need managed retreat in terms of coastal defence, and the administration of that rapidly needs managed advance if we are to gain the consent of the people most closely involved.

In 1998, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives was involved in discussions on the Flood Warnings (Vulnerable Properties) Bill. The debate revealed the inadequacy of risk assessment and its publication to communities and individuals. The subject requires careful consideration. I took seriously the point made by the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) that insurance companies are often inadequately informed about the differences between threats from coastal erosion and flooding and from river flooding.

The Minister will take on board the point made by the hon. Member for Daventry about the close connection between inadequate management of flood plains for rivers and consequent frequent conjunction with high tides and bad weather. That is what often causes the most trouble in our coastal communities, and it means that we cannot pretend that the issues are separate.

I want to give the Minister the maximum time to respond, but I shall make one final point. Shoreline management plans have been the "in" concept of recent years, and we acknowledge them as a step forward. They have brought together many otherwise diffuse responsibilities, and have enabled people to see more clearly what is involved. However, they still lack a vital ingredient. The new approach or mindset has brought responsible bodies together to find solutions, but it has not yet gained the full-hearted consent of the people most involved. It is on that that we must concentrate in the next few years. We must ensure the mechanisms for gaining that consent through consultation, direct involvement and a proper role for elected representatives at all levels. If we do not achieve ownership of the plans by the people most affected, those plans may be a waste of paper and time.

12.9 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on securing the debate and on the clarity of his comments. However, I am sure that he will understand if I ask him to pass on my congratulations, and those of the rest of the House, to his indefatigable 94-year-old mother. She has been the undefeated ladies champion of Mersea Island golf club for 43 years, which I am sure has nothing to do with its inundation by the sea.

My hon. Friends the Members for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) mentioned two crucial points about the Government's action. First, they referred to the incoherent management of flood defences, and secondly to the lack of funding. Both my hon. Friends' constituencies—although I know one better than the other—are in considerable danger from flooding. As a member of Sussex Royal Naval Reserve, I once drove a minesweeper out of Shoreham, from whose bridge I could see over the tops of many houses, so it is clearly an area under serious threat of coastal flooding.

The threat of coastal flooding is likely to become more menacing in time. The recent planning policy guidance on development flood risk from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions states that

"the current 1-in-100-year high-water level on the east coast may be expected to be exceeded every 20 years on average by 2050, assuming no change in storminess. There may also be secondary impacts such as changes in wave heights due to increased water depths, as well as possible changes in the frequency, duration and severity of storm events."

Of course, it is not the Government's fault that the south-east of England is gradually sinking, and it is impossible for them, single-handedly, to halt the pernicious process of global warming. We must accept that a rise in sea levels, especially off the coast of south-east England, is tragically inevitable, at least in the short term. Even a new Labour Government cannot play Canute. However, it is reasonable to criticise the Government for failing to provide adequate resources to deal with the problem at hand. I shall focus my remarks on that lack of provision.

Operational responsibility for flood alleviation lies with local operating authorities, including the local authorities, the Environment Agency and the internal drainage boards. Local authorities are ultimately responsible for coastal defence under the Coast Protection Act 1949. When their jurisdiction covers a coastal area, the Act grants local authorities powers to take measures against coastal erosion and sea encroachment. Private or corporate owners of coastal land are also entitled to take protective measures against erosion and sea flooding, but are not eligible for Government grant in aid.

The United Kingdom coastline is managed under the shoreline management plan—or SMP. Plans are devised for each coastal region and take into account a variety of coastal management issues, including the adequacy of current flood defences. However, local authorities are ultimately dependent on grants from central Government. Hon. Members have made that point repeatedly today. Authorities are dependent on grants for resources to tackle coastal flooding, which have been woefully inadequate in recent years.

New Labour's complacency in that respect is made clear by consideration of the figures that were supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in July last year. Money allocated to local sea defence projects by MAFF stood at £46.8 million in 1997-98. The following year the figure dropped to £36.5 million. In 2000-01 a mere £25.7 million was earmarked for spending on coastal flood defences.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It might be helpful if I explain to the hon. Gentleman that the issue is a little more complex than that. It is not that money that has been allocated has dropped, but that some schemes approved by local authorities have slipped. The money has not been lost; in many cases it has been reallocated elsewhere in the flood and coastal budget. The hon. Gentleman should look at the situation a little more carefully instead of having a routine, political whinge.

Mr. Sayeed: The Minister will recognise that I have been endeavouring to obtain greater clarity from his Department, which has deliberately hidden many of the figures, but these we have managed to wheedle out. It is clear: whatever obfuscation the Department chooses to deploy, over three years central funding for sea defences dropped by almost 50 per cent. To say that some schemes may have been delayed would be using the same argument that the Deputy Prime Minister used in relation to many road projects.

[Mr. Sayeed]

We are interested in money that gets spent and things that get done. Although the floods of autumn 2000 were principally inland, they should nevertheless have served as a vivid reminder of the enormous financial implications of large-scale water damage. It is bizarre that, in the same year as United Kingdom insurers faced an unprecedented claim of around £1.3 billion for flood and associated storm damage, MAFF should have made cuts in coastal defence funding.

Lack of funding is not our only criticism. There is also a divide between the Government's rhetoric and the reality. The Labour party's 2001 election manifesto clearly stated:

> "The dangers of coastal and inland flooding are now widely appreciated, and we are committed to investment in preventative solutions."

Quite how that admirable commitment squares with a £21.1 million reduction in grants for sea defences over three years is unclear.

In the aftermath of the catastrophic events of autumn 2000 the Association of British Insurers called for the Government to increase spending on all flood defence measures in England and Wales by at least £145 million. When increased Government funding finally arrived, it was too little and too late. The money allocated for flood warning and flood defence programmes by the Ministry was increased from £66 million in 2000-01 to £114 million in 2003-04—a £48 million increase—when insurers had asked for a minimum of £145 million, and much of that £48 million went on increased administration rather than on physical measures against flooding. The majority of that funding is provided by Government in the form of a DEFRA grant for approved capital and other works and by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions via revenue support grant, which is used by local authorities to fund levies to the Environment Agency.

Mr. Blizzard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sayeed: I am sorry, but my time is very limited. I shall carry on.

All say that that is too little money and too late, and many complain that all that they can do is repair what they have rather than improve the protection.

In conclusion, what can be said for the Government? They are not responsible for the weather, for the tilting of the UK or for the long-term effects of global warming, but they have dragged their heels over coastal flood defence and continue to do so. Prospects for an adequate coastal flooding strategy in the near future look remote. On 31 October 2001, in an answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), the Minister expressed optimism that the current review for flood defences would provide long-term solutions and promised that a review would

> "be published later this autumn."—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 735W.]

Three months on, with no sign of the promised report, the Government will perhaps forgive us if we do not share their apparently boundless optimism.

Despite increasing pressure on the UK coastline from erosion, rising sea levels and the gradual sinking of the south-eastern corner of England, sea defences remain hopelessly underfunded. The effect of that parsimony will be more misery, unnecessary cost, and more of the south of England lost at sea.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on securing the debate. He put his case in a thoughtful and constructive way. As a former Minister with responsibility for flood and coastal defence, he is very knowledgeable on the subject. He made his arguments in a thoughtful and logical way when he was a Minister, commanding much respect. I shall return to the main thrust of his arguments in a moment. I hope to answer a few points that have been made during the 10 minutes that I have available.

I start with the comments made by the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed). It is a little disappointing that his contribution was a purely political moan about how much more money we should be spending, and I am sure that he appreciates that that approach encourages cynicism among the public. I am not aware that his party has made commitments to large increases in public expenditure. If research is done, it can be discovered that the only cut in real terms in overall spending on flood and coastal defence happened under a Conservative Administration.

Under this Government, the overall spend on flood and coastal defence has increased consistently since 1997. From last year to 2003 there will be, in total, a 70 per cent. increase in expenditure from grants. Overall expenditure from all sources including levies, contributions from local authorities, internal drainage boards and the Environment Agency—the hon. Gentleman must take those into account, because DEFRA grants are not the only source of flood and coastal defence expenditure—will exceed £400 million this year. That is a record sum of money. We take the matter seriously.

There will always be an argument about what the appropriate figure should be. We have commissioned reports on appropriate spend and the need for long-term investment. That is an openness that has not existed before, although the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire accused the Government of hiding figures. We have commissioned such reports so that people can see them, and to guide our future priorities. Projects such as engineered coastal defence schemes are a long-term business. Design, build, public consultation and getting plants on site can take between three and five years.

It is not unusual to have big variations in annual spend. In 1997, the Lincshore project, of which the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) will be aware because it related to Skegness, involved very high capital spend on beach recharge, or nourishment, as the hon. Gentleman said. This year, the progress made on various coastal defence schemes is disappointing. Some £15.5 million was reallocated to the Environment Agency to provide, for example, £9 million for emergency repair costs following the floods of winter 2000, £3 million for a range of database schemes to improve flood warning and £3 million for special funding—this will be of interest in Sussex—for such things as whole catchment river schemes. Where communities have technical difficulties with flood defences, we are funding studies of the whole catchment to help understand how it works and find ways of defending such communities in various catchment plans.

Mr. Barker: I accept a great deal of what the Minister is saying, although we can quibble over individual projects. Does he accept that it remains a worry for people up and down the country, especially my constituents in Pevensey bay, that, whatever the statistics, the Institution of Civil Engineers has said that the amount of investment needed across the board for sea defence must be doubled to be effective? Indeed, the Government have not responded to that report.

Mr. Morley: We have only just had the report, and the hon. Gentleman must give us a chance to respond to it, because we commissioned it from the Institution of Civil Engineers, and we therefore take it seriously. I am surprised to hear that the residents of Pevensey bay are concerned, because we have recently spent a large sum on a big scheme in that area to protect them. I know that the scheme is appreciated by the hon. Gentleman's constituents because I went down there for its opening and talked to them.

I understand the persuasive case that my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) made for Corton. I shall consider sympathetically the bid from the local council, which knows the procedure to follow.

The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness made several reasonable and thoughtful points, although I unfortunately do not have time to respond to them in detail today.

I understand that the constituents of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) will be concerned by the points that he raised, although I was puzzled by his remarks about grants not being available for shingle beaches. I must discuss that with him in greater detail because I suspect that that relates to an argument about what is an environmental improvement to a promenade and what is a flood defence scheme. The issue is more complex than he seems to think.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made a point about taking a joined-up approach, which is something that we have been trying. We shall shortly produce the funding review report, which makes several interesting recommendations. It is an independent report, not a Government position, and we shall put it out for consultation and respond to people's views on it. The suggestions that it contains on institutional changes and other ways of raising funds are interesting.

The responsibility for flood and coastal defence is shared between central Government and local government because the benefits of such schemes often apply locally. However, we also recognise the need for a strategic approach, which is why the bulk of funding comes from central Government. There are issues about the way in which the standard spending assessment works and the appropriate level of funding, and those matters are, of course, under constant review.

The hon. Member for Daventry made several serious points about managed retreats. I make no secret of my enthusiasm for them, but I should like to reassure him that the Government know that they are not appropriate in all circumstances. When we consider a managed retreat we examine the circumstances in which it would be of benefit. It is certainly better if one can conduct a managed retreat by persuasion, and in some of the schemes that I have recently seen, the agency has purchased the land. Such schemes involve deliberately allowing the land to flood, and if one does that, there is a case for purchasing it or entering into a management agreement.

There is a difference between a managed retreat and land that is flooded as part of a natural process, which is sometimes inevitable. Much of my constituency is below sea level, and it is close to the Holderness coast, which has been eroding for centuries, during which time many communities and villages have been lost. That is part of this country's natural process and the dynamic nature of our coastlines. We must recognise that if we interfere with our coastlines, there may be consequences for other parts of the coast and other communities.

I shall ensure that we think carefully about managed retreats, which we approach in the context of the shoreline management plans that I freely acknowledge were a good idea introduced by the previous Government. We have built on those plans, and we review them regularly, which addresses the point made by the hon. Member for Daventry that 20-year schemes can be periodically reviewed in the context of shoreline management plans.

Time does not allow me to continue to deal with the range of sensible questions that were asked, other than to say that the Dutch support managed retreat. We are in close touch with them and they share many of our attitudes to the problem. This is an important issue that demands a large commitment in terms of funds and requires us to consider sustainability and the balance between hard and soft defence.

Generic Drugs

12.30 pm

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I am pleased to have secured this debate as it gives me an opportunity to explore the unforeseen effects of the pressure to drive higher still the proportion of national health service prescriptions for generic pharmaceuticals, and to make a submission to the Government review of the future supply and reimbursement of generic medicines for the NHS.

The Government have already, with some success, protected the supply chain that provides vital medicines to our pharmacists, general practitioners, hospitals and, ultimately, patients against some of the abuses that took place in the late 1990s. During that period, the need for the action that the Government subsequently took was apparent. Wholesalers regularly hoarded large amounts of a drug in demand and waited for that demand to meet critical mass before releasing their supplies into the market at the highest possible price. In 2000, the Government introduced an interim maximum pricing scheme for generics, which in its first year saved the NHS £330 million. That arrangement is not in place indefinitely and the options for the reimbursement and supply of generics are being reviewed. I shall return to that point later.

GPs have long been encouraged to prescribe generics whenever possible. In 2000, 71 per cent. of items were prescribed generically, but owing to the non-availability of generic versions of some drugs, only 52 per cent. were dispensed generically, representing 22 per cent. of overall cost. The upward trend continues. The figures for April to September 2001 reveal that almost 76 per cent. of items were prescribed generically against the 72 per cent. target. The dispensing rate of generics, although unknown, is unlikely to have increased a great deal.

Generics are less costly than branded medicines because their manufacturers do not need to undertake clinical trials. In the UK, the average net ingredient cost of a brand is £16.06 and that of a generic is £4.18. If there were no generics and the average cost of branded medicines remained the same, the NHS drugs bill would increase from £5.3 billion to £8.6 billion. According to the British Generic Manufacturers' Association, £1.2 billion spent by the NHS on generic drugs saves the taxpayer £3.3 billion.

The discussion paper, "Options for the Future Supply and Reimbursement of Generic Medicines for the NHS", said that the Government are looking to

> "achieve a secure and consistent supply of both established and new generics and value for money in the prices the NHS pays for them".

The reimbursement price of branded medicines is the NHS list price set by the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme. For prescriptions written generically, it is governed by the drug tariff price. The calculation that is used to determine the drug tariff is the weighted average of the list prices of five major suppliers for the most commonly used medicines, which is published every month by the Department of Health. Two separate pricing mechanisms are necessary because generics, as multi-source products, operate in what is effectively a commodity market.

The payment that pharmacists receive comprises the list or drug tariff price of the item dispensed, minus an assumed level of discount, plus a container allowance and a professional fee. The fee, if any, that the patient pays for their NHS prescription is deducted from that payment. The difference between the actual cost of generic products purchased by pharmacies and the amount that they are reimbursed is determinable through the use of a scale of deductions derived from a discount inquiry.

The reimbursement system is rightly designed to achieve the cheapest purchasing price for the NHS, although its reliance on pharmacists in all sectors buying lower than the reimbursement price is being affected by recent announcements concerning the reduced dispensing fee that community pharmacists now receive.

The majority of medicines remain cheaper when written generically, but there is evidence that the 72 per cent. quota that all primary care organisations must meet as a key performance indicator is inhibiting their ability to achieve potentially substantial savings for the NHS by buying a branded medicine that is cheaper than its generic counterpart. Indeed, one PCO chairman said:

> "Whilst greater levels of generic prescribing have historically improved value for the NHS, national and local levels have now risen to the point that further increases could either be unproductive or dis-functional."

Entertaining the prospect of purchasing cheaper, non-generic medicines should not jeopardise a PCO's status. The quota should remain, but where examples of substantial cost savings can be provided, there should perhaps be an exemption from inclusion in the overall quota. Obviously, there is the question of how one defines substantial cost savings, but given that the system of price checks and analysis is notoriously convoluted, involving individual community pharmacists, pharmacy chains and multinational generic suppliers, such an exemption is surely possible.

The justifiable fears generated by turbulence in the UK generics market in 1999 promoted the introduction of the maximum price scheme and a greater emphasis on a generic prescribing quota. Both factors now inhibit Government action and play into the hands of multinational interests, at the expense of the NHS, PCOs, prescribers and patients. The problems that the Government encounter in paying a fair price for the production, supply and provision of essential pharmaceuticals to the NHS and patients illustrates the legitimacy of the growing concern—particularly among younger people, who are increasingly reluctant to vote—that the rights and interests of corporations are being promoted at the expense of sovereign nations and their citizens. I agree with the view of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley), whom I am pleased to see in the Chamber. In criticising the behaviour of certain drug companies in a Westminster Hall debate on generic drugs, he said:

> "I am not arguing against the profit motive."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 17 May 2000; Vol. 350, c. 73WH.]

However, the primacy of the profit motive in shaping Government negotiations with the pharmaceutical industry does indeed have serious consequences for NHS patients and UK taxpayers.

To illustrate the way in which the Government's quota target can inadvertently aid the cartel of generic suppliers in driving prices to unacceptably high levels, I cite the experience of a particular east midlands pharmaceutical company, which encouraged me to initiate this debate. After consultation with a number of primary care trusts—including the former health authority for Leicestershire, which consistently overspent its drug budget in the last five years of its life—the company launched a branded version of an existing major generic that is used in treating depression, and which is 30 per cent. cheaper than the list price of other generics. It might seem counterintuitive, but generics firms that are resisting the product's entry into the market can be combated only by its being prescribed in a non-generic way. However, to do so would run against the NHS policy of incentivisation of generic prescription. Those two factors are preventing savings of up to £21 million a year on this product alone, and there are many other such products.

One of the motives in creating PCTs was the devolving of greater budgetary responsibility to a local level—something that we all support. The ability to access cost-effective new products such as the one that I have cited, without incurring the wrath of the auditors, is essential if we are to resist the monopolistic overtones of the handful of drug companies that already control the generics market. Of course, the overriding criteria for rational prescribing must always be drug effectiveness and suitability, but wherever possible flexibility in pharmaceutical spending is essential to achieving maximum possible savings for the NHS and the patient. Is not optimal use of the drugs budget more important than the generic rate?

It is well understood that the symptoms of an illness can indeed be exacerbated by a prescriptive flow of inconsistent characteristics. Patient unease at being prescribed unfamiliar treatments was consistently and cynically exploited by drug companies at the end of the previous decade. By exploiting poor communication between primary and secondary care—to an extent, such poor communication still exists—drug companies were able to wring millions of pounds out of the NHS, until the Government took welcome action and introduced a 72 per cent. generic prescribing target for PCOs. As expected, savings have been achieved but I have tried to show that that has had the possibly unforeseen side effect of restricting PCOs' ability to get the best drugs at the cheapest prices for GPs and their patients.

The major benefits of prescribing branded, rather than generic, drugs are that the prescriber knows the exact medication dispensed to the patient and that the patient will receive exactly the same medication wherever and whenever they have their prescription dispensed. That benefit would apply to low-cost post-patent proprietary brands, which are sometimes called ecogenerics. By paying regard to the needs of the NHS, GPs and patients, rather than focusing solely on shareholders, alert companies with knowledge of the pharmaceutical industry can reduce their excessive promotional budgets for the branded products that they sell, make them cheaper than generic alternatives and still make the decent profit that I and my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin endorse and recognise as necessary.

The rapacious pursuit of public funds that many drug companies have been guilty of in the past has been effectively reined in by the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme—the PPRS. That covers branded goods, the unregulated pricing of which has been a major burden on local health authority drug budgets.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. It is a shame that he and I seem to be the only two anoraks in the House of Commons who take this issue seriously. He referred to the PPRS but, saving the officials and possibly the Minister, probably only three people understand the PPRS: one is dead, one has been driven mad by it and third has forgotten everything that he ever knew. The investigation by the Office of Fair Trading into Napp Pharmaceuticals, which reported in spring after two years and was last week upheld by the Competitions Commission, found that the PPRS on its own is not sufficient—

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman must come to the point. He should be making an intervention, not a speech.

Peter Bradley: I apologise, Mr. Gale. I will come to the point. The Competition Commission upheld the OFT's findings that the PPRS on its own is not sufficient to control the abuses that it identifies. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is time for the Government to review all negotiation mechanisms for the drugs industry to secure real and substantial savings for the NHS?

David Taylor: I certainly agree and I think that the arrangements are opaque, inflexible and call out for major reform. I am confident that the Minister will be able to initiate and oversee such reform.

Regulation of the sort that we have seen on proprietary drugs is just as essential in generics, where private companies are driving profits ever higher at the expense of public health and public funds. To maintain some semblance of parity between the public and private sector, the regulatory framework must remain fluid and resistant to the pressure that is inevitably brought to bear on any regulatory framework by the large corporations affected and the sponsored political emissaries who represent their interests in this place—they are not in the Chamber this morning—often at the cost of every NHS patient in their constituency.

The report by Oxford Economic Research Associates, "Enhancing competition in generic manufacturing", illustrates the priorities of recent arrivals in the UK that are licensed to supply a significant proportion of the UK's drug treatments. It states:

> "The developments in ownership structure of UK manufacturers mirror wider trends, with large global manufacturers developing a presence in the main world markets. These players choose their markets of operation based on maximising return from their global portfolio, and are not constrained to one country of operation or supply, as traditional domestic suppliers were. They are often able to acquire licences in many countries using the same basic bio-equivalence research, and, in theory, can direct their generic output to those areas that generate the greatest return."

The type of activity flagged up by OXERA should be a cause for concern for everyone involved in primary and secondary care, whether as providers or recipients.

[David Taylor]

How it fits in with competition laws domestically, Europewide and internationally is a moot point and one on which I believe that the Competition Commission will report in the near future. How will the Minister implement the findings of any inquiry that illustrate that checks on competition, which are created by the generic prescribing rate, specifically prevent PCOs from obtaining the best quality medicines at the cheapest prices in an attempt to avoid overspend in their drug budgets? In terms of manufacture, supply, prescription and provision of both generic and branded drugs, the existing structure penalises the community pharmacist, a term that embraces chains as well as individual operators. Following the recent 10 per cent. cut in the dispensing fee paid by the Department of Health, the community pharmacist is bearing the brunt of the Government's reluctance to force the major drug companies to offer branded as well as generic drugs at realistic, affordable prices.

The local dispenser, invariably, is a community pharmacist or, in rural areas, a GP licensed to dispense pharmaceutical treatments. Such people are therefore NHS agents, purchasing both generic and branded medicines to dispense against NHS prescriptions. For a chain like Boots or Lloyds, the 10 per cent. cut will be easier to bear; a distinction between such companies and the local pharmacist serving the local community may have to be made in legislation if best value is truly to be achieved on behalf of patients and taxpayers. Otherwise, we shall have the Orwellian situation in which some community pharmacists are more equal than others, especially as vertical integration accelerates.

Finally, I endorse the second approach suggested in last year's consultation paper and urge the introduction of central purchasing for generic drugs through competitive tendering, which seems to be a more transparent arrangement and one that could readily be operated by community pharmacists.

We need to obtain far greater acknowledgment from the pharmaceutical giants that, although they are operating in a market environment, they are bidding for public money and the right to supply life-enhancing pharmaceuticals to that public. It is a large market. The NHS costs £60 billion a year, 10 per cent. of which is taken up by the drugs budget. Of that £6 billion, 20 per cent., or £1.2 billion, is spent on generic drugs. My estimates suggest that a saving of up to 25 per cent. of that, some £300 million, could be made—that is nearly £1 million a day: a £20,000 saving during the time that it will take to have this debate. I am sure that the Minister will recognise the potential and will respond as rapidly as she can.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) on having secured this debate and on having chosen the subject of generic medicines. It is an auspicious time to raise the subject because, as he said, we are examining the arrangements for the supply of, and reimbursement for, generic medicines in the NHS. Neither he nor my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) should be classed as anoraks, but as individuals who are extremely knowledgeable on the matter and who will make a constructive contribution to the on-going debate about the supply of generics.

The NHS spends about £5.5 billion on medicines in the community in England each year. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire knows and has kindly acknowledged, the Government are making a record investment in the NHS. However, that unparalleled investment does not take away from the need to ensure that every penny is spent wisely and well, and that as much as possible goes directly to patient care. Medicines are a key component in the delivery of high-quality patient care, both in hospitals and in the community, and expenditure on medicines in the NHS rose by an average of 8.7 per cent. every year from 1995 to 2000. Similar, and in some cases greater, rates of increase are occurring in most other countries in Europe.

Much of the increased cost is because more prescriptions are being written, many of them for preventive medicines, which are helping to improve the health of people in this country—nevertheless, there is a huge increase. Another factor is the availability of medicines to treat diseases for which previously no therapy, or no effective therapy, existed. There has also been an immense change in the type of products that is dispensed to patients. More effective, and in many cases more expensive treatments are replacing older and cheaper medicines, so there is upward pressure on the finances throughout the system.

As my hon. Friend acknowledged, the arrangements for prescribing, procuring and dispensing medicines on the NHS and for the reimbursement of pharmacists are not straightforward. He referred to "a convoluted system"—it is, indeed, very complex, as I found out in my early dealings with the market. We need to take account of the interaction between manufacturers and suppliers in the private sector. There are also issues concerning product patents, the licensing of medicines for safety, quality and efficacy and the different characteristics and side effects of individual products which limit the extent to which patients may be moved from one product to another. We must always be conscious of possible contraindications.

Decisions about what to prescribe individual patients are made by doctors and sometimes nurses, who rightly want the best medicines for their patients. They have an obligation to follow prescribing guidelines where those exist, but it must also be right that they should prescribe what they consider to be the best medicine available to treat their patients. At the same time, pharmacists have an obligation under their terms of service to dispense, with reasonable promptness, all the medicines prescribed by doctors. The reimbursement arrangements for community pharmacists provide an incentive for them to obtain the best terms that they can from wholesalers and manufacturers.

The purchase and supply of medicines is not an ordinary market, and many of the considerations that apply in such a market must be modified to ensure that patient care is safeguarded. Encouraging generic prescribing plays an important role in controlling the money that is spent on medicines and ensures that patients receive the care that they need.

Branded, in-patent medicines are considerably more expensive than their generic equivalents. That is primarily to enable researched-based pharmaceutical companies to recover the substantial research and development costs that they incur in developing new and innovative medicines.

David Taylor: Does my hon. Friend accept that branded, post-patent generic medicines—if that is not too much of an oxymoron—can be cheaper than the generics produced by the cartel, whose development has been accelerated by the vertical integration of the drugs market?

Ms Blears: I am aware that the company in my hon. Friend's constituency provided him with some interesting information, which we shall examine closely. I shall come to the definition of cheaper later, although the operation of the market may result in generic products not being cheaper.

Branded products are significantly more expensive than generic products, which is why we are keen to encourage as much generic prescribing as we can. Overall, we estimate that prescribing and dispensing as branded products medicines that were available generically would cost the NHS an extra £600 million a year.

The Government have set targets for generic prescribing by GPs. By March this year, 72 per cent. of items should be prescribed generically, while no more than 295 practices should have generic prescribing rates of less than 40 per cent. I am pleased to say that both those targets have been met ahead of time. As my hon. Friend acknowledged, slightly more than 75 per cent. of items are now prescribed generically. Although they must still meet the target, GPs have a large degree of discretion because 25 per cent. of their prescribing need not meet the generic targets. That gives them some flexibility in their dispensing procedures to take advantage of situations in which drugs become available that would save the national health service even more money. We have not set a hard and fast, 100 per cent. target, and we recognise that there will be a need for flexibility in some circumstances.

My hon. Friend acknowledged that there had been a tremendous rise in the price of generic medicines in 1999-2000, and he welcomed the introduction of the scheme, which has managed to stabilise prices. We always said that it was a short-term measure, and now we want to introduce longer-term proposals to deal with the supply of generics. In July last year, we published "Options for the Future Supply and Reimbursement of Generic Medicines for the NHS". There have been many contributions to the discussion, and we are currently considering all the options and shall respond shortly.

Peter Bradley: Will my hon. Friend give us an idea of the weight of support for a central procurement agency to secure what one hopes would be real savings to the NHS?

Ms Blears: The two options set out were central procurement and a reference-based price scheme, but I am not in a position to say what the balance of the submissions was. However, once we receive all the responses to the consultation, I am sure that the information will be made available. My hon. Friend will appreciate that simple numbers do not always indicate the weight of those responses; it is more complicated than that, and this is a most complex area with a great deal at stake. We shall therefore evaluate the submissions extremely carefully.

Representations similar to those made by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire have been received by PCTs and health authorities in the Trent region, and I understand that they have been the subject of detailed discussion and are still under consideration. I assure my hon. Friend that they will be properly considered and evaluated. Achieving savings for the NHS is in all our interests, not least those of patients.

The company considers that the branded product that it can offer would allow the NHS to achieve significant savings, and it is a matter worthy of investigation. The Government's policy on encouraging the use of generics has been successful in achieving savings for patients. Nothing in the present arrangements prevents a manufacturer or supplier from entering the market provided that it has a licence from the Medicines Control Agency. Wholesalers and pharmacists are free to buy from whichever supplier offers the most advantageous terms. When a prescription is written generically, the pharmacist has the choice of dispensing either a generic or a branded product. Usually, however, they will be reimbursed only for the cost of the generic. The procedures would not preclude a lower-priced branded product entering the market.

David Taylor: That is okay, as far as it goes, but not all wholesalers stock the cheaper branded alternatives to the generics, which are sometimes made available to companies under covert and special arrangements.

Ms Blears: My understanding is that the best wholesalers would make the full range of products in the drug tariff available to the pharmacist. It is in their interests, when pharmacists request specific products, to ensure that they are available, because pharmacists will not want to use a wholesaler that does not provide the full range of medicines. If a wholesaler chooses not to stock a product, we can look into the matter. However, if a generic is prescribed, the pharmacist can choose to dispense either the generic or the branded product. That would allow the products mentioned by my hon. Friend to come to the market.

The discount clawback is a complex system of remunerating pharmacists, under which discount inquiries take place and a clawback is made of the estimated amount of discount that pharmacists have achieved through their buying policies from wholesalers and manufacturers. That discount clawback is worth about £600 million to the NHS. We need to be aware, when making changes to the system of purchase and remuneration, that we consider the system as a whole and do not take steps that could jeopardise the income that the NHS receives from the discount clawback.

It is important that the NHS has a secure and consistent supply of medicines. If exemptions were to be made for particular products, we might find ourselves

[Ms Blears]

having placed all our faith in one supplier or manufacturer of a product. We know that that can cause difficulties for the NHS. It is in the interests of the service to have as wide a range of suppliers as possible, so that it can be assured of a consistent and regular supply. If we were to concentrate on only one supplier for a product, it would significantly increase the risk of shortage should that company run into difficulties and not be able to provide that secure and consistent supply.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for North-West Leicestershire and for The Wrekin for drawing attention to those important matters. We want to achieve the savings that can be achieved by the prescribing of generic medicines, but we also want, through whatever avenues are open to us, to increase the amount of money that we are able to spend on NHS patients. I reassure my hon. Friends that the submissions and points that they made will be taken into account in the current review of options with respect to the supply of generics in the national health service. They have made a constructive contribution to what is a complex area of manufacture, supply and reimbursement. I undertake to study closely the information that has been provided about specific products from my hon. Friend's constituency.

Standard Spending Assessment (South Gloucestershire)

1 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Mr. Gale, I do not know whether you have ever seen the old news footage of industrial action in which a striking worker walks down the street at a demonstration with a placard saying, "Five per cent. of nothing is nothing; we want 10 per cent." I feel I am in a similar position. My argument with the Government is not that this year's settlement was particularly bad. Indeed, as I am sure the Minister will point out, it was markedly more than we might have expected under a previous Government, and even allowing for population growth it was probably broadly in line with the national average. However, my key contention is that the base for setting spending in the South Gloucestershire council area is far too low. I want to remark on the urgent need for reform of the system, and offer some thoughts about the shape that that reform might take.

I offer my sympathy to the Minister because I notice that there is a rash of Adjournment debates on the topic of the SSA for various authorities. I have read the transcript of his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and some of the issues raised in that debate are obviously relevant to South Gloucestershire.

The issue is not, or should not be, at local level, a party political one. Although it might mischievously be suggested that South Gloucestershire council is spendthrift, in the current financial year all three parties on the council set budgets with remarkably similar spending levels, and the one with the lowest level—the Liberal Democrat one—was adopted. All three were in the same ballpark, however, because whoever runs South Gloucestershire council must operate against what we perceive as an unfair system.

South Gloucestershire council has been underfunded from the beginning. In its first year, 1996-97, it pencilled in the use of £10 million of its inherited reserves to patch a hole in the budget. By cutting spending inherited from its predecessor authorities it avoided using the whole £10 million, but each year since then, £3 million or £4 million has been pencilled in to plug the hole in the budget. That is not a sustainable state of affairs.

To give hon. Members an idea of how low the standard spending assessment is for South Gloucestershire, I shall cite some figures that are familiar to the residents of that area. South Gloucestershire is 145th out of 150 authorities with respect to children's social services; 147th out of 150 with respect to care of elderly people at home; and 150th out of 150—bottom of the pile—for primary education. Clearly, in any system there are some at the top and some at the bottom. However, the discrepancies between authorities are impossible to justify. South Gloucestershire receives £300 per primary pupil less than the national average. I cannot believe that it costs £300 less to educate a child in South Gloucestershire than it does elsewhere. Even when a comparison is made with similar, unitary, authorities, the discrepancy is £260. That affects real pupils and real teachers in real classrooms.

The base level of funding is unfair, but why? First, as the Minister, who is knowledgeable about such matters, knows, we, like many authorities in the region, are affected by the area cost adjustment, which gives us no credit for the pressures on our labour market. A pertinent example is that we find it impossible to recruit home care workers. Elderly people cannot leave hospital, because there are not enough care workers to look after them. It is the problem known as bed blocking. As the Minister will no doubt point out, money has been allocated in that general direction, but I cannot help feeling that if the system more readily recognised labour market pressures outside London and the south-east—and did so up front—we might never have had folk kept in hospital beds in the first place; we could have afforded care staff, enabling them to leave. We would not have needed a sticking plaster grant to deal with the problem. We could have pre-empted it. Whatever system the Government come up with, it is essential that they recognise that it is not only in London and the south-east that such labour market pressures exist.

A separate problem affects growing authorities such as South Gloucestershire—the use of acutely out-of-date information. The number of children in primary education is counted in the January before the following year's funding is calculated. A consequence of that is that each year South Gloucestershire educates the equivalent of a whole primary school's worth of pupils not for a below average amount, but for nothing at all. The county gets no money for the children that it is teaching. Until systems are introduced that use more up-to-date data, which ought to be possible by now, the authority, which is set to grow for decades to come, will lose out.

The problem affects not only young children but the whole population of the area. The assessment of that population, which feeds into the SSA calculation, is way out. The mid-year figure for 2000, which is used in the SSA formula for the coming year, assumes a population of some 247,000. However, we know from the health authority that, in April 2001, the population was already 3 or 4 per cent. higher than that and has grown since then. On the one hand the authority is not receiving money for people in its area and the other hand, the Government formula deducts money from the authority's grant for the council tax paid by those people as soon as they move in.

The day that someone moves into the area, the authority is assumed to be receiving council tax from them, which it does, and that is subtracted from the money that it receives from the Government. However, the authority does not receive the funds to cover the cost of educating those people's children or looking after the elderly among them or sorting out their dustbins for a year or maybe two. That is a double whammy. The second those people move into the area, we lose money on the council tax side of the equation. However, although the authority has to meet the costs of providing services for them straight away, they are not included in the figures on the revenue side until two years later. Growth is a real problem if the system does not catch up with change.

I have outlined some reasons why the base funding level is unfair. This year's settlement of 6.6 per cent. is clearly decent in the context of provision to other authorities. The figure is slightly above the national average, although when the population growth is taken into account, the increase is probably broadly in line with the national average. As I said earlier, it is welcome in that it is substantially more than what we might have received under a previous Government.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the total grant to South Gloucestershire council, in cash terms, has increased by about 40 per cent. during the past four years, which is dramatically more than under previous Governments? Will he acknowledge that his concerns about the SSA for South Gloucestershire are shared by all political parties on the council and by all local Members of Parliament, including me?

Mr. Webb: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support, of which I am well aware, for my argument that the SSA formula is unfair. I would say, however, that local political responses have been seasonally adjusted. When the Government announced the extent of their support in November, all three parties said that it was a scandal. When the council announced a council tax rise based on that unfair system, complaining about underfunding suddenly became a lonely business. Accusations were suddenly made that the council was not controlling its spending properly, and the Conservative opposition have been known to make mischief, having said only a few months earlier that the funding settlement was not adequate. I will deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about grants in a moment.

The settlement of 6.6 per cent. is not bad, but the fundamental point is that it is 6.6 per cent. of not enough. It is important to put on the record that built into that increase is the assumption that the council will increase council tax by roughly 5 per cent. Regular letters to the local press say, "We have to keep in line with inflation; why can't the council?" The first answer to that is that the Government assume that the council will not. They build into their allocation an assumption that council tax will be increased by double the rate of inflation before spending pressures have been considered.

As the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) said, separate grants go the local authority. The question is whether they change the system. Before we consider the grants, we should examine the spending pressures on the authority. Why was the SSA increase of £11 million or so not enough? One reason is that the authority has faced a near-doubling of people presenting themselves as homeless. The authority has a statutory duty to respond humanely to such people. It cannot turn them away or say, "Sorry, you are not in the budget."

That increase in homelessness is a nationwide problem, but it is particularly acute in South Gloucestershire. The homelessness tsar and his staff and departmental staff have been to South Gloucestershire to examine the council's response to homeless people and have recommended no changes. No fault has been found in the way in which the council responds to homelessness, but there has been a huge rise in the problem, for all sorts of reasons, which has put a further £500,000 on the budget for the year to come and meant that there were no underspends this year. Normally, interest income underspends bail the council out, but this year there have been additional pressures as a result of issues such as homelessness and falls in interest income from previous years.

[Mr. Webb]

The council has had to find money for other matters. Every three years or so, pensions schemes are reviewed for teachers and council staff. The council has a statutory duty to ensure that the funds are available, and has been told to put another £1 million into the budget to find that money. That sum, which is in addition to keeping services going, represents perhaps another 2 per cent. on the council tax. Another £900,000 has gone on what is known as single status, to level up the standards of manual and non-manual workers, whether women or men. Such matters are entirely laudable, and if a council did not act on them it would be taken to court, but the council tax payer has to pay for them.

A further £500,000 was required for the fire authority. Again, the council has no control over that, but simply has to levy the money. Another spending pressure is the £600,000 in matching funding when the Government take welcome action, not necessarily on core services but additional ones, and the council receives the money only if it finds money of its own. In a tight budget, that puts additional pressure on council tax.

In previous years, underspends have arisen, perhaps because of interest income helping to offset some spending and perhaps because of pressures that did not materialise. Now, pressure from homelessness and loss of interest income means that reserves have had to be run down by probably slightly more than £3 million in the budget. As a result, the reserves are almost gone and the burden falls on the hard-pressed council tax payer.

The hon. Member for Kingswood mentioned the grants that councils receive. They are mainly for schools and social services. The grants direct to schools are extremely welcome. However, given that the council has a policy for passporting all the money that it receives for schools directly to the schools themselves, the grants do not directly relieve the pressure on the council tax payer. The council does what it is told by passing the education money on to schools. It does not know what the schools will receive, so it cannot say that it will give less than any specific sum, and the Government would be unhappy if it did.

To an even greater extent, the grants for social services do not relieve the pressure on the council tax payer. Some £3 million is set aside for preserved rights cases, which involve people who used to be paid by the Department for Work and Pensions and are now the responsibility of the local authority. To match that £3 million grant, there is a £3 million or so liability. As my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome said a few weeks ago, that money has been dished out to councils in a way that reflects the SSA formula. That penalises us again. It would be wrong to say that councils have done well to receive millions of pounds and should reduce council tax when they have gained liabilities that more than exceed their grants in some cases. Likewise, £500,000 this year and £1 million next year for bed blocking is welcome, so far as it goes. At the same time, a grant to promote independence among elderly people has been cut by £500,000. One has to consider the whole.

The key point about the additional grants is that, welcome though they are, they do not pay for core services, except those to schools. They are for welcome innovations, but often do not help the pressure on core services. When they require matching funding, they can make matters worse, and when they are allocated through the SSA formula, worse still. My director of social services cited the example of an initiative to help disabled children, for which the council received a grant total of £32,000. It had such a small SSA for children that, once the formula had been applied, the sum had almost gone on the employment of one person and overheads. The SSA formula is wrecking the system.

The key point for us in South Gloucestershire is that when the new system is introduced next year—I hope that the Minister will reassure us that it will be—we will not have to wait years and years for any significant gain from it. I may be wrong and we may gain nothing, but I hope that there is only one way to go, given that we start at the bottom of the league table. If there are gains for authorities such as South Gloucestershire, they must be brought in quickly. I understand that if there are gainers in a fixed pot, there will also be losers, and that some cushioning has to be provided for the losers. However, I hope that the Minister will assure us that councils that are not fairly funded will not have to wait years for that injustice to be dealt with. If a ceiling is put on gains, I hope that the ceiling will be on gains per head rather than on the total SSA—or whatever succeeds that assessment. That would at least reflect the fact that we need more money just to stand still. A ceiling that remains determined on the basis of total cash will be prejudiced against growth areas.

In the longer term, the entire council tax system needs sorting out. Pensioners in my constituency who are just above benefit levels are often those hardest hit by large council tax rises. They do not receive help through the benefit system and have to pay the full whack of any increase, although their incomes have not risen by much. In the long term, we need a local government system that is closely related to ability to pay, and council tax is not such a system. The priority is to deal with that unfair system and make reforms quickly, because the people of South Gloucestershire have waited long enough.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) for giving us the opportunity to debate the local government finance settlement for South Gloucestershire for the coming financial year. He referred to the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) in this Chamber recently, on funding and the standard spending assessment for Somerset. Several points raised in that debate are relevant today.

I welcome the statement of the hon. Member for Northavon that the purpose of today's debate is not to claim that this year's settlement was uniquely bad or robbed councils of all their funding. The deeper issue that we should consider is how the funding formula works and how it distributes money to local authorities in general. That was the substance of his contribution.

It is worth repeating some of what I said in the debate on Somerset's standard spending assessment. This year's settlement is a good one for local authorities generally. It provides £3.3 billion more in general grant than in 2001-02, on a like-for-like basis. The 7.4 per cent. increase, taking into account all the grants that it represents, is more than three times the rate of inflation. However, I accept that the Government may truthfully say that the national settlement is good, while local authorities—and hon. Members discussing the settlement in the context of individual authorities—may say that it is not good, or that it does not do what they had hoped. That is not merely because the settlement varies greatly in different regions but because the funding formula continues to produce outcomes that individual local councils find perplexing. Hon. Members have often made that point in this Chamber.

South Gloucestershire council has benefited from the extra investment that we have made in local government. In the two years before 1998-99, which included the first year under this Government, South Gloucestershire received an average SSA increase of 3.6 per cent. each year. Since then, it has received an average increase of 5.7 per cent. Under our proposals for next year, it will receive a general grant increase of 6.8 per cent., or £8.16 million. This builds on the 4.5 per cent. that the authority received this year and compares favourably with the overall increase for authorities in England of 5 per cent., and for shire unitary authorities of 5.2 per cent.

On top of the increase in its general grant, South Gloucestershire will also benefit from the increases in ring-fenced grants, particularly in the areas of education and social services, on which I shall comment later.

It is not true that, in those settlement figures, the Government automatically assume that council tax will rise by the 5 per cent. or so that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. It is true that there were reports in the newspapers a little while ago of Treasury estimates that it was claimed were a built-in, council tax-assumed increase in the local government settlement. However, that relates to Treasury estimates of the council tax yield and is a composite calculation, which includes a possible increase in council tax, the continued improvement in the rates of council tax collection by local authorities and the additional properties that will be taxed through the council tax mechanism in the next year. That composite is not the same as an assumed increase. Indeed, because different local authorities have different circumstances, the Government have made no assumptions for an assumed increase in council tax across authorities before a grant is considered.

The hon. Gentleman emphasised the fact that, despite the good settlement for South Gloucestershire this year, there are substantial elements in the history of its funding and its nature as a unitary authority that cause him to believe that there are continuing problems in funding it. I am sure that the extra grant will have been welcomed by the local authority, but I appreciate that more fundamental concerns exist about the method of distributing grant between authorities, and I am aware of the general feeling among local authorities in the south-west that they do not receive a fair share of the grant overall, an issue highlighted in last week's Adjournment debate on Somerset.

I repeat the comments that I made in that debate. We recognise that the current system has its flaws. I have myself as a leader of a local authority fallen victim to a system in which the outcome of formula change reduced the grant increase to my authority, despite there being apparently no change in its responsibilities. The SSA formula tends to penalise authorities that had relatively low expenditure in the early 1990s when it was introduced.

South Gloucestershire would no doubt have wanted the Government to make changes this year, but we did not want to impose a system on local government without agreement that it would be fairer or more transparent. It is true that where population figures lag behind actual growth that can cause problems with grants, but a decline in population can also cause a problem, because the continuation of services does not relate arithmetically to the reduction in grant following a reduction in population. One cannot reduce one 29th of a teacher per classroom to compensate financially for the reduction of one child per classroom following a reduction in the number of children. Whichever way one looks at it, the SSA formula has problems.

I join the hon. Gentleman in emphasising that not everyone can be a winner from the changes that may eventually be introduced. We must therefore look closely at all the issues and consequences for councils of any proposed changes so that, winners or losers, they relate clearly to the way in which that new formula will work for them.

We are committed to a fundamental reform of the SSA formula and we are working to create a local government finance system that distributes grants fairly and effectively and gives councils greater financial autonomy to help them better to meet the needs of their local communities. As far as possible, we shall work with local government and try to build a consensus on how those changes will work.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful for what the Minister has said so far, but I tried to express the frustration that local residents feel about the unfairness and the need for urgent change, and he mentioned the need to build consensus. Only today I received a copy of a letter from him to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) who had suggested that he and I and the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) went to see him as an all-party delegation. In his letter, the Minister said that he would not meet us. How can he get consensus if he refuses even to see us?

Dr. Whitehead: I received—indeed, the Department received—a large number of letters, as we have in previous years, from local authorities wishing to discuss particular issues relating to their settlements during the period of consultation after the announcement of the provisional grant. The Department took the view this year that it would be appropriate and right to meet a number of different local authority groups to discuss the nature of the settlement—not just the Local Government Association but the county network, the unitary authorities and the district councils—and those meetings have taken place.

However, having a large number of meetings over a short period of time was not felt to be very productive for the settlement. I recall writing a letter to the hon. Member for Woodspring emphasising that although written submissions would be welcome, it was not appropriate at that stage to hold a large number of

[Dr. Whitehead]

essentially similar meetings with particular local authorities. It was hoped that discussion on representations with groups of local authorities would be a more appropriate way to make concerns felt. The hon. Member for Northavon has, however, taken the opportunity of securing an Adjournment debate in this Chamber on his local authority.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the vexatious issue of area cost adjustments. That factor in grant distribution reflects the higher cost of recruiting and retaining staff in the south-east, but there has always been controversy about how it is calculated, especially in areas that fall outside the boundary. Numerous research projects over the years have tried to find a better solution. We have conducted research openly, and local government has had every opportunity to scrutinise and debate the research projects, but unfortunately there has been no final agreement between authorities on the merits of the different options. We therefore decided not to rush into changing the area cost adjustment, but we are considering that as part of next year's review of grant distribution.

Some authorities complain about being just outside the boundary and argue, as the hon. Member for Northavon mentioned, that their pay pressures are comparable with those of the bordering authority. I have considerable sympathy with that argument and we have reviewed the issue carefully. Despite a considerable body of research commissioned in that area, local government remains divided. Finding the answer will not be easy, but we are committed to working with local government on it.

We shall update data, including the area cost adjustment, as normal for 2002-03. We have been working with local government to ensure that that is done in the best way possible and have taken on board some of its concerns, such as on new methods of measuring road lengths used in SSA indicators. We have made concessions in terms of not implementing new methods of road length measurements this year. That has been put off until a future date.

We continue to discuss with local government how best to implement the formula, flawed though it is. I hope that, as a result of the discussions that we shall hold and the calculations that we shall make, we will have a simpler, fairer and more transparent system based on need and a notion of what local authorities see going into the calculations. That system should divide up the global grant total available for local government in such a way that local authorities can see that the overall grant cake has been divided up fairly, whether they have been winners or not.

In an earlier year, we introduced the floors and ceilings mechanism essentially set out in the Green Paper on local government finance as an option for the future. We felt that the continued substantial variations in grant between local authorities as a result of the way in which SSAs were working, produced, especially among district authorities, very wide variations, ranging from 0 to more than 10 per cent. Having a floors and ceilings mechanism was therefore important. The hon. Gentleman will know that, in the context of the floors and ceilings mechanism for unitary authorities, we have changed, again as a result of discussion with local authorities, the system whereby poor authorities pay for the very poor. Some £41 million has gone into the settlement to ensure that mid-range authorities do not pay to bring lower authorities up to the floor.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will take into consideration the points that he has raised today. The Government believe that we shall provide a good settlement for 2002-03, but there will be winners and losers. Nevertheless, next year's settlement will be good for South Gloucestershire. We are coming to the end of the six-week consultation period, and we shall listen carefully to all issues raised by local government during that process.

Occupational Pension Schemes

1.30 pm

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I am pleased to have the opportunity to open today's debate. I shall raise the plight of more than 1,000 workers who were employed by United Engineering Forgings. The matter affects not only my constituents but those of numerous other hon. Members because UEF workers were employed in six manufacturing locations in the United Kingdom. Within the time available, I shall endeavour to accept interventions from hon. Members who want to contribute to the debate.

I recognise that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions may have difficulty commenting on much of the detail of the case, although I know that he has received correspondence and is aware of the situation. The position in which the members of the UEF occupational pension scheme have found themselves illustrates inherent weaknesses in the current rules that must be urgently addressed. I therefore hope that his response will inform the Chamber of the Government's intention further to strengthen pensions legislation to ensure that workers can never again be deprived of their rightful entitlement for which they have paid all their working lives.

I intend to show that this case has been caused by the irresponsible and cynical actions of UEF's major shareholder, Prudential Portfolio Management Ventures Ltd., which is part of the Prudential Group—ironically, a leader in pension provision. UEF was the former British Steel forging division that was purchased by PPMV in 1997. In January 1997, the chief executive of the company informed the group's trade union representatives of his five-year plan for the business, the aim of which was to launch the company on the stock market at the end of those five years.

The UEF company pension scheme originated in 1974 under the ownership of Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds. It was designed for GKN by the Prudential and was introduced as part of the 1974 annual wage award. It was a final salary scheme, in which the employer contributed 10 per cent. and employees contributed 5 per cent. of their pensionable earnings. The scheme was well run under GKN, and from 1986 by a new company, United Engineering Steels and Forgings. Actuarial reviews were held regularly and surpluses were the norm. When it was realised that there was a deficit, the employer fully funded the shortfall to the scheme, thus ensuring that benefits were maintained.

Until UEF bought the company in 1997, early retirement benefits were usually allowed only when the employer was satisfied that an employee's health was in such a poor state that they could no longer work. When UEF took over, it transferred the scheme as a mirror image, but a change was made to ensure that new members joining the scheme would not be offered the generous early retirement benefits that existed for its present members, which is ironic when one considers what happened later. In August 1997, when the transfer value was agreed, the scheme had 1,953 active members, and a board of seven trustees that was chaired by the company's financial director.

In September 1997, the first member of the pension scheme retired. However, the business was not going as well as the company had hoped, and it had started to make a loss. That fact is recognised by the employees, but it was the responsibility of the employer and the trustees to ensure that the pension scheme was funded properly. Some sites initiated voluntary redundancies in order to reduce their wages bill. The pension scheme, with its generous early retirement benefits allied to redundancy payments, certainly looked an attractive option to employees over the age of 55. Early retirement, however, required the company's consent. Former employees believe that the pension scheme was the carrot used by the company to ensure that many employees would volunteer for redundancy, with those of 55 years of age and over receiving their fully accrued pension. As I hope to show, scant regard was paid to the effect of this on the pension scheme and future pensioners.

To illustrate the effect of this redundancy policy on the pension scheme, an employee aged 55 years who had been a member of the pension scheme since 1974 would be entitled to a weekly pension of £100 per week plus a cash lump sum. If one assumes a life expectancy of 80 years, that person alone would cost the pension scheme £125,000 to £150,000.

In April 1998, the pension scheme had 47 pensioners and 27 deferred pensions. By September 1998, that had risen to 128 and 49 respectively. Some sites within UEF were employing new people, but they were temporary workers who were not allowed to join the scheme until they had been employed for a year. That did not help the situation, however, because fewer eligible members were paying into the pension scheme as more members were being taken out.

By April 1999, the pension scheme had 283 pensioners and 94 deferred pensions. The number of active members paying into the scheme had dropped to 1,712. In October 1999 the trustees, on the advice of Bacon and Woodrow, approached the board and asked it to increase its contributions, as the minimum funding requirement had dropped from the 120 per cent. funded in April 1998 to 100 per cent. in April 1999, and was still dropping. The advice was that the contributions required were now 19 per cent. The board refused to increase its contribution, and by March 2000 there were 373 pensioners and 139 deferred pensions, and the minimum funding requirement was down to 96 per cent. In April 2000, the board sold the Smith Clayton Aerospace division and the pension scheme then had 190 fewer paying active members.

In June 2000, the company decided to take action. Employees were asked to contribute another 2 per cent. on top of their existing 5 per cent. to help fund the scheme. The company would also pay 2 per cent., making a total contribution of 19 per cent., as previously requested by the trustees but refused by the board the previous year when the need was first highlighted. The employees were told that if they did not agree to pay the extra 2 per cent., the pension scheme would cease. Also a pensions roadshow was held at each site to explain to the employees why management was asking for the extra funding when the trust deed decreed that the employer should fund any shortfall, as previous employers had done.

[Sandra Osborne]

The company went into administration on 12 June 2001 or shortly thereafter, and an independent trustee to the pension scheme was appointed by the court. He reported that the pension scheme was grossly underfunded and would have to be wound up immediately at a cost of £3 million, which would leave a shortfall of £12 million.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister and other hon. Members present will understand that the work force were devastated. They were always told what a good investment it was to pay into a company pension scheme and how it would provide them with a wage in their retirement.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I thank my hon. Friend for raising this subject. Does she agree that the Government must protect such occupational pensions? Many large companies have used and abused the early release schemes and the same could happen to them and their pension schemes as happened to the one mentioned by my hon. Friend.

Sandra Osborne: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I hope to ask the Government later what action they intend to take.

Although such employees have taken the advice of Governments past and present and provided for their retirement by faithfully contributing for 20, 30 or even 40 years, so that they will not be a burden on the state, the expected pension from their fully accrued final salary scheme will not be there when they need it most—as they enter retirement and old age.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate; I, too, hope to secure such a debate. I am sad to say that her constituents' experience is mirrored by that of mine, but with one brutal difference. Mine appear to be losing not only their financial security in retirement but their jobs, and I hope that the Minister will say something about that.

Sandra Osborne: As the hon. Lady knows, receivership has had varied outcomes. I am pleased to say that a buyer has been found, but that will not diminish the serious impact on people's pension entitlement.

Such employees are now told that they must buy an annuity from whatever the reduced transfer value amounts to, but it will probably provide a pension far short of what they have paid for. Employees who are within one or two years of the normal retirement age must now live with the fact that, although they have no time to make up their pension deficit, younger employees who took advantage of the early retirement offers will reap 100 per cent. benefits for the rest of their lives.

I have permission to give the example—it is just one—of Mr. Willie Riggins, who has worked in what is known in Ayr as the Stampworks for 37 years, and has paid into the pension fund since 1976. In 1999, Willie received a quote for what he would be due—£29,500 in a lump sum and a pension of £137 a week—if he took early retirement. According to a recent quote for a stakeholder pension, however, he would get a lump sum of £12,500 and a pension of £40 a week. Those sums are based on the average transfer value in 1997, and would be even less now.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has stated in letters to colleagues that if a scheme is funded to at least the minimum funding requirement, it should provide fair value for the accrued rights of non-pensioners in the event of insolvency. However, what if, through the neglect of people who should know better, it is not funded to MFR levels? Again, to ensure that the scheme's funds are used for the intended purpose, there are restrictions on the amount that can be invested from the pension fund into the employer's business. However, what if misuse is not direct and monetary? What if the pension fund is used to cut the company's wage bills, and the fund is overburdened without taking account of future requirements?

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): Does the hon. Lady agree that the methods of complaint available to pensioners and future pensioners are weak and inadequate? First, they must go to the independent trustee, and then to the office of the Occupational Pension Schemes Advisory Service, which by its own admission has no teeth. Only then can they go to the ombudsman. Several of my constituents are trying such methods, but they are cumbersome and apparently useless.

Sandra Osborne: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I must curtail my comments because of time constraints, but I should point out that the Government have themselves recognised that MFR levels lull people into a false sense of security about their pensions.

It is clear that the responsible course of action on the part of trustees and the board would have been to put in enough money to ensure that the scheme was fully funded, and to take account of the company's financial problems by freezing those funds. That did not happen timeously, however. What can the Government do to impose sanctions on such irresponsible behaviour? While advising employees to increase their contributions because of the underfunding problem, PPMV was trying to offload its shares to the company and was totally uncommunicative with the work force, and others, in the process. For example, they refused to meet me and, to my knowledge, other Members of Parliament, to discuss the situation. Ironically, Prudential was keen to discuss it with me yesterday, but unfortunately it was a wee bit too late in the day.

I call on Prudential, even at this late stage, to sort things out. The shortfall is a drop in the ocean to it, but would make a huge difference to the lives of my constituents and of others. If it wants to retain its reputation, it should get round a table with the employees' representatives and live up to its responsibility for the whole sorry tale.

I am aware that the Government have been considering various aspects of occupational pension schemes and have recognised their importance. They have consulted on aspects that could lead to improvements, such as insurance and a central contribution fund, but have rejected them. I would like to hear about any proposals that will improve the situation that the Government have accepted. Will the proposals prevent what my constituents and those of other hon. Members experienced?

1.46 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Good afternoon, Mr. Gale. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne) for bringing this matter to the attention of the Chamber and for eloquently giving voice to the concerns of not only her constituents but those of a significant number of hon. Members across the House. They have directly suffered from the collapse of this company through the loss of pension entitlements and, in some instances, jobs, careers and the financial security in which they had been investing for future years.

I will attempt to answer as many of the questions as possible in the time available. I can offer a number of things to my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr and hon. Members who have not been able to attend today. I offer a further meeting to discuss the issue in more detail and consider improvements to the private pensions industry. A half-hour debate does not do justice to my hon. Friend's case or the general issues that the Government must address. If, by the end of the debate, I have not answered some questions, I will send a detailed letter to my hon. Friend that can be circulated to other hon. Members, who will then be fully aware of the response that would have been given had the debate lasted for an hour.

My hon. Friend said that she was extremely disappointed about the fate of the company. She greatly contained her anger. As a former trade union shop steward, I heard alarm bells and wondered whether we had heard this all before. A company has been bought out, or there has been a management buy-out, even though it has a good market record and order book, seems to have a product with added value in the marketplace, has substantial potential for development, and has a base in the UK economy and an order book for elsewhere. For a reason unknown to my hon. Friend and the work force, there is a venture capital company involved that may take a short-term, rather than long-term, view on the other company and its capacity to expand and improve its market share. I cannot comment on that, other than to say that we are in the ironic position that a venture capital company owned by a major insurance company is involved in the pensions industry. It is a further irony that Prudential was involved in the establishment of the original scheme.

The company has been led into taking short-term attitudes as a result of the pressure of investing in other pension funds. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr is right to pursue a meeting with Prudential to ask it about the decision-making process behind the way in which, ultimately, that company has been unbundled as it has. Parts of it have been completely closed off, others have been sold to competitors and parts of its assets, including land, have been sold off by those put in charge during the winding-up process.

My hon. Friend asked a number of questions, and I will try to respond to some. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) was not able to catch your eye, Mr. Gale, but I think that he had a point to make about the minimum funding requirement. The Government consulted on the future of MFR and, in the light of the responses to that consultation, have decided that most recommendations must be implemented by primary legislation. We cannot undertake them simply by regulation.

We decided that if we were to develop our legislative proposals and introduce a Bill as soon as parliamentary time was available there should be further consultation. We have set up a consultation panel of representatives from the pensions industry and other interested parties including representatives of pensioners and trade unions. It will meet on a regular basis during the coming months to assist us in developing legislation.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): Following my right hon. Friend the Minister's invitation, I could not resist intervening. Does he accept that MFR, as presently constituted, is a double-edged sword? It is a protection for pensioners, but in my own constituency, just this weekend, my major non-oil private employer, Richards plc, was advised by its trustees to close down its pension fund simply because the fund was falling into deficit. The major reason that the trustees cited for that was the effect of MFR in the present economic climate. The anticipated returns were unachievable by a company in a hard-pressed manufacturing sector.

Mr. McCartney: I cannot comment directly as my hon. Friend invites me to. If he wants to write to me, I shall certainly comment, but let us remember why MFR is there. Whatever propositions come up later, certain principles are involved. One of those is, in all circumstances, the capacity to ensure that the employer makes good a deficit. The question is what is the most appropriate way of doing that, and we have decided that it is not the MFR regime as it currently stands. The review of MFR is not to get rid of, undermine or reduce an employer's obligation to make good funding requirements, but to find the most appropriate way of doing that on a consensual basis. If my hon. Friend writes to me, I shall send him more details about the review and what has come out of it.

The first meeting of the panel took place on 16 November, and agreed a work programme for activities with me. Hopefully, I will be able to report on that later in the year. Again, in a letter to my hon. Friend, I shall set out the work that has been done so far.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr asked about the discontinuance fund and rightly said that my predecessor consulted on it and found little or no support for the proposal. That was mainly because other defined benefit schemes made it clear that they did not want their members to help pay the deficit of members in other occupational funds. The Government are not in the business, and cannot be, of being a financial guarantor to every defined benefit scheme in the country. That is not feasible. Therefore, there is no consensus on well-run fund schemes being part of a fund to meet the needs and shortfalls of others.

Another issue raised was insurance to meet solvency concerns. Again, a consultation on that took place under my predecessor, and again there was no consensus on the system of safeguards for funders. It was thought feasible to have insurance on the terms that my hon. Friend talked about, but it was argued that the scheme would be even more complex than MFR. I am prepared

[Mr. McCartney]

to examine insurance and will write to my hon. Friend about it. There is an issue there about finding ways and means for the scheme under difficult circumstances: because of the way in which the company has been wound up, it is outside the capacity of the members to use MFR or any other means. I am prepared to look at that matter again and give my hon. Friend a more detailed answer.

As to the question on employment that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) asked, perhaps she could write to me with the details. The Department for Work and Pensions has a complete and professional Employment Service that works in local labour markets. I shall be more than happy to make the connection between the company and the Employment Service, if they have not already met, and to sit down with them to discuss the services that can be provided for those who will get redundancy notices. I will deal with the matter appropriately with my ministerial colleague at the Department responsible for employment services.

Despite what my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr said, I assure hon. Members that the vast majority of schemes have important safeguards that continue to protect members. A few weeks ago, I announced that I am carrying out a quinquennial review of the operation of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, and I shall report back on that later this year. I hope that by the end of the year we will have recommendations on the future of OPRA in relation to its effect on the regulatory regime, whether it should be more proactive, rather than reactive, whether it has enough resources to do the job and, five years after its establishment, what more we can do to make it more effective.

OPRA investigated this case. It has powers to impose financial penalties, to bring criminal prosecutions, to disqualify a scheme's trustees and to refer cases to the police or the special fraud office. However, it does not generally supervise the actions of trustees. Where there is wrongdoing, it has powers to act on behalf of those who made the complaint. OPRA first had inquiries about United Engineering's pension scheme in June 2001. The information that it obtained established that there was no breach of rules on which further action could be taken. Specifically, there was no evidence of theft or fraud having taken place. My hon. Friend is concerned about whether the company acted appropriately in carrying out its fiduciary duties. That has been taken up with the Occupational Pensions Schemes Advisory Service and the ombudsman.

If the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) will write to me with details, I will investigate the reasons for the delay. I cannot comment on why it is taking so long, but I will look into the matter on his behalf.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I hope that when my right hon. Friend finally receives the report he will err on the side of more regulation, not less. This goes way back to 1988, when the Tories were in power talking about regulation being a bad thing that should be got rid of. They are still at it. We should be able to regulate those private firms to ensure that they carry out the wishes not only of my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne), but of all the others involved. I urge my right hon. Friend, when he gets the report and takes action to introduce the Bill, to err on the side of more regulation, and let us hope that Conservative Members do not come to the House of Commons bawling about it.

Mr. McCartney: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. However, it is a matter not of more regulation but of effective regulation. In my old position as a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, I was probably responsible for about 80 per cent. of Government regulation in the last Parliament, whether for the minimum wage or employment relations. I am not averse to using regulation, but it must be effective.

In the past we had layer upon layer of regulation going on for decades, mounting to the point where the books of case law are extremely thick, but there are still areas where it has been ineffective. That is the reason for the simplification review. We must strip out all the regulations that are doing nothing to support and develop pension schemes, to protect members' interests or to help and encourage companies to continue to fund them. We cannot force companies to have defined benefits schemes. It is therefore important that the regulatory regime should meet the balance of requirements in terms of the schemes that are established. I give my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr the absolute assurance that any regulations that are introduced will be effective.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 23 January 2002

[Sir Michael Lord *in the Chair*]

Zimbabwe

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

9.30 am

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It is chastening to observe that Robert Mugabe, who started his time in power in Zimbabwe as an avowed Marxist, seems to be ending it as a fascist.

I am put in mind of the fact that at about the time that Mugabe took control of Zimbabwe back in 1980, the BBC televised a version of Bertolt Brecht's remarkable play "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui". It painted, in terms of Chicago gangland, a parable of the rise to power of Hitler and the way in which he maintained himself in power, though nothing more than a lethal murderous clown, by means of corruption of the courts, intimidation of witnesses and the substitution of gangsterism for civilised behaviour.

I am reminded of that play in the context of present-day Zimbabwe because of the series of reports that comes out of that wretched country day by day. On 15 January, it was reported that David Mpala, an opposition lawmaker, was critically wounded after 20 ruling party militants attacked him, slitting his abdomen. The police spokesmen said that the incident was being investigated, but claimed that the assailants were unknown and suggested that it could have been a case of carjacking.

Similarly, on 19 January, it was reported that Thomas Tawanda Spicer, the 17-year-old son of a Zimbabwean film maker, was tied to a tree, and beaten and kicked throughout the night. Later, he was taken to a police station where he was reportedly arrested on charges of kidnapping. After first denying any knowledge of him, the police then confirmed that he was in their custody, but have denied him access to his family or to a lawyer.

This is the third debate on Zimbabwe in as many months that has taken place in Westminster Hall. There remain 45 days before the presidential election. Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change states that the country is already engaged in what he describes as "low-intensity civil war". There are road blocks where people are required to produce ZANU-PF cards if they want to proceed. Prisoners are being interrogated in ways that would have Labour Back Benchers and Liberal Democrat Front Benchers frothing at the mouth if they were applied to al-Qaeda suspects in Cuba.

The foreign press is being excluded from the country, and the local press is threatened with being licensed year by year. The chief justice of Zimbabwe has been forced from office; opposition politicians have been murdered; their rallies have been tear gassed and their offices torched. An electoral register excluding up to 2 million Zimbabweans on the basis that one parent was born abroad has been drawn up, while the same electoral register allows large numbers of long-dead voters the privilege of receiving a ballot paper.

There are threats to seize UK companies in Zimbabwe, of which there are about 300. Repeated demands are being made for British passport holders to renounce their UK citizenship and, presumably, the protection that that is still reckoned to confer. Since 2000, 156 opposition supporters have been murdered and many more have been kidnapped and tortured. The military have stated that they will not serve under a different Government from that of Mr. Mugabe. Of course, they do not put it precisely in those words. The chief of staff, General Zvinavashe, said that the armed forces could not accept a president who had not fought in the liberation struggle. That was clearly designed to rule out Morgan Tsvangirai.

It is believed that, since the beginning of this month, some 10,000 soldiers have been sent on leave to campaign throughout the country for a Mugabe election win. Legislation [illegible] being put into practice to ban foreign journalists from working in Zimbabwe at the earliest opportunity. Two-year jail terms are anticipated for reporters who cause by their journalism "alarm and despondency" in the country.

In short, Zimbabwe is suffering from starvation, inflation and colossal unemployment, while Mugabe and his cronies embezzle funds and channel them abroad in readiness for a possible enforced retirement to Libya or some other bolthole, in the event that they are eventually forced from power.

The head of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists, Basildon Peta, has produced a remarkable series of reports for *The Independent*. He notes:

> "Critics say the new laws exceed the worst excesses of Rhodesia's white minority government or apartheid South Africa".

The question that I must ask is, why are people who, rightly, strongly criticised white repression in those countries in the past responding so feebly to black repression now? This is a viciously racist and fascistic regime. Where are the mass demonstrations against it? Could it be that people on the left of politics feel a little intimidated by such Mugabe rhetoric—unjustified rhetoric I hasten to add—as, "Britain has a war with us. Prime Minister Tony Blair wants his own version of colonialism in Zimbabwe."? Is it a liberal-left guilt feeling about anti-imperialism, or simply double standards? I do not believe that it is double standards, but I do believe that a bit of liberal angst is creeping into the muted reaction that we are getting to this terrible situation.

Baroness Amos, a Government spokesman in the Upper House, reportedly told the BBC:

> "There have been calls for targeted sanctions against the government of Zimbabwe.
>
> The process that we are engaged in with the European Union could result in what are called 'appropriate measures' if the things that we are looking for are not met. What it means is that Britain has been working with partners on this. The EU has the possibility to take 'appropriate measures' . . . that could be targeted sanctions."

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

The report, via the Press Association, goes on to say that Lady Amos added that the Government want to maintain dialogue with Zimbabwe and said:

> "We are not ruling anything in or anything out.
>
> We are at a point now where the Government of Zimbabwe have to come back with some written commitments . . .
>
> And the EU have made it absolutely clear that they will be looking very closely at the action that is being taken by the Zimbabwe government on the ground".

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Is not part of the problem that Ministers have remarked more than once that Robert Mugabe came to power by democratic means? Surely the lesson of history is that some of the very worst tyrants, including arguably Adolf Hitler, originally came to power by largely democratic means. That cannot be a justification for what is happening now.

Dr. Lewis: It is certainly true that the system in Zimbabwe seems to be a parody of democracy. Its leaders try to govern by means of institutions that look, on the face of it, as if they conform to democracy while actually being the merest send-up or perversion of democracy in the way that they operate.

I fear that the Foreign Office has consistently applied too much of a softly-softly approach. We saw the same sort of language back in April 2000, when *The Independent* quoted British officials as claiming that the Cairo meeting between the then Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), and Mr. Mugabe had restored relations to

> "a frozen kind of friendliness",

and that Mugabe would lessen his criticism of UK Ministers if the Government would

> "lower the temperature of its commentary"

about him. That is not the approach that is required, or that we were led to expect when the Prime Minister said in May:

> "I will make Africa a major personal priority and a priority for the Labour Government."

In June, the Foreign Office said in a press release:

> "Relations with Africa will be an important priority for this Government's second term of office."

In a leaked memorandum entitled "Touchstone Issues" and published in *The Times* on 18 July last year, the Prime Minister admitted that the Government is seen as "insufficiently assertive on Zimbabwe".

It is not assertions that Zimbabwe needs, but effective action. It is hard to believe that right up until recently the deportations of people back to Zimbabwe were continuing at a heavy pace. The Refugee Council expressed serious concern that the Home Office's assessment of the situation in Zimbabwe was so out of date that it was only under severe pressure from the council—and, I might add, from the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats—the Home Secretary suspended deportations of people back into the hands of the Mugabe regime.

There has been much talk about what measures could be applied. We hear that smart sanctions are under consideration by the European Union and America, and that the Commonwealth is expected to consider calls for Zimbabwe's suspension. Where is the voice of Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in all this? For that matter, where is the practical action by our Prime Minister, who memorably told the Labour party conference last year that

> "on the African side, true democracy, no more excuses for dictatorship, abuses of human rights; no tolerance of bad governance, from the endemic corruption of some states to the activities of Mr. Mugabe's henchmen in Zimbabwe . . . This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us."

On 14 January, Mugabe promised the Southern African Development Community that the presidential elections would be free and fair, and that recent cases of political violence would be "fully and impartially investigated". Apparently, that was good enough for the President of Malawi, the chairman of the SADC, who said:

> "Let's give Zimbabwe a chance. President Mugabe has made a commitment to us as SADC—let's wait and see."

After that regional summit in Malawi, Mugabe boasted:

> "The whole meeting supported our position"

and he claimed that he would like "free and fair" presidential elections to go ahead. That was also enough for South Africa's deputy Foreign Minister, who said that there was no alternative to using "quiet diplomacy" to persuade Mugabe to restore the rule of law. He said:

> "Let's try at this very difficult time to assist, to take measures that will help us stabilise the situation."

That is in stark contrast to Morgan Tsvangirai's call for South Africa to impose direct sanctions on Zimbabwe by cutting transport links and stopping fuel and electricity supplies. That call will evidently fall on deaf ears.

The sad fact is that the gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell has achieved more effective action against Robert Mugabe than the Commonwealth, the United Nations, the EU and the Governments of Britain and South Africa put together. Basildon Peta, the head of the free journalists in Zimbabwe, has stated that the EU, the UN, Britain and the Commonwealth have done precisely nothing. He said:

> "All we can do is brace ourselves for years of dictatorship, and pray that someone, one day, comes to our aid."

He also said:

> "An unfortunate truth for many Zimbabweans is that we cannot rely on institutions such as the Commonwealth, the British Government or the European Union, which purport to be the custodians of democracy, for relief against wayward leaders like President Robert Mugabe."

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Lewis: I am bringing my remarks to a conclusion, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Tony Worthington: The hon. Gentleman's speech has contained some fine rhetoric, but he has not yet said what he would do. Before he brings his remarks to a conclusion, will he say what he would do?

Dr. Lewis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I have said that tough sanctions should be brought into play. I may be somewhat ahead of my party's position, because I would not rule out direct intervention in the event that this dictatorship is not seen to bring matters back into a constitutional position.

Tony Worthington *rose—*

Dr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman will have his chance to contribute shortly. I want to develop the point that I was about to make when he intervened.

I am glad that the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), will respond to the debate, because as he knows I consistently supported the Government when they took action against tough regimes. He has remarked on that fact to me, and I am grateful that he acknowledges my support. I supported the Government over Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, and I hope, in the not too distant future, to be able to support the Government over Zimbabwe as well.

I began by drawing a parallel between Mugabe's regime and Nazism, and I want to go back to that to conclude my speech. Desmond Tutu has rightly described the Zimbabwean political leadership as having gone

"bonkers in a big way."

That reminded me of the famous despatch that our ambassador in Germany sent back as early as June 1933, only a few months after Hitler had come to power. The ambassador, Sir Horace Rumbold, was retiring and was sadly about to be replaced by an appeaser. In his valedictory address, he said:

"I have the impression that the persons directing the policy of the Hitler Government are not normal. Many of us, indeed, have a feeling that we are living in a country where fantastic hooligans and eccentrics have got the upper hand."

His recommendation then was that Hitler should not be appeased. Our recommendation now is that Mugabe should not be appeased either.

9.47 am

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I agree with a surprising amount of what the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) said, but it is the duty of Opposition Members to be specific about what they would do. He claimed that Morgan Tsvangirai was in favour of sanctions, but as I understand his statements, his appeal is that they should be targeted against Mugabe and his narrow band of people who are looting the country.

When the hon. Gentleman says that he does not rule out direct intervention, he should explain what that means. Does he want British intervention? Should any intervention be under the United Nations or should it be regional intervention? That should be spelt out. For all his rhetoric, the hon. Gentleman has not made it clear how his position differs from that of the Government.

I shall be honest about this and admit that this problem is an embarrassment. Something is going on in the heart of Africa. The British reaction—not the Labour party's—to the situation in this previously and still potentially prosperous country has been muted. That is because, for a long time, we believed that any intervention by this country would be counterproductive. If we protested, we would be seen as intervening on behalf of white farmers in that country, and that would feed into Mugabe's rhetoric. I think that we were wrong, because the main sufferers have been poor blacks, and they are suffering more and more.

Our reticence has had some strange side effects. If we had realised the depths of Mugabe's iniquities, we would have protested more effectively, and would not have been returning opposition people to Zimbabwe. There is a great deal of difference between protesting and taking effective action.

There is no doubt that Zimbabwe is a potentially prosperous country which Mugabe is progressively destroying, institution by institution. That is what is suggested when a chief officer in the army threatens a coup if the opposition win, when the judiciary is packed with Mugabe supporters, when the police stand by while atrocities occur, and when there are attacks on the opposition. Wherever there are abuses of human rights, we must protest. I was delighted to hear a Tory Member call for an ethical dimension to foreign policy, and I hope that he will spread his influence among his colleagues.

Dr. Lewis: I will do my best

Tony Worthington: It must be pointed out that the main losers in Zimbabwe are poor blacks, and that the need for humanitarian aid is mounting as the economy collapses. Nearly 100 members and supporters of the MDC have been killed, and thousands have been tortured, maimed and raped by ZANU-PF supporters. That can be authenticated.

We should praise the sheer courage of opposition politicians who are risking all for democratic government. Last Saturday, 10,000 MDC supporters turned up for a peaceful rally at the White City stadium. The rally was cancelled, and 25 MDC supporters were tortured and hospitalised by ZANU-PF supporters while police stood by. That is outrageous. We can already see that these are not free and fair elections, because of the intimidation that has already occurred.

The hon. Member for New Forest, East referred to the violence and corruption, and to people being forced to buy ZANU-PF cards in order to go about their daily business. That, too, is outrageous, as are the laws that are being passed. I was interested to read this morning that it is intended to proceed with the restriction on press freedom that was postponed for a short time. Recently an Act was passed, the General Laws (Amendment) Act 2002, which it is estimated will disfranchise more than 1.5 million people. Postal voting from overseas is being restricted to those who are effectively in the Government's employ. Those in rural areas can vote only if the local headman will vouch for them: in other words, they must be approved by Mugabe. The impact of the licensing of Zimbabwean journalists could not be clearer.

It is plain, then, that Mugabe has no intention of holding free and fair elections. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, he has broken the promises that he made at the Abuja meeting in September. He has already failed to take the action required of him by SADC members on

[Tony Worthington]

15 January. We can see that he will break the promise made just last weekend to President Osabanjo of Nigeria that he would stop all election violence immediately.

Mugabe claims that what is happening is British interference, but that is not true. It cannot be British interference that has caused 2,500 people to leave Zimbabwe for South Africa each day. That is the official figure; I suspect that the actual figure is far higher. *The Independent* estimates that there are now some 400,000 Zimbabweans in this country. Many are here illegally, but the fact that they are avoiding the tyranny in Zimbabwe cannot be due to British action.

I am sure that African leaders are increasingly realising what an enemy of Africa Mugabe is. It is not Britain but poverty-stricken Zimbabwe that is damaged by his action. Assistance from the World bank, the African development bank and the European investment bank has already been withdrawn from Zimbabwe, and, as the hon. Gentleman said, the inflation levels are frightening: the latest recorded figure is 112 per cent.

In June last year, the European Union invoked article 8 of the Cotonou agreement. After all, why should our assistance go to a Government who stimulate political violence, do not allow election monitoring, have ended freedom of the media and judicial independence, and have allowed and even encouraged the illegal occupation of property? At the meeting of the General Affairs Council of the European Union on 28 January, the EU must agree to use every possible means to target the corrupt resources of Mugabe and his narrow group, and to make their lives as difficult as possible by forbidding them to travel.

We have a bad record on the issue of corrupt leaders and their resources—leaders such as Abacha, Mobutu, Milosevic and Saddam Hussein. We must now see whether all the laws passed in the world since 11 September to prevent money laundering work. They must be imposed rigorously against Mugabe. I am sure that the ordinary people of Zimbabwe will rejoice if he can be prevented from gaining access to the looted resources that he has gained from not only his own country, but the Congo.

Sanctions, however, must be targeted; they must not be general. We have learned over and over again that when we impose general sanctions, the victims of such people as Mugabe become double victims. Sanctions, among other things, set up black markets and give power to supporters of Mugabe and the like, so that they look after themselves and those outside the network lose further.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Sanctions were imposed on Libya to force it to give up the Lockerbie bombers. Libya is now a close ally of Mugabe. Perhaps the success of those sanctions will cause the Libyans to advise him to pay a great deal more attention to what we are suggesting.

Tony Worthington: Believing that requires a considerable leap of faith. It is touching that the hon. Gentleman believes it, but I think that it would be difficult for him to find anyone else who considers that Gaddafi's influence will be crucial in this instance.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): The hon. Gentleman should not dismiss Gaddafi's influence so lightly. There is evidence that he has contributed about half a million pounds to Mugabe's election expenses so far. Moreover, there are reports of Libyans being granted fertile land, particularly in areas near Harare. The hon. Gentleman underestimates the potential influence of Gaddafi and the Libyans at his peril.

Tony Worthington: This is becoming a little esoteric. The fact is that general sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe would mostly damage those who have already been damaged by Mugabe's activities. I find it difficult to identify any imposition of general sanctions in the world that has been really effective. Where they have been effective, for instance in South Africa, it has taken decades. We want our action to be effective a little more quickly than that.

There is no doubt that there should be targeted sanctions. The International Development Committee has considered what are often described as smart sanctions, although there is not too much smartness around. I hope that the legislation that has been introduced around the world by an enormous number of organisations can be proved to work in the case of Mugabe.

We must continue the pressure for an end to political violence, and for unrestricted access to election monitors. I believe that the exertion of pressure by the European Union can be a huge advantage. One of our problems is that Mugabe uses our colonial past against us. He cannot do the same to the 15 countries of the European Union. This is a good example of the way in which the EU's foreign policy activity can be very helpful to us. I am surprised—although perhaps not—that the hon. Member for New Forest, East rather down-played the contribution that can be made by the EU.

The African countries must now fully punch their weight, especially South Africa. It is losing because of Mugabe. From Mugabe, we must have only action. The illegal seizure of lands must cease. The recent judgment by his court that illegal seizures of white-owned land were justified must be reversed. There must be invitations immediately to international observers from bodies such as the Commonwealth and the EU. He must let international journalists, including from the BBC, back into the country.

We must intensify that pressure in any way we can without harming the ordinary people of the country. The whole international community, regardless of colour or race, must tell Mugabe that his behaviour is leading his country into total wilderness.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. It may be for the benefit of the Chamber if I ask right hon. and hon. Members to call to mind that the general convention at sittings is to ask the three Front-Bench spokesmen to commence winding up 30 minutes before the termination of the debate. I ask those participating to bear that in mind and to make their contributions concise, clear and pertinent.

10.1 am

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): The Chamber owes a debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) for raising this issue and for the way in which he has introduced the subject. I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) and welcome the tone of his contribution. It is encouraging that there is growing consensus. I hope that we can approach the issue with as little partisan spirit as possible.

Why does the great issue of Zimbabwe matter to us? It matters because of our history, our connections and our historic obligations to it, and because of its strategic importance. It is at the centre of southern Africa. What is happening there is contaminating and destabilising the whole region. Therefore, for every reason that one can think of, it is in Britain's interest and a matter of honour and obligation to do whatever we can to assist the beleaguered people of Zimbabwe.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East and the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie have talked about what is happening in Zimbabwe. It is now a matter of public record and without contest that matters are descending ever further into what amounts to—it sounds like a paradox but it is not—state-sponsored anarchy. It brings to mind what Mao Tse-Tung did in China in the 1960s—an ageing despot increasingly out of touch with his people, with the world moving on beyond him. Like Mao, Mugabe is unleashing the forces of anarchy, effectively declaring war on his own people and deliberately subverting the rule of law. He has only one objective. It is nothing to do with land; we all know that. There is an issue with land but it can be dealt with sensibly. This is about one thing only: power. It is about that ageing despot clinging to power. He will do anything to accomplish that.

We have heard the saga of murder, beating, invasions, systematic brutality and the way in which the economy is being deliberately subverted and disrupted, so that there is widespread shortage of food and starvation in many parts of the country. I have visited Zimbabwe twice in the past 18 months, the last time in February. I had the privilege of meeting so many amazingly brave, fine people who are striving to make their country better. Whether they are white or black, they all think of themselves, rightly, as Zimbabweans. It is their heritage, their country, and they feel that it is being taken away from them.

During a tour of the high-density suburbs of Harare, I was guided around by a wonderful man called Wilfred, who had been a senior commander in the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army under Mugabe. He was a genuine war veteran. A lot of people who are described as war veterans are not. They are plainly too young to have been anything other than toddlers in arms at the time of the so-called war of liberation.

Wilfred said, "This is not what we fought for. What is going on at the moment is as bad or worse than anything we suffered under the old Smith regime." These people have a sense of betrayal and a desire to move on from the past and to make their own lives. Wilfred had become an entrepreneur: he was running his own business and trying to make a success of it in appalling circumstances. We must all move on from the post-colonial guilt which sometimes overhangs our approach to black African countries. Certainly most Zimbabweans have moved well past post-colonial resentment, which undoubtedly had an effect.

What can Britain do? We must speak out. We must make our voice heard unequivocally. Britain has not always done that since matters began to deteriorate in February 2000. The Minister's colleague, the current Minister for Europe, did speak out when he had responsibility for these matters. I praised him on many occasions for doing so. Sometimes one felt that he was not entirely in accord with the Foreign Secretary at the time, but he was right to do so. With his background of anti-apartheid campaigning he perhaps had almost unique authority and credibility to speak out in that way, but I would like to hear the same clarity of articulation from the current Minister.

Too often, the argument that we must pursue quiet diplomacy and not disrupt our influence by being counter-productive has degenerated into what an Australian Prime Minister called the pre-emptive cringe. We must beware of that. We owe it to Zimbabwe to speak out.

The pre-emptive cringe reached its culmination in the Abuja agreement in early September. We must be clear about it: that was a sham. Mugabe agreed to that agreement for one reason only: to get himself into what was going to be the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Brisbane. As we know, that has been postponed but it was transparently obvious that that was what it was about: buying time to allow him to strut his stuff in front of the world's media at the Brisbane meeting.

It was clear, even in the few days between that agreement and the events of 11 September, which caused the postponement of the meeting, that nothing was being done to implement it. In fact, all the reports I had from Zimbabwe said that, even in the few days immediately after the agreement, matters were getting worse: the intimidation was being intensified.

That shows that Mugabe cares about the Commonwealth, about being able to be part of that important organisation, and about the veneer of respectability that continued membership confers upon him. I urge the Minister to use all Britain's considerable influence to ensure that at the reinstated CHOGM in a few weeks or couple of months, Mugabe is not allowed to make a grand entrance.

We saw the damage last year when Mugabe was given the full red carpet treatment by President Chirac in France and by the Belgian Prime Minister. The propaganda coup that that gave him in Zimbabwe was considerable. We must beware of that. He must be denied the propaganda oxygen that continued membership of the Commonwealth confers on him and his regime.

What can be done now? Aid has been reduced. We do not like that but it is obviously necessary. The military advisory team has been removed. That was the one thing that people in Zimbabwe said to me they did not want. They saw the presence of even a small contingent of British troops there as a stabilising influence on the

[Mr. Francis Maude]

army. I revert to the points that were made by my hon. Friends the Members for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) and for East Devon (Mr. Swire) about the effect of Libya. The small vacuum created when the British military advisory and training team left last year has been filled by Libyans. My impression is that Zimbabwe is stiff with Libyans these days, and that some of the slack has been taken up by advisers from China's People's Liberation Army. Taking the BMAT team away as a modest gesture of protest has therefore had an unfortunate effect.

What can be done? The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie mentioned targeted sanctions, as did my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East. That option must be the answer, as my party has urged for many months. It is not necessarily a matter of targeting sanctions against Mugabe himself. Morgan Tsvangirai has always told me that it is a mistake to focus all the action against Mugabe, and that attention should be turned to the gangsters who surround him and sustain him in power.

The number of such people—about 20—is not huge. They could be subject to financial sanctions, and their assets could be examined. They should not be allowed to travel, and their histories of wrongdoing, which largely go back to the Matabeleland massacres of the early 1980s, could be investigated. It has taken a long time to make any progress on such matters, even to talk about suspending the Mugabe regime from the Commonwealth. I am glad that that is at least being discussed now, but we must move in the direction of targeted sanctions against individuals.

What of Mugabe himself? If he departs voluntarily, what should our attitude be? I suspect that it would stick in everyone's gullet if Mugabe were allowed to slip off to a cosy and quiet retirement home in Libya or some other chosen location. However, it is in the overwhelming interests of Zimbabweans that he should leave. The price that has to be paid for seeing him leave voluntarily might be that a line has to be drawn under his regime of tyrannous misdeeds. However, all my contacts and knowledge lead me to believe that most Zimbabweans would joyfully pay that price. Of course, there will be a human desire for vengeance and retribution, but people in Zimbabwe just want to see the back of Mugabe and to get their country back. They will accept drawing a line under his personal misdeeds if that means that he leaves voluntarily and quickly. We should therefore be sufficiently realistic and grown up to accept that that would be a price well worth paying.

We must be aware of the danger that the threat of endless pursuit of Mugabe, into his old age and wherever he is, is likely to make him more desirous of clinging to power. We should be aware of the danger that, like a wounded and cornered animal, he would be willing to do anything for that.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie spoke of the presidential election. We must abandon the pretence that there is any prospect that it will be free and fair. It cannot be, even though the Zimbabwean Parliament is discussing the media law today. The other laws that have been passed, the gerrymandering and the systematic intimidation of those who oppose Mugabe make it unrealistic that the election could be free and fair. Even the presence of monitors would not change that. Their investigations could only provide more incontrovertible evidence of what has been going on, if that were needed.

However, that is not to say that the elections will be won by Mugabe. The parliamentary elections 18 months ago were subject to gerrymandering, intimidation and vote-rigging—every tool of the dictator was deployed to secure victory, but he only just managed it. Many Zimbabweans will have taken heart from that, and seen that they have the power to make a difference, despite all that is being done by Mugabe. We therefore should not simply assume that Mugabe will succeed in his aims. He may very well not succeed, and if he loses the election and tries to cling to power, Britain and the international community will have some difficult questions to answer.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East raised the possibility of intervention. We should not be mealy-mouthed about the fact that that would result in hair-raising problems for Britain. However, it would be impossible for Britain and the international community to stand aside and allow to remain in power someone who has lost an election even though everything was in his favour.

My plea to the Government is that they should lead international opinion and use Britain's influence in the world to good effect. They should spend some of the international political capital that the Prime Minister has undoubtedly accrued in recent months to help the people of Zimbabwe. The country could be incredibly prosperous and stable. It has some of the best educated and most literate people in Africa, and it could be a fantastic success story.

Britain should use its influence to make a difference in what is a very good cause. We have obligations of honour and history to Zimbabwe, and we must discharge them.

10.16 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I shall try to make my comments as brief as possible.

It seems to me that Zimbabwe challenges the ways in which the Commonwealth and the Government put principles into practice. I should like hon. Members to consider a simple and straightforward statement from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), who is responding to the debate. Answering an oral question a couple of weeks ago, he said that the Government welcomed the public reiteration by Pakistan's President Musharraf of his commitment to stick to his road map to democracy and to hold national and provincial elections by October 2002. Yet Pakistan is still suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth, while Zimbabwe is not.

Pakistan was suspended immediately under the Millbrook terms. Since then, at the Commonwealth ministerial action group on the Harare declaration in Durban, it was recommended that Pakistan remain suspended until democracy was restored there. The Millbrook terms are unambiguous: they state that once a suspended country returns to the Commonwealth it

"must reinforce the need for change . . . even after two years."

Although Pakistan is making progress towards democracy, it remains suspended from the Commonwealth. In contrast, Zimbabwe—which is introducing the strikingly undemocratic Public Order and Security Bill and other legislation—has had no action taken against it by the Commonwealth. Such double standards do not reflect well on the Commonwealth.

Zimbabwe is also challenging the way in which the UK Government respond. The Department for International Development has reduced overall development aid to Zimbabwe in the past year, but the total amount is still larger than it was in 1997, when the Government came into office. The Department's most recent report states that development aid should be

> "focused on systematic poverty reduction in ways that support local ownership."

It added that the Government

> "has . . . increased its commitment of assistance for well thought-out programmes in key sectors in reforming countries . . . which in turn will improve the quality of public expenditure management as a whole, and help reduce corruption".

It is clear that the DFID principles regard improving democracy as a totem for supporting development aid. but that is not happening in Zimbabwe.

The Government's support for the land reform programme in Zimbabwe is very confused. Indeed, that programme, more than any of DFID's other programmes, puts into sharp relief the confusion of the Government's approach to Zimbabwe, democracy and development principles.

The communiqué from the Abuja agreement last September rightly observed that

> "land is the core of the crises in Zimbabwe and cannot be separated from other issues of concern to the Commonwealth, such as rule of law, respect for human rights"

and democracy. The same communiqué also refers to the UK Government's financial involvement in land reform and welcomes the

> "re-affirmation of the United Kingdom's commitment to a significant financial contribution to such a land reform programme and its undertaking to encourage other international donors to do the same".

That would be welcome if the land reform programme remotely assisted poverty reduction. It does not. The Zimbabwean Government's "fast-track" land reform programme is not fair land reform. It does not meet the Abuja agreement terms and it does not deserve bilateral aid from the Government.

A paper presented last year to the Southern African Regional Poverty Network asserts that the situation for huge numbers of farm workers in Zimbabwe

> "is still unsatisfactory. They are still poor in absolute terms, and access to services such as health and education in particular is far from satisfactory".

As the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) said, the solutions in respect of Zimbabwe are not easy, but I believe that if we are to have statements of principle, whether from the Commonwealth or from the Prime Minister speaking, as he did recently, in India about the need to support democracy, we must be consistent. Neither the Commonwealth nor the United Kingdom Government are being consistent in their approach to Zimbabwe in putting principles into practice. That is bad for the people in Zimbabwe where, tragically, 500,000 people now face starvation, bad for general support for the Commonwealth and bad for the integrity of international development.

10.21 am

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): This is the second time that I have taken part in a debate on Zimbabwe, and I am most grateful for the opportunity to speak. While I, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) and the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington), deplore the actions of President Mugabe and his supporters, I wish to speak, in the time remaining to me, mainly about the plight of those ordinary citizens who are suffering from Mugabe's mismanagement of the economy.

Zimbabwe has traditionally been seen as the most industrialised country in the southern African region, and one which has traditionally produced a grain surplus. However, it is now clear that under President Mugabe's mismanagement the economy is in crisis. There is a grain shortage and hundreds of thousands of people face starvation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) commented, according to the World Food Programme, more than 550,000 people in the far north-west and south of the country now face severe food shortages.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office website states:

> "for many years Zimbabwe's per capita income was significantly higher than that of most sub-Saharan African countries. Mining (gold, ferrous alloys, asbestos and nickel) accounts for about 33% of exports, and manufacturing 23% of GDP. Commercial farming (tobacco, meat, cotton, maize, sugar, and plants) is export oriented, accounting for around 19% of GDP, and earning 40% of the country's foreign exchange."

More than 80 per cent. of financial transactions that pass through institutions in Zimbabwe pass through institutions that are owned or managed by whites, practically all of whom oppose ZANU.

The project document that accompanies the latest emergency operation in Zimbabwe from the World Food Programme states:

> "all economic indicators currently show negative trends. The gross national product is expected to decline five per cent in 2001, amounting to a cumulative decrease of 18 per cent during 1999-2001. The country is facing an acute foreign exchange crisis limiting its ability to import fuel, energy and basic food grains to meet the looming food deficit. The prices of basic commodities and services continue to increase following the fuel price increase of 70 per cent in June 2001. Rapid inflation combined with high levels of unemployment and the increasing cost of living have deepened the poverty and eroded the purchasing power of poor urban and rural households."

The project document provides the following worrying evidence:

> "The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission, carried out in May 2001, determined that there would be a shortfall of 447,000 tonnes of maize during the April 2001-March 2002 marketing year."

The document states that the reason is that

> "due primarily to disruptions caused by land acquisition activities, the large-scale commercial sector experienced a decline of 30 per cent in area planted under all crops and a 54 per cent drop in maize area planted during the main season. Mainly because of the poor production in commercial areas, cereal production in 2001 was 24 per cent lower than last year and 8 per cent lower than the ten-year average."

[Mr. Hugo Swire]

I am arguing that according to local experts, the only country in southern Africa with a grain surplus—and a narrow one at that—is now South Africa. One Harare-based economist told BBC News Online that the Zimbabwean Government had

> "pretty much mismanaged the tendering process. There's very little on the way. For months they denied that there was a need to import, and by the time the government changed its tune most of it was allocated. There's not much more than a week or two's supply left."

The scandal does not end at Government mismanagement. According to the state-owned *Herald* newspaper:

> "the government has seized 36,000 tonnes of maize from commercial farms who were refusing to hand it over to the Grain Marketing Board (Zimbabwe's monopoly supplier). More than 6,000 tonnes was seized from a German-owned farm, the paper said, despite efforts from German embassy staff to stop the process."

While the people starve, the Government are seizing food to feed Mugabe's henchmen. That scandal cannot be allowed to continue. I ask the Minister, what are the British Government doing to ensure that pressure is put on President Mugabe to allow that vital aid to reach those people who need it the most?

President Mugabe turns 78 next month and he is reputed to be in failing health. According to a report in *Africa Confidential* on Vice-President Simon Muzenda's birthday last October, Mugabe said:

> "The biggest prayer of my life is that God gives me more life to see me through the land issue. I have the backbone to pull through, the courage, and I am fearless but I need God's blessings."

As that report depressingly concludes:

> "Such blessings may bring an election victory but they are ruining the country."

10.27 am

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The debate has been short but notable, not simply because of the degree of unanimity across the Chamber but because it is the first time that I have heard Peter Tatchell and Bertolt Brecht quoted with approval by Conservative Members.

I congratulate the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on obtaining the debate, but we should not need to have it. The only reason that we are having it, as the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said, is because of Mr. Mugabe's determination to retain the presidency of his country at all costs—indeed, at any cost, as long as that cost is borne by his countrymen and women.

In this country, to some extent, our focus has been on the plight of white farmers, some of whom have bloodcurdling stories to tell of intimidation and violence. I suspect that I am not the only Member in the Chamber today who has received representations from constituents with relations in Zimbabwe. I do not propose to mention any names, for fear of further persecution, but some of the personal stories that have been relayed to me in letters and e-mails and by other means are extremely distressing.

Black citizens also suffer in Zimbabwe. The farm workers, some of whom have spent generations on one farm, are not the beneficiaries of some benevolent form of land redistribution. They have become the consequential, and sometimes frightened, victims of illegal land appropriation. The legitimate political rights of black citizens have been removed.

It is clear that Mr. Mugabe does not believe in apartheid: when it comes to damaging the interests of citizens of Zimbabwe, he does not discriminate against them because of the colour of their skins. A feature of his behaviour has been the agreements entered into and the undertakings given that have been abandoned before their ink has dried. Reference has already been made to the empty sham of the Abuja agreement, which, as the right hon. Member for Horsham rightly said, was designed to try to ensure that Mr. Mugabe could take his place at Brisbane.

The Mugabe Government are still characterised by intimidation of the judiciary, the expulsion of independent journalists, the persecution of their political opponents and the introduction of repressive legislation, with one purpose only: to secure Mr. Mugabe's re-election. There is nothing more repressive than the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Bill—Orwellian in conception and, no doubt, totalitarian in application. There are reports in a national newspaper today of anxiety in the ranks of members of ZANU-PF, which suggest that the consideration of that Bill has been adjourned because of those very anxieties.

In truth, Mr. Mugabe ought to be grateful for that delay, because the Bill would create an offence of causing fear, alarm and despondency. If anyone has caused fear, alarm and despondency in Zimbabwe, it is Mr. Mugabe himself. He has engendered the same consequences throughout southern Africa, which caused Mr. Mbeki—until now, by no means a trenchant critic of the Mugabe regime—to say on 21 January:

> "The instability in Zimbabwe has gone too far . . . Poverty, economic instability and unemployment have continued to affect that country."

For months, there has been an overwhelming case for sanctions, targeted against the elite surrounding Mr. Mugabe. I do not for a moment pretend that the simple imposition of those sanctions would, overnight, restore Zimbabwe to the kind of democracy that we would all hope it to be, but restrictions on bank accounts and travel should be in place now. If we need any example, we have only to look across the Atlantic to the United States Congress, which has passed legislation in both Houses to allow the President to implement such sanctions were he to consider them appropriate.

The hon. Member for New Forest, East mentioned the possibility of direct intervention. He is right to say that he has supported direct intervention in other places, but direct intervention in Zimbabwe would be extremely difficult both from a political and a military point of view. Which of the surrounding countries would be the obvious candidate to give us host-nation military support? We could hardly conduct operations in Zimbabwe all the way from Brize Norton or RAF Lyneham. Which of those countries would be willing to give us the political support on which it would be necessary to base the moral authority for intervention?

Again, as the right hon. Member for Horsham rightly says, if Mr. Tsvangirai and his brave colleagues are successful in the presidential election but Mr. Mugabe refuses to accept the result, very difficult questions will shortly present themselves not just to our Government, but to those of the European Union and perhaps to the United Nations.

Zimbabwe stands on the edge of the abyss. The breakdown in law and order is palpable. As we have already heard, grain shortages are acute—3 million people have registered for food relief and almost 600,000 people in the countryside are now considered to be at risk of starvation. Inflation runs at more than 100 per cent. Unemployment stands at 60 per cent. Three quarters of the people of Zimbabwe live in poverty. It is estimated that 25 per cent. of the population may have HIV. It is further estimated that 2 million Zimbabweans have fled illegally to South Africa.

If we talk about direct intervention and applying sanctions other than in a targeted way, we must remember that a possible consequence will be a further flight to the south from Zimbabwe. That would place enormous strains on the South African economy, which has suffered from a reduction in inward investment and a decline in the value of its currency as a result of the very instability and lack of confidence that Mugabe's behaviour has created.

We are talking about someone who ignores the condemnation of Kofi Annan, Mary Robinson, Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela—hardly 21st century defenders of British colonial rule in the past two centuries. Their independence is not in doubt, yet Mr. Mugabe seeks to bolster his position with oppressive legislation that undermines the human rights of every citizen of his country.

I believe that Zimbabwe under Mr. Mugabe has forfeited its right to membership of the Commonwealth. When the Commonwealth leaders meet in Brisbane on 2 March, unless material improvement has been demonstrated, their duty is clear: suspension, with the credible threat of expulsion, is the minimum necessary.

10.36 am

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on securing this debate and on the robust and effective way in which he opened it. This is a most timely and important debate on what all hon. Members agree is a matter of enormous importance, not only for the people of Zimbabwe but for southern Africa generally and the wider international community. He made a powerful case, and we are all grateful to him for doing so.

It is shameful, however, that for the third time in as many months this subject is being debated at the instigation of an Opposition Member. It would certainly not be taking place if it were left to the Government to initiate such a debate. For the Government, this is an international crisis that they wish they could pass by on the other side. This impending catastrophe challenges the last vestiges of their ethical foreign policy, and I suspect that it will prove the graveyard of that ethical foreign policy. The Government's reluctance to face up to this spiralling disaster, to take any initiative or, indeed, to do anything, other than wring their hands and talk about talks, is nothing short of an abdication of responsibility. I do not blame the Minister. I blame his boss, the Foreign Secretary, and the Prime Minister, too, because they have simply dodged this issue.

Let us be clear: we are not debating a far-off problem of which we know little. We know Zimbabwe well; we know it much better than we knew Bosnia or Kosovo. We know that Zimbabwe faces a growing nightmare of fascism, the destruction of democracy, the suspension and abrogation of human rights and the undermining of justice and the rule of law. We know that it faces a growing humanitarian crisis, as we have heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and for East Devon (Mr. Swire).

We know, too, that the birth of this new rogue state is already responsible for an economic downturn among Zimbabwe's immediate neighbours, not least South Africa. The usual suspects of the rogue-state brigade—not least Libya, as we have been reminded this morning—are already eyeing Zimbabwe with anticipation. The Government's response has been, if I recall the phrase rightly, one of "quiet diplomacy"—to do nothing, and nothing is what they have done. However, doing nothing in the face of evil is not an option.

We should not be squeamish about what is happening in Zimbabwe. In the past year, there have been 48 political murders, 329 abductions, 2,245 cases of torture and 992 cases of unlawful detention. Foreign journalists have been labelled as terrorists. Draconian laws have been introduced to block basic democratic freedoms of expression and assembly. Every day, 2,500 Zimbabwean refugees are now entering South Africa. The rand has suffered and much-needed investment in the region has been lost. In short, Zimbabwe is collapsing internally, and externally it is exercising an increasingly malign influence. The international community cannot stand idly by.

For some time, Conservative Members have been pointing the way. Our calls are not new. In March last year, my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who made such a strong speech, attacked the Government's "supine inaction" and urged

> "the imposition of travel bans and criminal investigations of those of Mugabe's henchmen who sustain him in his murderous and repressive regime".—[*Official Report*, 27 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 800.]

I remind hon. Members that my right hon. Friend was mocked by the Government for making those suggestions. Yet despite the previous Foreign Secretary deriding him then and the current Foreign Secretary deriding me now for proposing targeted sanctions against Mugabe, his henchmen and their ill-gotten foreign stashes, there are at last faint signs that the Government are beginning timidly to give support to those—including the United States, which has been robust on this matter for a long time, and now Europe—who are now moving in this direction.

Bringing Mugabe to book even at this eleventh hour must be the immediate objective. He must be brought to see the downside of ignoring the democratic norm and the weight of international opinion behind it. With our associations with Zimbabwe, we can no longer shelter behind the lily-livered shield of post-colonial sensitivity. It did not stop the Prime Minister jumping in with both feet in India to offer advice on Kashmir, so why are we so sensitive about Zimbabwe? If we have a constructive contribution to make—I believe that we have—we should make it and not just talk about it.

[Mr. Michael Ancram]

Action cannot wait. It is clear that President Mugabe has no intention of keeping his promises to ensure free and fair elections. Already this week, we have seen the first Movement for Democratic Change rally of the presidential campaign tear-gassed by the police. That will not be the last time that we see that.

We know that international action must, above all, involve Zimbabwe's long-suffering neighbours, especially South Africa. In the end, they can exert the greatest pressure on Mugabe and his henchmen. What assistance are the Government offering those countries that we must seek to bring into the international coalition to deal with this problem? In the other great international coalition, both Pakistan and India have received substantial packages of support, so what proposals does the Minister have for south African countries whose assistance we also need?

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) asked what action could be taken. He must have heard from many speakers that the actions that we can take are now clear. They include international sanctions targeted personally against Zimbabwe's elite and, as the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said, suspension from the Commonwealth. They also include suspension from the Southern African Development Community and from other organisations that convey respectability. What action are the Government taking to initiate such procedures? In the event of other developments, such as the rumoured possibility of an army takeover and the postponement of the presidential elections, can the Government tell us what contingent response has been prepared to meet such a situation?

A lot can be done, so why are the Government still dragging their feet? It is not for the want of fine words. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East reminded us what the Prime Minister said in his great "I will mend the world" speech that he delivered to the Labour party conference in October. It worth recalling the words that he used. He talked about

> "no tolerance of . . . the activities of Mr. Mugabe's henchmen in Zimbabwe".

"No tolerance". Strong words, but what did they mean? From the inaction that we have seen, they were not worth the breath with which they were uttered. They created false hope that has now been dashed by "supine inaction". That inaction continues.

The Foreign Secretary goes to central Africa, where he is today, but he does not go anywhere near Zimbabwe. The Prime Minister—the man who spoke of "no tolerance"—goes to Africa later this month or early next month and we are told that he too will give Zimbabwe a wide berth. Once again, there will be more talks—of that we can be sure—but Zimbabwe does not need more talks. It needs action.

I should like to quote a member of the Movement for Democratic Change, who said this week:

> "We are fighting on all fronts using the only tools we have—the truth, the written and spoken word, and the courage of our leadership and membership throughout the country."

A spokesman of the MDC said recently:

> "In this deteriorating situation where the abuse of civil and human rights has become commonplace, where fear rules and freedoms exist in word only, we urge the European Union to take appropriate measures . . . We urge the governments of Europe to remember the pledge made at Nuremberg—'Never again'."

Never again—that should be the wake-up call to this Government, whose inaction on Zimbabwe to date has been a disgrace and a betrayal of the values for which this country should stand.

We owe Zimbabwe our support. There is still time—just. If the Foreign Secretary has not the stomach for this task, he should make way for someone who does.

10.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I congratulate the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on proposing this debate. I am aware of his close personal interest in Zimbabwe. His usual eloquently expressed concern is shared by many in the House and in the country at large.

I was also extremely grateful for the contribution of the former shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), and the particular stress that he placed on the importance and the greater effectiveness of the House approaching the problems in Zimbabwe in a bipartisan spirit. I am only sorry that the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), did not enter into the same spirit. To claim that the Government have done nothing does him no credit.

All hon. Members have stressed the need for tough action. We agree with that. However, our approach to Zimbabwe must put Zimbabweans first. That means that, when it comes to combating the abuses of the Mugabe regime, we should act rationally and effectively. Whatever the right hon. Member for Devizes says, in his heart of hearts he must recognise that the Government's long-held view—that we act best when we act with our international friends—is the most effective strategy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) said, the importance of international action is paramount. It is vital that we do not play into President Mugabe's hands and allow him to portray this as a neo-colonial struggle with Britain.

The Government believe that their efforts to build a strong international consensus on Zimbabwe has borne fruit. The European Union has tried constructive engagement with Zimbabwe for 10 months, and there has been no response. On 11 January, the EU gave the Zimbabwean Government seven days to take immediate action on election observers and free access for the international media, but their response has been neither specific nor satisfactory. EU Foreign Ministers now have no choice but to discuss appropriate measures against Zimbabwe at their meeting on 28 January. In their deliberations, they will also consider the views of members of Zimbabwe's civil society and opposition parties, all of whom are keen to ensure maximum international scrutiny of the presidential elections.

On 20 December, the Commonwealth ministerial action group—CMAG—condemned Zimbabwe's serious and persistent violations of the fundamental values of the Commonwealth. The group put Zimbabwe on its formal agenda, ensuring that Zimbabwe's status in the Commonwealth will be debated at the Heads of Government meeting in Australia in March. CMAG Ministers will discuss a recommendation to suspend Zimbabwe from the organisation at their meeting in London on 30 January. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear on 8 January that Britain would argue for Zimbabwe's suspension if conditions continued to deteriorate. Well, they have. Britain shares the view of Australia and others that countries that violate the values of the Commonwealth should not have a seat at that table.

The United States and other countries are also considering measures. They have not taken concrete steps yet, because—like us—they have been listening closely to the views of representative groups in Zimbabwe and have wanted to act in international concert. However, the US Government's line on Zimbabwe is strong, principled and unambiguous, and we welcome it.

During last November's passage of the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act, the United States Congress set out a clear bipartisan view that Zimbabwe's fundamental problems are not about land or black majority versus white minority interests; nor are they about unfinished colonial business. Congress made it clear that the problems arise from the Government of Zimbabwe's authoritarianism and political violence. The support of the Bush Administration for that Act sends a clear message to the Government of Zimbabwe about the political consequences of their actions, and American views on that are close to those of the European Union.

Several right hon. and hon. Members, including the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), described the Abuja agreement as a sham. The Government accept that it has failed, but we still believe that it was worth getting an agreement to lock the fellow African countries into the process and make the international consensus on Zimbabwe more effective. As the shadow Foreign Secretary admitted, that approach is vital.

I was going to describe the picture in Zimbabwe as it has developed since 27 November, but to be perfectly honest I would rather concentrate on other matters in the short time available. In any case, the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe was eloquently described by other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for East Devon, who made an excellent speech about the state of the Zimbabwean economy, and my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie, who painted a bleak but nevertheless accurate picture of it.

Some people ask why the countries of the region do not do more. It is easy for outsiders and for us to ask that question, but it is much more difficult for those in the region who make the decisions. The countries of southern Africa face the brunt of the breakdown in Zimbabwe and of Mugabe's misrule. They know what Zimbabwe's economic implosion would mean. They feel the effects of the collapse in investor confidence and know the bizarre reality that, by frightening away investors, the Government of Zimbabwe have effectively imposed sanctions on their country and the whole region.

Indeed, President Mugabe's economic policy has crippled Zimbabwe's economy far more effectively than external sanctions ever could. The region knows that. Just as the world is warming to the idea of an African renaissance, Zimbabwe is trying to row the continent back to the bad old days of a one-party state. It is no wonder that the Southern African Development Community has taken action to express its concerns and to set out clear benchmarks for the Government of Zimbabwe's future conduct. To answer the question posed by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife, the prospect of concerted regional action is growing.

In contrast to what the hon. Member for New Forest, East suggested, the United Nations Secretary-General and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights have recently added their moral weight to the international consensus, which is a sign that events in Zimbabwe threaten peace and security in the region. Let me make it clear, however, that Britain's policy of international action has not stopped us acting or taking unilateral decisions if we think that that is right.

Mr. Swire: On unilateral action, what thought have the Government given to the aftermath of the election if Mugabe wins it, but it is deemed unfair, or to the alternative scenario in which Mugabe loses the election, but refuses to go?

Mr. Bradshaw: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I will not speculate about what might happen in one, two or three months' time. At the moment, it is vital that we concentrate on the immediate steps, which we are trying to make as international and multilateral as possible. I explained that some precipitative unilateral action will not work because it plays into President Mugabe's hands.

In recent weeks, we have seen reports of ZANU-PF thugs carrying out appalling atrocities against opposition supporters. We have seen efforts to deny the opposition the right to campaign and the media to report freely. We have seen reports of plans to rig the voting process and a statement by the chief of the Zimbabwean defence forces that the army would not support the opposition candidate even if he were the people's choice. The British Government unreservedly condemn those flagrant attacks on democratic principles and practice. The violations show that Zimbabwe's ruling party knows that it cannot win a free and fair election. Instead, it is choosing to rig the process and bludgeon its way through.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I understand why the Minister declines to speculate, but if we are inviting countries surrounding Zimbabwe to be part of a political coalition that might have consequences for their economies, are we able to say that we will give them economic assistance if their economies are damaged because they have signed up to something that all hon. Members think is appropriate?

Mr. Bradshaw: We are holding detailed discussions with those countries and already provide economic assistance to many of them. We shall certainly give requests for help sympathetic consideration. International observers are a key to free and fair

[Mr. Bradshaw]

elections. The EU has insisted on the invitation and accreditation of international observers at least six weeks before the elections. The tragic truth about Zimbabwe's leaders is that they no longer offer constructive answers or desire genuine co-operation; they simply create more extreme problems and resort to ever more implausible allegations against outsiders.

There are those—we have heard their voices today—who say that the efforts of the international community to date have been too little, too late. I do not share that interpretation because it assumes that there could have been a magical solution if only we had tried harder to find it. The hon. Member for New Forest, East suggested that in this country that approach had something to do with a liberal-left guilt about colonialism. I have been on the same side as him in all the arguments about intervention since we have both been in the House, and I sincerely suggest that that is not the case. The issue is how we approach the problem most effectively, without playing into President Mugabe's hands. Some of the quotes that he gave, not least by Baroness Amos, who is the Minister with responsibility for sub-Saharan Africa, were out of date and did not reflect the progress that the Government have made.

It is our view that the only people who could have prevented the crisis, and still could prevent a meltdown, are those in positions of authority in Harare. Zimbabwe is a sovereign country. It runs its own affairs, but one thing is certain: the course being taken by the Government of Zimbabwe is unsustainable and, ultimately, self-defeating. Zimbabwe's leaders need to know that one day they will be held personally accountable for their stewardship.

Although we have focused on the present, we should not overlook the future. Let me reiterate the Government's strong desire to resume a close relationship with a democratic, open and forward-looking Zimbabwe. In the right conditions and with the right international support, Zimbabwe can again become a beacon of hope for Africa—stable, prosperous and a good neighbour. That will take time and effort, and we will continue to work to that end. We look to hon. Members on both sides of the House, and more widely, for support in that.

Coal Industry

10.59 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): I am proud to represent the largest remaining coal mine in the United Kingdom, the Selby complex—[Interruption.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Will right hon. and hon. Members leave the Chamber quietly, please, so that we can continue with our business in the proper fashion?

Mr. Grogan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am proud to represent the Selby complex, which is the largest remaining coal mine in Britain. The Government have a creditable record on dealing with coalfield issues and the coalfield communities since 1997, when they came to office. Sometimes it has taken passionate debate in Parliament and elsewhere to bring that about, but that is how it should be. The Government have been responsive to arguments made by coalfield communities and MPs about justice. They have dealt with the legacy of decades of coal mining and its effect on our communities; the legacy of the strike of the 1980s; and issues such as implementing the largest ever compensation scheme for industrial disease. Only last week, they recognised for the first time the special needs of the poorest mining pensioners and their families and are making special provision for them. They have dealt with those who were unfairly victimised in the aftermath of the strike and, just before Christmas, they ensured that those people have proper pension arrangements. They have also dealt with the major issue of the regeneration of coalfield areas through the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and other mechanisms. That is a proud record indeed.

As well as offering justice, the Government have ensured that the coal industry has a part to play in modern energy policy, not out of sentiment or respect for the past, but out of sheer economic need and necessity. In 1997, when the Government came to office, there was a widespread feeling that coal was discriminated against and that gas was favoured by market arrangements. Measures were taken, including new electricity trading agreements, a moratorium on gas-fired power stations and, latterly, the introduction of subsidies. That big move from the Government ensured the survival of much of the British coalfield. I understand that the latest figure for subsidies paid is more than £130 million; the Selby coalfield in my constituency has got more than £140 million in subsidy arrangements. There can be little doubt that without those subsidies Britain's coalfield would probably be about half its remaining size. That is a record to be proud of.

Essentially, I want to make four points. I know that a number of hon. Members representing coalfield areas want to speak on particular issues; the future of the Prince of Wales colliery, for example, will be mentioned by some of my hon. Friends. I wish to underline the continuing importance of coal nationally and internationally. When I was preparing for this debate in the Tea Room yesterday evening, one of my hon. Friends from the south of England looked at me and said, quite seriously, "You mean there is still a coal industry?" Internationally, 40 per cent. of all electricity is still generated by coal; there is no indication that that is likely to change. In Britain, just over one third of our electricity is generated by coal and £1 billion of our national income depends in some way on the coal industry. There are nearly 300 million tonnes of proven reserves of UK coal; BP estimates that perhaps 1 billion tonnes of coal are available for the country's energy needs.

Coal therefore still makes an important contribution to our overall energy pattern and portfolio. Today's debate is taking place against the context of the energy review which, together with the accompanying clean coal technology review, will be published by the end of the month, so Ministers tell us. That is a specific commitment; I am used to being given the commitment that reports will be published in spring, summer or winter, which is a bit more flexible. However, a publication date of the end of January is pretty specific. The energy review is ambitious; the Government are looking at a period of 50 years. Imagine looking in 1952 at this country's energy needs in 2002; the venture is extremely ambitious.

The background papers to the review are worthy of brief examination as they suggest that there has been a stark decline in coal-generated power. Energy Paper 68, which was published at the end of 2000, deals with the projections by the Department of Trade and Industry on different energy prices in the years ahead. Importantly, those assumptions depend on the role that the Government envisage for different energy sectors. A critique emerges from the paper; the Government make fairly realistic assumptions about the price of coal, but they underprice oil and gas, which leads to projections of a steeper decline in coal than is likely. I asked my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy a written question in December, to which he replied that the oil price projections in Energy Paper 68 were above the range for 22 of the past 24 months. I therefore urge Ministers to look carefully at assumptions in the energy papers.

In addition, some of the papers come to frightening conclusions about the country's likely dependence on imported energy in future. According to those assumptions, by 2020, we will be 70 per cent. dependent on gas, 90 per cent. of which will be imported; similar projections were made by the European Commission. How robust that gas supply would be is open to question; only a few weeks ago, the Confederation of UK Coal Producers issued a report, commissioned by the respected risk analysts, the Control Risks Group, which pointed up possible terrorist threats to gas pipelines. However, terrorists do not pose the only possibility of blackmail; there is also a possibility of economic blackmail. If we go down the gas route, we will be in a similar position to the one that we were in the 1970s, but instead of the oil industry holding us to ransom, it will be gas. The head of the Russian gas monopoly, Gazprom, which will be one of our largest gas suppliers in that scenario, recently said:

> "It is necessary to create a body which will group countries exporting natural gas, a body that would exercise real concrete regulation of prices."

He continued,

> "Everybody should get together to pool their ideas and come up with . . . an agreement about the way we should behave on the market instead of each exporter doing his own thing."

That is the threat that we would face. It is worth recalling that at the moment, contrary to projections in Energy Paper 68, coal burn is increasing in coal-fired power stations and went up last year. PowerGen recently announced plans to reopen coal-fired power stations, so there is a role for coal.

Some people question whether that coal needs to be British, and ask whether some of it could be imported from the international market. There are early signs that that market is tightening; China, for example, is importing coal for the first time. Much Colombian coal, which flooded on to the market some years ago, is now tied up in contracts with the United States. We should never forget one advantage of coal, which has become all too apparent in the past few years in our energy markets; coal-generated power can follow the load in the electricity market. It is much easier to increase and decrease the volume of power according to market fluctuations with coal than with renewables or nuclear power. That advantage has become particularly apparent in the workings of the market in recent months.

I wish to examine in a little detail the subsidy arrangements to which I referred earlier. The treaty establishing the European coal and steel community, a feature of European policy since the 1950s, expires towards the end of July 2002. The treaty was designed to expand coal mines. In the aftermath of the war, mines were sunk in the 1950s in many parts of Europe. However, since the 1950s, the European coal and steel treaty has largely been a vehicle for subsidising an industry that has been in decline.

I have explored the issue to some extent with my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy in various exchanges in the House. In European Standing Committee C in November, he said:

> "As I have said in the past, if a successor coal regime is introduced in the EU, we will not allow our industry to be put at a relative disadvantage, on principle. However, our stated position is our starting point in the discussions and if another state aid regime is agreed to, we will reluctantly subscribe to it and it will then be part of the scheme to which we have subscribed."—[*Official Report, European Standing Committee C*, 28 November 2001; c. 8.]

My plea to the Minister on that occasion and subsequently is based on many years of supporting Bradford City, mainly in the lower divisions. It is simply to get stuck in. To be fair, I believe that he has done that.

Although a coal subsidy scheme is subject to veto, all the signs from Europe point to discussing such a scheme in the Industry Council and the European Parliament by the spring. Parliamentary written answers since November suggest Government awareness of that. It is in our interests to shape the scheme because we shall probably have to live with it until 2010.

In the original proposal from the European Commission, there were three grounds for subsidies by member countries under the new regime: to safeguard resources; to cover reduction of activity, and to cover exceptional costs. It is not clear that, for example, subsidies for investment will be allowed under those criteria. My hon. Friends will go into detail about the Prince of Wales colliery, but investment has clearly been important in that crisis.

There has been much speculation about nuclear power and the need for a great deal of public investment if we were to go down that road. Surely there is a case

[Mr. Grogan]

for subsidy arrangements for opening new coal faces or even new mines. We should try to include that in the European instruments that will be introduced later this year.

There is a more immediate problem. Any new treaty will not take effect until later in the year. National Governments will have to design their schemes; France, Germany and Spain have already said that they will do that. There will be a transitional period because the schemes will have to be approved by the European Commission and are unlikely to be in operation until next year. The transitional period will probably last for six months from July.

The other European coal producing nations have announced that they will apply to the European Commission to roll forward existing schemes for another six months. Given the Minister's remarks in the European Standing Committee about not wanting Britain to be at a disadvantage, I hope that the Government will seriously consider doing the same. If we do that, it would be logical to lift the cap of £75 million, which applies to payments to any coal producer because the figure relates to a specific subsidy scheme that ends in July.

It is worth comparing the scale of subsidy in other European countries with that in Britain. In 2000, the last year for which clear figures are available, approximately 6 billion ecu of aid was given in Germany. In France and Spain, the figure was roughly 1 billion ecu each. By contrast, the figure for the United Kingdom was approximately 142 million ecu. The scale of subsidy was much smaller in the United Kingdom.

There is a message in all that for UK Coal, the major coal producer. If we are to have further subsidy arrangements, it must specify what precisely it offers the coal industry. There is more than a suspicion that UK Coal plans to concentrate production in fewer pits with more intensive working—possibly 24-hour working—and to move miners from pits that it closes to those that it decides to work intensively. UK Coal is paying reasonable dividends at the moment, no doubt to ward off takeover. If it seeks a subsidy to maintain the coal industry and invest in it, it must specify what is on offer.

The 1997 Department of Trade and Industry review said that the pit at Selby could last until 2009. It is not clear that that will happen on UK Coal's current investment plans. However, without going into detail, there are possibilities of further investment in work in Selby and elsewhere. UK Coal should be more forthcoming about that.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I compliment my hon. Friend on obtaining such an important debate. Unfortunately, I do not have the constituency interest that I used to have in subsidies for coal mining. There is only a small mine in my constituency, in Moorside, that employs 29 people. However, small mines sometimes have difficulty getting into the subsidy regime. They have problems in organising their submissions and the rules of the schemes sometimes make it difficult to get on to them. I hope that that is taken into account when new systems are developed in Europe. It is important for the people who depend on coal for their livelihoods.

Mr. Grogan: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point that reinforces the need for the British Government to be at the negotiating table at all stages to take care of the interests of small mines.

I want to consider clean coal technology. The latest figures that I have seen show that CO_2 emissions have been stable since 1997. They are no longer in decline, and the Government and the coal industry must tackle that. I shall make one or two suggestions about that. Sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions are close to being sorted out. One of the successes of the past few years is the expansion in the number of companies that are introducing new flue gas desulphurisation plants. Eggborough in my constituency is an example of that. Such technology was considered unlikely given the dynamics of the market three or four years ago, but it has happened.

We must deal with CO_2 emissions. The clean coal technology review is most welcome. Ministers have generally supported clean coal technology. In July 1998, the then Minister with responsibility for energy stated:

> "Clean-coal technologies have an important part to play . . . We are keen to support cleaner coal technologies."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 1081-2.]

In November 2000, the successor Minister said:

> "Several hon. Members have raised the issue of cleaner-coal technology . . . We are conducting an analysis and will do so in even more detail as we proceed with examining the technology."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2000; Vol. 357, c. 405.]

Lord Sainsbury spoke in a debate on clean coal technology in the other place before Christmas. His words suggest the likely content of the clean coal technology review. I make a plea to Ministers not to neglect existing coal-fired power stations. Without going into detail about the technology, the super-critical boilers can be retrofitted to existing coal-fired power stations. That could save up to 20 per cent. of CO_2 emissions. Such a step could be taken quickly, given that those power stations will be with us for many years, whatever the policy.

I shall paraphrase Lord Sainsbury's argument, which appeared to be that some clean coal technologies such as gasification and super-critical boilers are used overseas and that there is therefore little need for a demonstration plant. However, he said that other clean coal technologies such as carbon capture and pumping CO_2 into oil fields to capture the CO_2 and to improve the extraction of oil are in such an early stage that a demonstration plant would not be feasible. I cannot imagine anyone presenting such an argument about renewable plants, which clearly exist in many overseas countries. Much of the technology is speculative, but the Government have made a clear commitment in financial incentives to developing renewables. I hope that they will make a similar commitment in the review of clean coal technology.

Let us consider the scale of what happens in other countries. In America, the Department of Energy contributes $2 billion a year to clean coal. In Japan, the new Sunshine programme means $100 million for clean coal technology. That has to be the future of our industry. I hope that the review that is coming out before the end of the month will demonstrate that now is the time for some action, after many years of supportive words and comments.

Whatever happens in terms of the energy review, it is inevitable that there will be coal mine closures in the next decade. Some pits will become exhausted. It is a challenge to the Government as to how they deal with that. The closures will obviously be on a much smaller scale than in the '50s or '60s, and, indeed, in the '80s, but this will nevertheless be a real challenge for the communities involved. I hope that it will be a mark of the Government that, where there are closures, they will be planned for and that the necessary investment will be made in skills retraining, and so on.

The official estimate in the Department of Trade and Industry review in 1997 for the closure date of the coalfield at Selby, in my constituency, was 2009. Who knows precisely when it will close? But it will close—I do not know whether it will be in my lifetime as the Selby MP, with a majority of 2,000—although I hope that it will go on for many years. On 22 February we are holding a conference on the future of the Selby economy—I shall provide the Minister with details—and I hope that the Government office will be represented there at a high level. One of our aims will be to work out ways of prolonging the life of the coalfield, but we shall also discuss planning for the inevitable day when it closes.

If the Government are to ease the closures, when they occur over the coming decades, they should look again at pensions. Managers and pit deputies who are made redundant get a pension at the age of 50 under the arrangements made following privatisation. Ordinary miners, however, do not. Those hon. Members, many of whom are present in the Chamber, who have worked in the coal industry, and those such as myself who have been down a mine, will know that miners have a very physical, back-breaking job. In Germany, the pension arrangements on early retirement are much more generous.

If miners in this country were given the same rights as their managers and pit deputies—the right to a pension at 50 if made redundant—it would cost about £99 million, according to the actuaries. The mining pension schemes have been in surplus, but this idea will never be promoted by the trustees of the scheme who are elected by the miners, because those miners are all retired. There are no working miners in the scheme. However, half the trustees are now representatives from the DTI, and it would be open to the DTI to explore the possibility of this change, through those trustees. Putting miners on the same footing as their managers would cushion the blow in communities in which there will be closures in the coming decades.

Coal mining is now a modern, flexible industry. It is eager to make its contribution to Britain's energy requirements for many years to come, and all that it asks from the Government is fair play. The Government have given it that over the last four years, and it would be a pity—now that the industry faces heavy losses owing to the decline in prices following 11 September—if they did not build on the achievements of their first term of office to maintain a viable domestic British coal industry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should call to mind that it is the convention at these sittings to commence the three Front Bench contributions 30 minutes before termination—in this case, at midday. I have five names on the paper, and an additional hon. Member trying to catch my eye, making six in total. I therefore ask hon. Members to bear in mind my admonishment and make their contributions concise, clear and pertinent, and to keep interventions to a minimum—I would prefer to see none at all.

11.24 am

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) for securing this vital debate, and for his knowledgeable and forceful exposition of the case for continued public support for the coal industry. This is a critical time for the coal industry and, unfortunately, we are all aware of rumours about pits that might be about to announce redundancies, and about other mines that might be moving over to a closure plan, thus foreshortening the life of the mine. This is a dreadful shame, particularly considering the social and economic conditions in many of the communities involved.

The Minister has taken a much more expansive, open-minded approach to this issue than has possibly hitherto been the case. This is certainly a Government success story, and I say that as, technically, an Opposition MP. The UK coal aid operating scheme is something of which the Government should rightly be proud. In my constituency, Betws New mine, where my father worked, has received significant support. It should have closed in 1988, and it is a tribute to the work force, the management and the support from the Government that it is still providing good quality jobs—150 faceworkers, earning about £25,000 a year—in one of the poorest communities in the UK. That illustrates the success of the subsidy regime, and shows why hon. Members are keen to see that success built on.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the coal industry is still a significant industry. It employs about 2,000 people in Wales, directly and indirectly. If we compare the level of subsidy in the UK to the 4.6 billion euros that the coal industry in Germany receives, our level of support is very small. Considering that, it is amazing that British coal production is very competitive compared to imports. It would take only a small change in the exchange rate or the global level of coal prices to close the gap.

The arguments for continued support have been well rehearsed. They relate to security of supply. Coal has to play a part in ensuring a diversity of supply in terms of energy needs. We are not just talking about energy needs, however. There are other markets for coal. In my constituency, there is an anthracite coalfield. The only suppliers of good quality anthracite to the UK from outside Europe are China and Vietnam, so there is clearly an issue of security of supply involved.

[Adam Price]

The point about the social cost to the community of mine closures has been very well made, and we certainly do not want to repeat the travesty of what happened to so many of our communities in the 1980s. If we consider the question in terms of the global net impact on Government revenue, it would be idiocy to close these mines, because the tax take from employment in many of them more than makes up for the cost of the level of support across the industry that we are talking about.

In the coal industry, more than in any other, we have to take a long-term view. I notice that Lord Sainsbury of Turville, speaking in another place yesterday, referred to the short-term factors that were the rationale for the introduction of the support scheme. There are always short-term factors involved in access to reserves in any mine. Hon. Members who have worked in the industry will know that. That is the problem with the coal industry: it has long-term reserves and needs a long-term perspective, but there are short-term costs involved in accessing those reserves. When problems of market failure occur, there is a legitimate role for the Government in helping the industry to overcome issues of short-term costs, to ensure that the coal industry can continue to access the available reserves, probably for the next 50 years.

I was also glad to hear the Minister's remarks about ensuring that we are not at a comparative disadvantage. The point has already been made, however, that we shall be at a comparative disadvantage unless we get at least a short-term extension of the scheme, so that we can have a full debate about designing a regime that is most appropriate for the UK industry's needs. The issue of the company cap has been raised, as has the question of aid, not just operating aid, but investment aid for access to new reserves, and why not? In a very long-term view of the industry's future, a report by international mining consultants, commissioned by the Government in 1998, referred to new mine construction.

The six-month extension to the scheme, which has already been announced in other EU member states, is vital to some of the mines that I know will be switching over to a closure plan. Those who have worked in the industry will be able to explain this better than me, but basically some mines will be looking in the next few weeks for an announcement about an extension from July to December, otherwise they will halt their development plans and start working to a short-term closure plan. I know of mines that have the potential to last another 10 years, but without an announcement their lives will be foreshortened to perhaps two or three years. The issue is critical, as I know the Minister is aware.

It is imperative that the Government show their faith in the coal industry and coal communities. They have a good record on this issue, and we do not want to repeat all the mistakes of the 1980s, do we? The industry has been badly served by successive Governments, and this is an opportunity to build for the future. The last thing that the Government want as their epitaph is that they closed down the coal industry. We must bear it in mind that there are by-elections on the horizon. Let us, together, develop a positive future for the industry in Wales, where there is a lot for the Government to build on. I repeat: it is vital that we have an announcement on the extension in the next few weeks.

11.32 am

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): May I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on securing this important debate? He made an excellent speech and gave us a grand and detailed tour of the issues. I shall bear in mind your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and concentrate on one aspect of the issues.

My hon. Friend's constituency is just to the north of mine, but a boundary is not the only thing that we share. We both have a deep interest in, and commitment to, the coal mining industry, the people who work in it, directly or indirectly, and of course the communities in which they live. The way in which the last Tory Government ransacked the industry in the 1980s and 1990s was absolutely appalling. They abandoned the people and their communities, leaving a trail of destruction, with little hope of a decent future. However, I do not want to dwell on the past; I want to look to the future. I believe that coal and the people who work in the industry can and should have a prosperous future if we—and by that I mean this Labour Government—grasp hold of the new generation of clean coal technology that is now coming to the fore.

There are serious decisions to be made about our energy supply in the not-too-distant future. We are awaiting the outcome of the performance and innovation unit's energy review, and I understand that it has been submitted to Ministers for their consideration. Whatever that review says, the Government will need to decide what they will do to secure and maintain the supplies to meet our future energy needs. It will be good sense to maintain a broad mix of generation options.

The Government will have to deal with our rapidly depleting indigenous gas supply, the enormous cost of decommissioning the present nuclear capacity and the environmental threat from any new build. They will have to face up to the fact that renewable sources are not and will not for years to come be sufficiently advanced to generate enough power at a reasonable cost. May I warn the Minister that I believe there will be a huge outcry when the public see great swathes of our countryside and seascape blighted by obnoxious-looking, noisy wind farms?

The Government have to grasp the nettle of reducing our CO_2 emissions. There are other forms of renewables which are not as environmentally unfriendly as wind farms, and the Government can embrace the new generation of clean coal technology, in which they may well find the answer to many of these questions. Moreover, they will tackle the issue of security of supply. Within the new CCT methods being developed, integrated gasification combined-cycle technology offers us a realistic way forward. Put very simply, and I mean very simply, IGCC plants convert coal to gas and steam, and then burn the gas and utilise the steam to generate electricity. They reduce CO_2 emissions, are small enough to be built on colliery sites and produce an inert waste material that can be used in road foundations, among other things.

Let us look for a moment at what we can achieve by using the new CCT. First, the bulk of the coal produced at a mine need not even leave the site, cutting down on road transport and, in turn, emissions from heavy goods vehicles. Secondly, it reduces CO_2 emissions, which will help us to meet our Kyoto targets. Thirdly, unlike other CCTs such as flue gas desulphurisation, there is no need to dig great holes in our countryside to extract limestone. That cuts down on quarrying, which scars the landscape, and again reduces HGV emissions because there is no need to transport more limestone.

Fourthly, the by-product is useful in civil engineering, again cutting down the need to quarry in our beautiful countryside. Fifthly, by using our own coal supplies to greater advantage, we do not have to worry about the security of supply issue. Sixthly, as it develops, CCT may help us to deal with the issue of our depleting indigenous gas supply. If we burn more gas in IGCCs to generate electricity, there will be less need to burn our natural gas supply for that purpose, thereby resolving the vexed problem of our having, in the not-too-distant future, to import natural gas from eastern Europe. Finally, a new life for coal will be created if it is used in this way. It would create new employment opportunities in areas that have still not recovered from the devastation of the Tory pit closures programme of the 1980s and 1990s.

In the round, we start to get the picture that once again coal can play a significant role in our future energy needs. All we need is a bit of willpower and foresight, and together with the coal industry the Government can help to give coal a new life, help to save the environment on several fronts and regenerate communities that were ripped apart by the Tories. In conclusion, I urge the Minister to look closely at all these matters and to take a step into the future with a fuel that we know we can rely on.

11.38 am

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on securing this important debate.

The coal industry still plays an important role in my constituency. Ellington colliery, which borders Wansbeck, employs some 450 people, and with an unemployment rate that is still twice the national average, those jobs are vital to the local economy. Ellington, however, was not included in the UK coal operating aid package. It is producing today only because the other collieries in the group are receiving financial aid, thereby freeing much needed capital investment for new equipment, enabling the colliery to continue production.

Coal's contribution and value is recognised widely throughout the European Union. The Commission has allowed member states to subsidise coal for many years. The current scheme, as hon. Members have pointed out, ends this year. I understand that the Commission will soon be recommending a new scheme, which is intended to operate until 2010, to replace the current operating aid. I urge the Government, through my hon. Friend the Minister, to play a leading role in setting the rules of any new financial structures, because any new scheme should certainly encourage investment. If it can be proven that new equipment or even accessing new reserves will improve a colliery's efficiency, financial support should be given. That is exactly the investment required by Ellington to keep it viable for at least the next 10 years, to cover the short and medium terms.

The coal industry's long-term future can be guaranteed only by building a new generation of clean coal power stations, and the Government could assist either by direct grants or by introducing an obligation. Either way, it is important that the current balance of fuels for electricity generation be maintained. Coal, nuclear, gas and renewables all have a role to play, but it is imperative that the UK should not become dependent on gas.

I have nothing against the gas industry—gas is a wonderful fuel. Indeed, it is far too valuable to flare off in huge quantities in gas-fired power stations. In 1990, total UK gas reserves stood at 36 years. By 2000, that had fallen to 14 years, and we shall import 55 to 90 per cent. of our gas by 2020. It is reasonable to ask where that gas will come from: 70 per cent. of the world's natural gas reserves are concentrated in the middle east and the former Soviet Union—areas not noted for political stability—yet oil companies are pressing ahead with projects such as the $35 billion Yamal pipeline from Siberia. If we source our gas there, the UK will be at the end of a long pipeline and subject to high transport costs and possible supply interruptions. We still have a choice and that choice, if we are serious about security of energy supply, is simple: coal from the UK or gas from Siberia.

The thermal efficiency of gas power stations, which is nearly 50 per cent., may look attractive compared with that [illegible]r coal-fired power stations, which is only about 38 per cent. That comparison pales, however, when the alternative uses for gas are examined closely. Modern domestic central heating boilers can achieve nearly 88 per cent. efficiency and compressed natural gas provides significant environmental benefits in transport. The European Union White Paper on transport policy for 2010 argues that natural gas is the most promising fuel in the medium to long term; so considered against more efficient uses, burning vast quantities of gas at power stations is incredibly wasteful. Coal, however, is abundant and ideally suited to power generation.

In an Adjournment debate that I secured in July 1998, I argued for building a clean energy centre in my constituency. It would be a world first in best practice and would incorporate research and development linked to the region's universities. Newcastle university is a world leader in photovoltaics—the science of converting light to power—and the only offshore wind farm in the UK sits half a mile off the constituency, adjacent to the seven wind turbines, which are also in the constituency, at Blyth harbour.

There is huge potential for offshore wind farms, yet the generating technology is sourced outside the UK. The centrepiece of the new clean energy centre should be a brand new, state of the art, clean coal power station incorporating combined heat and power, which should be set in green parkland. We can show that coal meets the challenges both of efficiency and of the environment.

I see that you have looked at your watch, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and several times at me, so I shall conclude. There is still a huge opportunity for coal. The industry's short term can be protected by lifting the cap on operating aid. The medium term can be secured by the UK's agreeing to implement a new EU scheme. The long-term future can be guaranteed by encouraging the building of a new generation of clean-burn power stations.

[Mr. Denis Murphy]

By implementing the measures that they have, the Government have shown the value that they put on the industry and the people who work in it. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to continue his excellent work and his support for Britain's coal industry.

11.45 am

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan). This is an important debate and the number of MPs from coal mining and former coal mining communities who are here shows that. The coal industry is a strategic industry, because on current extraction rates, it could last 200 years, so we must ensure continuity for coal mining through investment and encouragement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) referred to the size of the coal mix in the UK's energy economy. Members are aware that, in 1993, the President of the Board of Trade referred his cuts to the Trade and Industry Committee, which reported in February and suggested that there was a market for 62 million tonnes of coal. Last year, we burned 59 million tonnes, which clearly shows that the Select Committee got it right, and 62 million tonnes would briefly have retained a mining industry of about 40 collieries.

There is a continuing need for a coal industry, particularly in respect of the dominance of gas, and I refer the Minister to the gas price increase. I suggest that it has been caused largely by UK gas suppliers pushing their gas through the interconnector to Europe and chasing the higher prices there. That pulled UK gas prices in its train, causing the increase. A price fall is unlikely because, in the next two to three years, we shall import gas from the Danish field to feed into our power stations.

Just three power stations are fitted with flue gas desulphurisation technology—another is under construction—but six need to be fitted with it. I hope that the Minister will encourage the owners of that set to fit FGD technology, because it is required. In moving towards new clean coal technology, we must deal with the existing plant and FGD offers one way of doing that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North referred to the new IGCC technology. I think, Minister, that we ought to aim high, and in aiming high we should invest in a demonstration plant. That could put in train a new generating set based on new technology, which would be good for British manufacturing and good for our ability to exchange the technology, particularly with economies such as India's and China's. That, too, would be good for British manufacturing. I hope that the Minister will consider such an investment.

The current coal aid system is restrictive. It operates under the European Coal and Steel Community treaty, which ends this April, but the new European Commission draft is just as restrictive. We need a flexible coal aid scheme and I hope that the Minister will take that up with the Commission. We have to bear in mind how we can aid further development at new and existing collieries and in health and safety technology. We must also ensure that that technology keeps pace with mining technology.

Finally, I urge the Minister to hold a major debate in the Chamber when the PIU report has passed through his office and entered the public domain.

11.49 am

Colin Burgon (Elmet): I too congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on securing this debate on the future of the coal industry. He is a staunch supporter of both the industry and those who work in it. Even though he is a Bradford City supporter, his contribution was truly outstanding.

I shall make a short contribution to the debate—I see you nodding your head, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall not cover general points but will raise one specific concern.

The Selby constituency now contains more working pits than any other constituency in Britain. Prior to the great miners' strike of 1984-85, my constituency had three pits and one workshop, and was headquarters of the National Coal Board's northern area, which meant that some 3,500 jobs were provided by the industry. All those jobs have now gone. It is estimated that, within the whole of the Leeds district, only some 200 men are left in mining. While I, like many others, am well aware of why that happened, I will never forgive the Conservative party for destroying the industry. It was a wanton piece of vandalism. We must now concentrate our minds on securing some kind of future for coal in Britain.

Rather than go into the general policies that will ensure a place for coal in helping to meet our current and future energy requirements, I shall concentrate on the need to keep open the last remaining pit in the whole of west Yorkshire, the Prince of Wales colliery at Pontefract.

On 3 December, UK Coal announced that work was to be halted on developing a new coal face in the colliery. That move jeopardises the 480 jobs at the colliery. If the pit closes, those, plus another 150 contract workers' jobs, will be at risk, with all the usual knock-on effects. Indeed, Wakefield council estimates a possible loss of some £50 million a year in wages and income, from supplying service industries in the area.

The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), has been energetic in the campaign to prevent closure and has called on UK Coal to keep the pit open. I fully agree with her stance on that. I also agree with the view of the Coalfield Communities Campaign when it called for a new mining plan to be drawn up ensuring the colliery another 20 years of life.

The Prince of Wales colliery has made more than £80 million profit since privatisation in 1995. Unfortunately, it has hit geological problems precisely when UK Coal can no longer call on the current subsidy scheme for assistance. I fully support the view that the current Government aid package should be extended to access new coal reserves. As the Yorkshire coal taskforce has argued, it should be seen as part of a European coal reserve, accessible at a far lower cost base than coal mined elsewhere in the European Union. That would help make the colliery an important asset in accessing reserves, as discussed in the European energy Green Paper.

I hope that the Government will listen to all who argue that they should amend the UK subsidy regime to allow the Prince of Wales colliery to remain open so that it can contribute to the country's energy needs and the local economy. I know that the Government have done a great deal, as has already been said today. To be blunt, if we did not have a Labour Government, we would not be having this debate.

I am lucky to have friends who work at the Prince of Wales colliery, and I have discussed with them the threat that they face. There is a long history of miners being badly treated, and UK Coal seems determined to continue that tradition. Miners complain of an almost total lack of information. They do not know whether to leave the industry and are convinced that UK Coal is not vitally committed to keeping the pit open. They also suspect that UK Coal wanted to transfer a section of the work force to Kellingly colliery so that it could impose an unpopular four-shift system, so as to fulfil its main aim, the boosting of company profits. I look forward to UK Coal proving me wrong.

On Saturday, I read in the *Yorkshire Post* that six options are now being considered for the pit. Gary Foreman, the NACODS—National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers—branch secretary, said that there was a prospect of going into a new seam. I hope that that is the case and that the Government will support such a move. I also share the view of Tony Withington, the National Union of Mineworkers branch secretary, that UK Coal should not cut and run, but should show a full commitment to keeping the pit open.

Future generations will look back and judge the privatisation of the coal industry to have been a monumental piece of economic and political vandalism. They will judge the approach taken to a plentiful and reliable energy source to have been profligate and short sighted, and the treatment of those who work in the industry to have been cavalier and thoughtless. Let us hope, in relation to the Prince of Wales colliery, that those judgments will not be sustained.

11.54 am

David Hamilton (Midlothian): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak. I may follow Gary Cooper at high noon in order to meet the 12 o'clock deadline, and I shall therefore make my remarks very quickly.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on raising the issue. I also congratulate all my longer established comrades, who have for a number of years been fighting the campaign to try to keep the coal industry in existence. I shall limit my remarks to one or two small points which I consider very important, because the detail has already been argued.

When I started work in the pits at the age of 15, and then went down the pits at 16, the one thing I knew was that at some point the pits would close. I therefore do not look at the coal industry with a great big heart and think that it must be kept at all costs. I was involved in the 1972 and 1974 disputes, which it should be remembered came about because of the price of oil. We were at the beck and call of the middle east.

What hon. Members have said today about expanding the coal industry is right, but I believe that the security of our future energy needs is key to this whole debate. We must go forward in that area. In the short time I have been a Member of this House, we have had several meetings with the Minister on a host of matters, and his door is always open in order that progress can be made on those matters.

Renewables are a key area for the future. The Minister is well aware of Moncktonhall colliery, which is was one of the deepest pits in Europe and has now been closed. Midlothian council is looking into the possibility of some 4,000 houses being provided with the hot water that has been generated there. Thus an ongoing benefit to the coal industry is stored at the colliery. I invite the Minister to pay the council a visit to see that project for himself.

I wish to discuss two major issues. The first is the fact that the oil and gas industries are finite, although the coal industry has a much longer period before it. There will be major obstacles for nuclear power. Personally, I would oppose nuclear power all the way down the line, not because I am an ex-coal miner but because I think that it is the wrong way forward. Nevertheless, the two industries must compete with each other and also complement each other. If Europe is to survive in the near future, the German, Spanish, French and British coal industries should combine to secure their future. The former Soviet Union and the middle east have major problems—we have only to look at what is happening now. We cannot possibly leave our future in those hands.

With those few comments and with only two minutes to go until noon, I do not think that I have done too badly. Let me make one final comment on pensions. The Minister is to be congratulated on the work that has been done on pensions. Miners' pensions had been victimised, and I hope to see progress on that work very soon.

11.58 am

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I have just one minute in which to speak. I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) for being late. I was due to be in a Select Committee, so I had not put this date in my diary. It was only when the title of the debate came up on the screen that I realised it was on.

I very much support what my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and my other hon. Friends have said. I thank all hon. Members present for their support in helping to keep Scotland's only deep coal mine, Longannet, open. Without the support that it has received from my hon. Friends, the Labour Government and particularly the present and previous Ministers for Industry and Energy, that pit would not be open. I very much hope that the Prince of Wales colliery can look forward to a secure future in the months ahead.

I urge the Minister to listen to comments about clean coal technology and how this country could lead the way and boost both the future of coal-fired energy production and manufacturing by exporting our expertise and knowledge to other countries. I hope that we shall be able to celebrate an announcement on, and some funding for, the development of super-critical boilers, for example, and that we will support a diverse energy market.

12 noon

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on shepherding through all the speakers in the debate in good order. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on introducing the debate. He spoke effectively on the subject. I grew up on the outskirts of the west of York, a few miles from his pit, so I understand the strength of feeling about this issue and its relevance to the economy of the Vale of York.

Unfortunately, I shall begin by making a slightly discordant comment. Most hon. Members have pitched their remarks on the assumption that the key energy review is on Ministers' desks and is being considered at leisure. Unfortunately, it is already in the public domain. It was referred to in *The Independent* this morning, and I do not know in how many other newspapers. That is yet another example of the discourtesy shown to Parliament. I do not know whether an official or a Minister leaked the report.

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): If I knew how to prevent leaks of the PIU energy report, I would employ a hundred plumbers to do so. It certainly did not come from the Government, and it is deeply against our interests. It has been leaked by people who want to put a spin on it, and not to reflect the overall report.

Dr. Cable: I accept the Minister's comment. The report does not help the case of the hon. Member for Selby, because one of its key conclusions, according to that article, is that we need

"a radical agenda to enable the UK to put itself on the path to a low-carbon economy"

that is less reliant on oil and coal-fired power stations. That is a bold and brutal conclusion. The implication is that we must quickly debate this report in Parliament. Whoever was responsible for the leak, the issues are out, and the Minister should make a statement this week, so that the matter can be properly debated.

My first point is about the basic economics of coal. For those of us who do not represent coalfields, the issue is how much we are willing to pay as a society to keep open the option of a coal industry, and to keep the skills and technology to stop the coal faces from being destroyed. There is an argument for keeping that option open and for paying something for it as a community. I agree with the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) that the Government have got the balance right. The current modest subsidies, which are degressive over time, are probably the right approach.

A key uncertainty, which has not been mentioned but which is important to the debate, is the current United Kingdom exchange rate. One reason why the UK coal industry finds it extremely difficult to compete against imported coal, quite apart from other fuels, is the fact that the pound appreciated in real terms by 30 per cent. in 1995, and it has remained at about that level ever since. The British coal industry competes against not just western Europe, but Australia and South Africa. The Australian dollar and the rand have been heavily devalued. To have a proper discussion about how much the industry needs to be subsidised to maintain that option, we need a clear picture of the exchange rate at which the industry can compete at its present level without a subsidy.

The Secretary of State clearly understands that problem, because she was on the radio this morning talking about the exchange rate in relation to the euro. I do not want to open that debate, but it is essential to the argument. It would be helpful to have an understanding of how much the exchange rate needs to come down to keep the coal industry in business. That is the issue.

My second point is about security of supply, on which I have a little less sympathy with hon. Members from the coal mining belt. When they talk about security of supply, I sense that they are clutching at straws. The brutal fact of the matter is that the British gas supply is much healthier than in the 14 years that the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) mentioned. There is constant exploration, new technology, west of Shetland development, and the industry is developing horizontal drilling, which enables it to get not just the oil but the associated gas and to develop new gas fields. The amount of the reserves continues to expand.

Overseas supplies are not as unreliable as has been suggested. According to the article in *The Independent*, the leaked reports says that there is

"'little risk' of an international shortage of gas supply".

Most of it comes from western Europe—Denmark and Norway—and the former Soviet Union. We tend to forget that the pipeline from the former Soviet Union was built in the days of the cold war, and was one of Mrs. Thatcher's initiatives. She rebelled against Reagan, and insisted that the pipeline be built, which was sensible. It has never been disrupted, and there are now new pipelines and new private sector suppliers. There are at least two pipelines from north Africa, liquified natural gas from the Gulf, Nigeria and Venezuela, and large numbers of diverse supplies.

To argue that those supplies will be disrupted politically is not plausible. The coal industry has a case, but it should not rest it on security of supply. Worse than that, it gives ammunition to the Germans, who are pushing through an unhelpful policy on coal subsidies, which are massively greater than ours, and it damages the case of the UK coal industry. The security of supply arguments are completely invalid and to our disadvantage.

Thirdly, the environmental argument about clean coal is important. I support the idea of investing in research and development for new coal technology. That is a much better use of money than endless operating subsidies. The basic point that must be addressed is about carbon. The hon. Member for Selby rightly said that many of the problems associated with sulphur and nox have been dealt with, so the problem is with carbon. In the past few years, Britain has met its carbon dioxide targets because of the replacement of coal by gas, so how should we address that issue?

I have heard people in the coal industry arguing that it can be dealt with through coal sequestration. Carbon can be pumped into deep reservoirs under the oceans. I do not know how far that technology has evolved, but there is a case for examining it seriously and investing some resources at least in research. I do not know whether it has reached the prototype stage, but that seems to be the area on which clean coal research should be focused. I would be interested to hear the Minister's view of how that is progressing.

My fourth point relates to Europe. I have always been a strong supporter of British participation in the European Union, but the EU is a disaster in two areas: agriculture and energy. The Government must try hard—it is easy to say that, but there are 15 other member states—to get the energy policy right. At the moment, it works heavily to the disadvantage of UK energy producers, especially the coal mining industry. There is massive over-subsidisation in Germany, and we cannot get an agreement on the liberalisation of gas, which is the real security of supply problem. Ruhrgas can divert gas within Europe. This is an internal, European problem. Until there is an agreement on single market rules, the continental European producers will continue to distort the market against us.

The French continually block agreement on electricity. Electricité de France operates at a cost of capital of a normal nationalised industry, competing against British producers which operate in the market, so companies such as Scottish Power that use coal and are committed to coal have to compete on an unlevel playing field with European producers such as EDF. Until we get a proper, liberalised, fair European market in energy, many of these problems will remain. The Government must give that top priority.

My final comment, Mr. Winterton, is to say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I am pleased to tell the hon. Member that fortunately a motion went through at the end of last week, and I can now be addressed appropriately as Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Cable: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I had not caught up with the news.

The clock is ticking on energy policy. The report of the energy review has got into the public domain, and I hope that the Minister will say when he intends to bring its conclusions to Parliament so that we can debate them properly.

12.8 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall start by congratulating the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on initiating this important debate. Not only does he represent a quarter of the nation's coal industry in the Selby complex, but he plays a significant role as the honorary secretary of the all-party parliamentary coalfield communities group. I congratulate that group on the submission it made to the PIU review of UK energy policy, which was a good deal more concise than many reviews, and contained much more good sense.

Coal has a future: it is a modern, rejuvenated industry, as hon. Members have said. The energy industry and the City are investing in coal: they want it to succeed and so do I. Any debate about the future of coal must assume a knowledge and understanding of the history of coal, coal mines and coal miners and the role that they have played in the industrial and social life of the United Kingdom. As a southern MP, I was brought up with stories of the coal mines. My father was brought up in the Potteries, and his father was the rector of Hanley. There was a mine at the bottom of the garden, and he was regularly down the coal mines. He told me all about it.

This does matter. It is wrong to imagine that just because people live in southern England, they know nothing about coal mines. I do know about them. I first went down a mine in 1976, when I was fighting my first seat, Holborn and St. Pancras. The headquarters of the National Union of Mineworkers was in that constituency.

I also observed the importance of the miners to the whole trade union movement during the 1977 Grunwick dispute, with which I was intimately familiar when I was secretary of a large branch of what was then the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs. I will never forget the impact of the NUM's march to Grunwick through the summer mist with Arthur Scargill at its head, and the sight of him being snatched by police about three feet from where I was standing—much to his annoyance, as he had been pushed through the police picket line by members of the Socialist Workers party. But I must not digress.

From the agony of the 1980s has emerged a small, efficient industry—an industry with a future, if it can survive in the face of heavily subsidised foreign competition, which has already been mentioned. It was a pleasure to hear more from the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) about his campaign against wind farms, and also to hear from the hon. Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton), who spoke of the importance of price stability and pointed out that the industry had already been held to ransom in the past. I feel particularly strongly about that, as my first job was in Musselburgh, and I was very familiar with the mines of which he spoke.

One of our current problems is that the Government, like ducks, are paddling like mad under water and trying to look serene on the surface, while numerous leaks occur and, apparently, reports are delayed. Yesterday, in the other place, Lord Sainsbury of Turville pointed out that the Government had subsidised the industry to a significant extent—£140 million so far—under the coal operating aid scheme. He said

> "We currently have no plans to extend it, or to introduce a new scheme beyond July 2002."

He mentioned the performance and innovation unit and the clean coal technology review, which we hoped would have been published by now. He said that there would be no more subsidies under the existing scheme, but added

> "We are also working to ensure that the new EU regime gives us the flexibility to pay suitable types of aid if appropriate."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 1382.]

We really do need to start coming clean. It is not fair to the coal industry for there to be so much uncertainty about not just the general approach to the energy review, but specific schemes.

Do leaks matter? They do, but perhaps not as much as some people think. I suspect that the leak mentioned by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and reported in today's *Independent* has a great deal more to

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do with the feelgood factor among newspaper circulation managers than with the future of the coal industry.

The PIU report is not important merely as a subject that we will debate. It is crucial for the Government to make their policy clear thereafter. I suspect that when the report goes into the public domain, the Government will say "It is frightfully interesting: let us now talk about it for quite a long time". That is entirely right, but what will matter are the conclusions that they subsequently reach.

If there is anything to be said about the leaks in today's newspaper, it is this. The hon. Member for Twickenham said that reducing the cost of carbon emissions made things look bleak for coal, but, according to *The Independent*, the PIU proposes to put the United Kingdom

> "on the path to a low carbon economy"

that would be

> "less reliant on oil and coal fired power stations. But it"—

the PIU's leaked report, that is—

> "says that the plan to switch to 'renewable' energy could push up domestic electricity bills by between 5 and 6 per cent."

There is another issue, however. Will this lead to the end of any hopes for clean coal technology? That would be a tragedy, and I hope that it will not happen.

There are some questions to which the industry needs answers. As we are seriously constrained by time, I will ask them now. I hope that the Government will address these questions, which have been raised by the industry.

Do the Government recognise the role of coal-fired generation in providing fuel diversity? I believe that they do—the Minister and I have discussed the issue before—but it is crucial for the Government to reassure the industry. A good deal of investment is needed. The industry is also keen to know whether the Government will facilitate the co-firing of biomass in coal-fired plants under the renewables obligation, as has happened in Denmark. Let me add that it is important for the policy review to be completed and then followed by a period of stability in energy, so that we can get down to working out investment strategies in the various sectors of the industry.

Perhaps the main point that should be answered—the Minister will say "Not me, guv"—is that the Government should not gold-plate the environmental controls agreed in Brussels under the revised large combustion plants directive. I know that that is technically a question for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the health and safety regime, but there will be a hugely important impact on the coal industry if the directive is unhelpful to it.

The PIU review of the strategic issues surrounding energy policy is set in the broader context of meeting the challenge of global warming, and ensuring secure, diverse and reliable energy supplies at a competitive price. It is terribly important for people to realise that we do not have a true market in energy anywhere in the world. If we did, the rush to gas would continue and the price would fall to a point at which—as has happened in California—no one would invest in new plant, and the lights would not come on when the switches were pushed. The Government must be careful to avoid that, and I am sure that they will.

The issues of security and diversity are extremely important. We should consider what is in the national interest, and what is in the strategic interests of all the industries involved. Then there are the environmental issues. I was astonished to learn that Greenpeace had made no submission to the PIU review, and that Friends of the Earth did not mention the word "coal" in its submission. It has not mentioned that word in any of its output since 1998, when it was pretty rude about it.

I think it tremendously important for us to allow the Government to support the industry sensibly, not least because it faces massive competition from other European interests. I urge the Minister to go in there and sort out subsidies in the European market and liberalisation of the energy market, particularly in France and Germany. If he can sort that out he will have our wholehearted support, because it is one of the great brakes on a liberalised energy market in this country.

We must encourage clean coal technology whenever we can. We do not yet know the costs involved, because the important paper that has been spoken of has not yet been produced. We look forward to its publication.

Whether we are talking about the treatment of emissions from pulverised fuel combustion or about other examples, such as the hybrid combined cycles which, I believe, have a bright future, we need to ensure that the coal industry is properly treated as part of the country's energy mix. Coal has a future in the energy mix, because it is abundant, capable of storage, can be turned on and off in minutes, is not dependent on unpredictable weather conditions, and can be easily transported by ship, rail or road. Quite minor investment will ensure that coal can continue to meet the UK's baseload energy requirements while new technologies are allowed to develop.

The flexibility of coal makes it an ideal complement to intermittent forms of generation such as wind and wave power. It has an important future, and it has our support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) for his contribution. The Minister of State will reply.

12.19 pm

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): I join my colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on securing the debate and on his wider work in promoting the interests of the UK coal industry. It has been a useful debate, which has reflected the industry's importance in many parts of the country, and its importance to the nation's energy needs. I will certainly follow up on some of the comments that have been made.

I appreciate the comments about our performance on the coal industry. It is a very interesting and challenging part of my job as Minister for Industry and Energy. We do have a good record. We have managed, for example, to turn around the coal health compensation scheme, which is now working pretty well. There is always room for improvement but the money is getting through, which is what matters. I am pleased that I have been able to do something about victimised miners and the low pensions issue, and to keep the subsidy scheme operating effectively, as hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have recognised.

I was particularly pleased to be able to do something about Hatfield when the opportunity arose. I look forward to going there next week for what I am sure will be a happy occasion, when we can also discuss Mr. Budge's ideas for an IGCC power plant, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) referred. I welcome the comments of all hon. Members about the effectiveness of what the Government have done for the industry, including the comments by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price).

Coal has a major role. If any Labour Member deep in the south of England does not realise that, they should be sent a copy of the *Hansard* for this debate. After all, the industry provides over a third of the UK's electricity needs. If current trends continue, coal burn is expected to account for between 10 and 22 per cent. of electricity generation in 2010. Clearly, coal will continue to play a key role in the UK's energy mix for a long time to come.

We have a coal industry to be proud of. It is by far the most efficient in Europe, thanks to the great strides in recent years to improve efficiency and raise productivity. To give hon. Members some idea of that success, in the 1990s, output per head increased by an average of 33 per cent. each year—greater than in any other energy industry, and far greater than the 5 per cent. average for the industry as a whole.

At many of the remaining pits, the prospects are good. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr mentioned Betws, which is a good example. Lots of reserves are being worked on a relatively small scale, producing highly valuable anthracite for niche markets. We could go through the card. The prospects for a good number of pits are sound.

On the other hand—everyone recognises it—the future is not entirely rosy. For geological reasons, some mines will close in the next few years. Realistically, that cannot be avoided. I return, however, to the positive. Latest statistics suggest that last year coal production in this country rose by over 4.5 per cent. Over 3.5 million tonnes more coal was burned at power stations in 2001 compared with 2000. Over a third of electricity is generated by coal.

Several hon. Members mentioned clean coal technology, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy). I emphasise the crucial significance of that. If we are to secure a truly long-term future for coal, it must be consistent with environmental obligations. CO_2 emissions in particular will need to be addressed, given the concerns we all know about on global warming. That is one of the reasons why the Government announced in June that the case for supporting development of cleaner coal technology was being reviewed. A demonstration plant could play an important part in any future role for coal in the fuel mix. It would ensure security of supply while meeting environmental requirements.

In the course of the clean-coal technology review, the scope for capture and storage of CO_2, and the need for Government support for that, have been given particular attention. There are potentially exciting prospects, both for using CO_2 to enhance oil recovery from North sea oil wells and to store CO_2 permanently underground, a point to which the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) referred. I assure him and other hon. Members that the clean coal technology review will have a lot more to say about that.

The conclusions of the review into Government support for cleaner coal technology will be published later this month. The PIU energy review is expected to be published around the same time. Both reviews will inform a fresh look at how we can achieve our economic and environmental objectives.

A lot depends on those two reviews but I stress, as I always do in these discussions, that the PIU report will be a report to Government, rather than of Government. As the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), the Opposition spokesman, rightly said, the debate will begin rather than end with the publication of the PIU report.

Everyone knows why the PIU review was set up and has seen speculation about it but I reiterate the point that the leaking has been in order to secure particular interpretations of the review. Most of it comes from the obsessive anti-nukes. They started off trying to prove that the review was a great whitewash for the nuclear industry, that the devil incarnate was involved and that it was proof positive of that. Then they gave up on that and changed their line. Now they say that it is the death knell of the nuclear industry. Pay your money, take your choice, but my advice is to wait for the PIU review. I think that people will find a balanced report on that issue, as on others. Future policy on coal and energy more generally will be informed by the conclusions of the review.

Everyone has recognised that the UK subsidy scheme has been very successful in achieving what it set out to do. It was designed in 2000 to assist the coal industry through short-term market problems and to prevent a sudden and sharp decline in the coal industry. That has been achieved. Eligible pits have been helped significantly to survive the very difficult price and structural threats that they faced between 1999 and 2001. As a result of that approach, hundreds of jobs have been saved. I welcome the comments of hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber about the success of that approach.

Any pit with a long-term viable future should now be able to survive without Government support. Indeed, the terms of the scheme, as approved by the European Commission, required recipients of aid to be able to demonstrate medium-term viability without aid from July 2002.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and others recognise, we are negotiating to put in place a framework for possible national subsidy schemes after July 2002. Our aim—I repeat what the hon. Member for Salisbury and significantly my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) said—is to secure an outcome that will give us the flexibility to put in place suitable schemes, should we wish to do so. The key word is "flexibility". Future policy will be informed by the PIU energy review, the Department of Trade and Industry business support review, the clean coal technology review—like London buses, they come in threes after a long wait—and the House of Lords

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reports into security of supply. If the conclusions of those reviews suggest that a further coal subsidy scheme may be appropriate, we will of course consider the issue further. I look forward to discussions beyond this debate with colleagues.

A number of hon. Members have raised the issue of security of supply as an argument in favour of a new scheme. Clearly, that is an extremely important issue, and the overall aim of Government energy policy remains to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices.

Whether there may be security of supply benefits from maintaining a particular level of coal-fired generation is something that we will need to consider in the light of the PIU review and the House of Lords and Select Committee on Trade and Industry reports, but our current position is that, whatever the security of supply issues surrounding coal generation, there are not significant security of supply benefits from maintaining a particular level of UK coal production. As the EU security of supply Green Paper itself notes, the geopolitical diversity of coal sources is such that the risks of disruption to supply are minimal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Sadly, time is up. I am grateful to the Minister of State for his reply.

Tanzania

12.30 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I welcome the opportunity to hold this debate, not least because it allows me to address you correctly for the first time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Normally, I use Adjournment debates to deal with policy questions, and I regret in some ways having to raise a personal case today. However, the case is so extreme and frustrating, and has been going on for so long, that I feel that it can be addressed only in an Adjournment debate. It involves a dispute between one of my constituents, Mr. Patel, and the Tanzanian Government that has been going on for almost 20 years. It has involved Ministers in this Government, and their Conservative predecessors, for five years.

I shall recount the story in a few moments, but the essential point is that Mr. Patel supplied thread to a Tanzanian factory as part of a Government project in 1982. He was owed about £100,000 on the transaction. The Tanzanian authorities never disputed that the claim was entirely legitimate, but the money was never paid. To this day, my constituent has not received a penny for that deal.

Even before today, at least three Ministers have been involved. There have been innumerable diplomatic notes and meetings with Ministers, but we have found no way forward. I want to bring the matter to the slightly higher level offered by this Adjournment debate for three reasons.

First, we seemed 18 months ago to have reached the point where all the details had been agreed. The Tanzanian Government had at last accepted the principle that they should pay Mr. Patel some interest payments on his outstanding claim. Mr. Patel had accepted the terms, the cut-off period and the rate of interest. I have the correspondence, which went through the high commission in Dar es Salaam, setting out the details. All the preliminaries had been conducted and, 15 months ago, agreement was reached in principle to resolve the problem finally. However, nothing happened and the drift continues.

Secondly, the conditions of Mr. Patel's life have deteriorated over the years. No one has ever said as much in print, but I suspect that there is a feeling in Tanzania that a rich Asian business man is pursuing interest on loans that a poor developing country cannot pay. However, Mr. Patel is not a rich man. Twenty years ago, he used his house as collateral for a loan to finance the deal, and he has struggled for the past two decades. His wife has gone out to work and he has changed his job in order to meet the interest payments on the loans. Eighteen months ago, he finally had to give up. His wife was made redundant and his house was repossessed. He is now homeless and living with his daughter.

Thirdly, although Mr. Patel's fortunes have waned, those of Tanzania to a degree have waxed. The country has received debt relief, with the support of the International Monetary Fund and the other international institutions. Although still a very low-income country, it is now considered to have rather sounder economic conditions, and is committed to a liberalisation programme.

The British Government evidently felt that Tanzania was sufficiently solvent to enable them to promote the sale of air traffic control equipment to it. I do not want to reopen what was a major controversy but, if the press is to be believed, even the Prime Minister got involved in promoting the deal. My simple reaction is that if Tanzania can afford to meet its obligations to British Aerospace it can certainly afford to meet its obligations to Mr. Patel, who is no less British. Moreover, if Tanzania is moving into a new era in which it attracts foreign investment and deals on a proper commercial basis with investors and creditors, it must resolve its outstanding claims.

I realise that, for the Foreign Office, such matters can take a long time. I have no criticism of the Foreign Office, which I think has handled the matter very well. I am not out to bash the Foreign Office, as I realise that resolution of such matters can be protracted. In the 1970s, I was a first secretary in the Foreign Office, and I remember repeated visits from the Peruvian bond holders who had been expropriated in a nationalisation in Peru some 40 years earlier. They kept coming back to the Foreign Office, and we remained unable to get them any money. However, I hope that there will be a happier outcome in the case of Mr. Patel.

I have set the scene, so I shall now take the Minister through the sequence of events, as the file is rather fat and some of the details are important.

The problem originated in early 1980, when a shoe project was supported by the World bank. It was not some dodgy little project: it was high profile, with World bank sponsorship. Mr. Patel's company, Pillarcliffe, was commissioned—by the World bank and after proper tendering procedures—to supply thread to the Morogoro shoe factory.

The project went ahead, Mr. Patel supplied the necessary equipment, but the money was not paid. The initial reasons for that were complicated, and had a lot to do with inefficiency in the World bank. Mr. Patel was never properly reimbursed, and for three years was involved in an argument about whether the money should, or could, be paid. However, the matter was clarified finally in 1988, when the principal secretary in the Tanzanian Ministry of Finance and Economic Development accepted in writing that the business transaction was entirely legitimate and that Tanzania had an obligation to pay the money. I have the relevant letters here.

Nothing happened. Three or four years later, the Morogoro shoe factory folded, as did a lot of other publicly sponsored industries in Tanzania. That was the Ujamaa era of protected import substitution in the country. The industry became unviable and collapsed. The Tanzanian Government accepted that they had to take responsibility for what remained, and decided to settle relations with creditors, who included Mr. Patel. The Foreign Office is in possession of letters to that effect. The Tanzanian Government, effectively, nationalised their liabilities and undertook to pay them.

The letter confirming that undertaking dates back to 1994, but still nothing was paid. In the mid-1990s, Mr. Patel had not been paid the £100,000, and the accumulating interest on that sum, which he was owed. He estimated the interest owing to him at £375,000.

Lest anyone think that Mr. Patel was some sort of usurer, I must stress that he was paying interest on the UK loan with which he had financed the transaction. Those interest payments were a lot higher than the interest that he would extract, as a creditor, from Tanzania.

Mr. Patel became extremely frustrated. He went to his local MP, my predecessor, Toby Jessel. Jessel wrote a strong and effective letter to the Foreign Office, which then took up the matter with Baroness Chalker. She met Tanzanian Ministers, who wrote letters to the Tanzanian Government, and for a while it seemed that something was going to happen.

In 1996, however, a very strange but important episode took place. Although it represents a slight detour, it helps to explain how we have got to where we are. Thirteen years after the original deal, the Tanzanian Government finally agreed that they must pay Mr. Patel his £100,000. They duly paid the cheque—unfortunately, to the wrong Mr. Patel. My constituent is Mr. M. R. Patel, but the cheque was made out to Mr. Chantilal Patel, the chairman of a Tanzanian company called Globe Mercantile.

I generally subscribe to what might be called the cock-up theory of history, and people may say that the fact that there are so many people called Mr. Patel means that such a mistake is easily understood. However, this was no mistake: this was a case for which the conspiracy theory of history is valid.

When documents were produced, it emerged that an elaborate fraud had been perpetrated. A letter was unearthed from an address in Twickenham—a false address that was nothing to do with Mr. M. R. Patel—that purported to authorise the payment of money from the Tanzanian Government to the fraudulent company, Globe Mercantile, which was owned by Mr. Chantilal Patel. The cheque was paid fraudulently.

Fortunately, Mr. M. R. Patel realised what had happened. He alerted the British high commission, who informed the Tanzanian Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and suggested that the simple way of dealing with the matter was to freeze the account of Globe Mercantile, which was in a Tanzanian state bank. For very odd reasons, the Tanzanian Government never took action, which has led to the suspicion that rather more was involved than the fraudulent Mr. Patel. None the less, the money was never paid to my Mr. Patel. It remained in Tanzania and probably at some point disappeared into a bank account overseas.

The importance of that episode was that Mr. Patel effectively lost his claim on the principal because the Tanzanians, to this day, have never accepted that that money was diverted. Mr. Patel has more or less written off that money. He has been told that if he wants the money he must pursue a legal action in Tanzania against the phoney company. He lacks the resources to do so, so he has accepted that, effectively, he has lost the principal.

That was where I came in, as the new Member of Parliament in 1997. Mr. Patel had lost £100,000 as a result of a fraud, but he still had the possibility of obtaining some payment from the Tanzanian Government in respect of the accumulated interest. We continued to pursue that claim through the Minister's

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two predecessors, who were very effective, but we ran into an impasse. Tanzania had serious debt problems and a lack of foreign exchange. It pleaded that it could not afford to pay, even though it realised that Mr. Patel was in distress.

The problem drifted on until 2000, when there was a flurry of correspondence, in which the Tanzanian authorities accepted for the first time that they would, in principle, pay interest. They said that they would settle part of the claim through the interest payments. Mr. Patel initially suggested a 10 per cent. interest rate. He was actually paying much more to his bank in the United Kingdom, but he would have accepted 10 per cent. The Tanzanians said that that was too much. He then said that he would accept 7.5 per cent. for most of the amount and 5 per cent. for the rest. The Tanzanians said that that was too much. Mr. Patel finally settled, agreeing that the whole claim should be settled on the basis of a specific cut-off date and a 5 per cent. interest charge. That was accepted in correspondence in the middle of 2000.

What has happened since then? Nothing. That is why I have called the debate. Here was a claim long since outstanding. It was very convoluted, but at least there was some transparency and some agreement on the principles of a settlement, which had never been made.

I am asking the Minister to help us point the way forward. There has been a vast amount of correspondence; the file that I have with me contains only a small part of it. I am sure that the Foreign Office has an even bigger file. I am not sure that much more can be achieved by endlessly sending letters backwards and forwards. I believe that, probably, senior officials in the Tanzanian Ministry of Finance and Economic Development are genuinely trying to come to a conclusion on the problem. They seem to be honourable people, and Mr. Patel certainly is an honourable person. I am looking to the Foreign Office to find a way through the mess.

It may be that the sensible answer is that, the next time that a senior Tanzanian official from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs visits London, which I imagine that they do quite often, we should try to get round a table with them and agree a final payment solution, to resolve the problem finally. It does not reflect well on the Tanzanian authorities that the last 20 years of my constituent's life have been destroyed by this case. There is now a possibility of resolving it. I appeal publicly to the Minister to help us through the final stage of this very long and difficult case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): For the second time this morning, I welcome the Minister to Westminster Hall.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) for proposing the subject for debate. I congratulate him on his interest in the case and on the hard work that he has done to represent his constituent. I also acknowledge the work put in by his predecessor, the former Member for Twickenham, Toby Jessel.

We sympathise greatly with Mr. Patel's situation. It is an extremely sad story, as you have just heard, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are aware of the financial difficulties that the delay in settling payment has caused the hon. Gentleman's constituent and the resulting anxiety for Mr. Patel and his family.

I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kind words about the efforts that the Foreign Office has made to settle the case. Officials from the Foreign Office and the British high commission in Dar es Salaam have been involved in Mr. Patel's case since 1993. They have regularly written and spoken to the Tanzanian Ministry of Finance and Economic Development about Mr. Patel's claim. They have also forwarded correspondence from Mr. Patel to the Ministry. Since 1993, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been in regular contact with Mr. Patel by letter, telephone and meetings. We have also been in correspondence with the hon. Gentleman and his predecessor about the claim, and a succession of Ministers has raised Mr. Patel's case with the Tanzanian high commissioner in London, the Tanzanian Minister of Finance and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, in 1996 and 1997 the Tanzanian Government made two payments to settle the principal amount owed for the goods. However, as he said—he will forgive me if I cover some of the same ground, but I think it important to place on record the Government's view of events—the payments were made to a company in Dar es Salaam that had previously acted as Mr. Patel's agent. Mr. Patel still has not received any of that money.

In making those payments to a third party, the Tanzanian Government acted on what they believed to be instructions from Mr. Patel. However, Mr. Patel says that the letter of instruction was a forgery, and the hon. Gentleman has reinforced that statement. The Tanzanian Government consider that they acted in good faith and that they have paid off the principal debt. Since 1996, we have advised Mr. Patel to take legal action against his former local representative to recover that money.

As the hon. Gentleman says, Mr. Patel is now pursuing a claim for the interest due on the unpaid principal sum from April 1982 to 1996, the agreed cut-off point for the debt. Mr. Patel calculated that at a rate of 10 per cent. per annum, giving a total claim of £387,110. In April 2000, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development wrote to Mr. Patel, stating that a 10 per cent. rate of interest was too high and requesting that they agree a rate of 5 per cent. instead. Mr. Patel responded in May 2000, suggesting a rate of 7.5 per cent. from 1982 to 1996, plus an additional four years—1996 to 2000—at a rate of 5 per cent.

The Ministry replied on 11 August 2000, reminding Mr. Patel of the agreed cut-off date. It did not refer to his suggested 7.5 per cent. rate for the pre cut-off period. Mr. Patel replied to the Ministry on 5 September, confirming that he would drop his claim for interest from 1996 to 2000. That left his claim for 1982 to 1996 at 7.5 per cent. per annum—a total of £277,374. Since then, there has been no response from the Ministry. It has not accepted Mr. Patel's calculations or agreed that it owes him that amount.

Regrettably, Mr. Patel's situation is not unique. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office receives many requests for help from people who have a claim against foreign Governments following a commercial transaction, property dispute or pension entitlement. As we have seen with Mr. Patel, such cases can drag on for many years. Often the delay is not the result of a deliberate attempt to obstruct the claim or deny the claimant's legal rights. It may simply be the result of a lack of capacity in the local administration to address the issues raised by a specific claim, or of an inadequate legal framework.

However much we sympathise with Mr. Patel's situation, I am afraid that there is now little more that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office can undertake to do. The matter is essentially a private dispute between Mr. Patel and the Tanzanian authorities over a commercial debt. Her Majesty's Government have no formal standing to intervene in cases of that nature.

In addition, Tanzania is one of several poor countries that have been unable to repay their debt. The enhanced heavily indebted poor countries initiative—for which Tanzania qualified in April 2000—stipulates that all creditors, bilateral, multilateral and commercial, should provide debt relief on comparable terms. The United Kingdom Government strongly support that principle, which is essential if Tanzania is to exit the shadow of debt and fulfil its commitment to tackling the extreme poverty that exists in the country. Unfortunately, there is no reason why Mr. Patel's claim could be considered to fall outside the remit of the HIPC initiative.

Britain and Tanzania have an excellent and warm bilateral relationship. We share historic Commonwealth ties and have similar interests in the Great Lakes region and east Africa, such as their stability, security and economic growth. Tanzania is a major recipient of United Kingdom development assistance—about £65 million in this financial year.

It is regrettable that Mr. Patel has had to experience such a delay and so much anxiety in his efforts to secure payment from the Government of Tanzania. However, I hope that the hon. Member for Twickenham understands the United Kingdom Government's position. Achieving substantial debt relief for the poorest, most highly indebted countries is a key objective for the Government. Now that Tanzania has been granted debt relief under the HIPC initiative, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office can no longer continue to push the Government of Tanzania to pay Mr. Patel. However, we always remain happy to pass on correspondence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We thank the Minister for his reply. That brings this debate to an end. As the hon. Member and Minister involved in the next debate are not present, I suspend the sitting until 1 o'clock.

12.51 pm

Sitting suspended.

MOD Site Disposals

1 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) to introduce his debate, I welcome the Secretary of State for Defence to the Chamber. He will respond to the debate and his presence is a recognition of the important role of Westminster Hall.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): We are part of an august Assembly, so we shall act responsibly. When I secured this Adjournment debate, I did not realise that I would be asking questions directly of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, I welcome him to the Chamber. I hope that some of my general comments will be useful for the future.

I intend to concentrate on two sites that are partly within my constituency and that draw many of their work force from it. Lessons can be learned from what happened in both cases. The two sites are RAF Quedgeley, which is on the outskirts of Gloucester, and MOD Aston Down, which is midway between Cirencester and Stroud.

The two cases illustrate the problems that have occurred when sites are closed and how the work forces are deleteriously affected by that. I hope that we can consider some recompense for them, but I particularly want to look to the future so that we can improve matters. I also hope to draw some general conclusions.

I realise that we are dealing with legal matters and that it is not entirely within the power of even the Secretary of State for Defence to deal with all the issues involved. However, these cases provide a useful example. I have been wrestling with the problems for a considerable time. In fact, after my election to the House, the action group from RAF Quedgeley was among the first groups to see me to complain about what had happened to its members.

I wish to consider four key elements. First, I shall provide some of the background, but I do not want to consider it in great detail, because the Ministry of Defence knows exactly what happened and will have its own views. Secondly, I shall consider the implications for the employees and, thirdly, what the MOD could and should do in the future. Finally, I shall pull the strands together by considering how we can move forward.

RAF Quedgeley was an equipment supply depot on the outskirts of Gloucester and, before 1984, the base was fully staffed by people employed directly by the MOD. As a result of changes to contracts, a contract was awarded in 1984 to SERCO, a private contractor, and it had responsibility for the site for some time.

The point of dispute is the basis on which the redeployment of the employees was engineered. I accept that the issue has been gone over with a fine-toothed comb by those who have considered the legal arguments. It has gone all the way to the House of Lords and a judgment was made not just on this case, but on the way in which the previous Government had, in a number of instances, misunderstood or deliberately got wrong the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and the subsequent acquired rights directive.

[Mr. David Drew]

In 1990, the site returned to the direct employment of the MOD, but contractual obligations meant that the work force were disadvantaged because they were not taken on as full-time employees of the MOD. They had a contractual arrangement and, when the closure of RAF Quedgeley was announced in the 1990s, they lost some of their rights. They have campaigned ever since to demand the restitution of those rights and to ask for an apology given that a legal statement makes it clear that what happened to them was wrong. There is no dispute about that.

I draw particularly on the evidence of Mr. Deryck Waterhouse who is one of the leading advocates in the RAF Quedgeley action group. The argument is that people were disadvantaged because it was not possible to right the wrongs that they had experienced. I am aware that the case went to the House of Lords and that the judgment was that nothing much could be done. My right hon. Friend is a lawyer, so he will know better than me that there have been precedents.

I became involved in the case and contacted the Treasury solicitor. She argued that, because the case fell outside the six-year rule, it was not possible to obtain recompense. She also argued that those involved had been compensated in any event so recompense would probably not have led to them being any better off. However, the difficulty is that we do not know what would have happened and, because people returned to work at the site as contractually employed employees, they were placed at a disadvantage when RAF Quedgeley closed. Although I cannot dispute the Treasury solicitor's legal opinion, I not sure whether in moral terms the employees are no worse off than they would have been.

The case at the MOD site at Aston Down is more recent and took place under this Government. I was placed in the unfortunate position of having been told that the strategic defence review meant that the site would be kept open. However, a year later I was told that it would close, and that left a rather bad taste in my mouth. I had met the unions—mainly representatives of the Transport and General Workers Union—on a number of occasions to assure them that the site was safe for the immediate future, but the decision to close it was then taken.

The site was largely used for the storage of munitions and spares, but the common feature that it has with RAF Quedgeley is that SERCO has been involved in its running. Supposedly, SERCO had made a bid for the work at the site only for that bid to be turned down. However, I, as an innocent bystander, believed that that site could continue to operate even if it were not owned by the MOD. That would have ensured the continuing employment of the work force. Once the site's closure was announced, despite the good work of the rapid response team in helping to re-employ those losing their jobs, many people did not find suitable employment. The 80 employees feel rather let down.

My right hon. Friend will know whether there have been similar cases elsewhere, but the closures of those two sites were not handled with the sensitivity that should have been shown. A moral issue relates to the way in which the employees were treated, and the employment tribunal and the courts became involved. Although the courts have arrived at a judgment, the Government must be seen to be transparent and cleaner than clean in the way in which they treat the work force. People from both sites are disenchanted. Those from RAF Quedgeley, such as Deryck Waterhouse, are continuing to campaign. They realise that it is a moral case. They do not blame the Government for the decision, because they were not in power at the time, but they think that they could right a wrong.

In the case of Aston Down, I have drawn on the work of Alan Beale, who was employed there. It is thought that much more could have been done. The authorities should have been more honest and open with the work force by explaining the basis on which a deal with SERCO was possible, if at all. I have put parliamentary questions to that effect and asked Ministers in the Ministry of Defence about that. Indeed, I met the former Minister of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), to clarify the situation. I knew that it had been decided to close Aston Down, but I wanted to get the ground rules clear. If there was a way to get the site taken on by another organisation and to allow its employees to have continuous employment, I wanted to ensure that we sorted that out, but nothing much seemed to happen. The message was that that was not possible. Apparently, there was no reason to pursue that course of action because there was an argument over the value of the site and of the work. That left me in a difficult position.

Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State consider the implications of the decisions? Can he reassure me about the way in which we handle such problems? Such matters will arise again and there is no point pretending otherwise. We have to rationalise what we have available and ensure that the right services are in the right place and that the right people are doing that work. In so doing, however, we have to handle the issues with great sensitivity. We must consider the legal implications and we must learn from the fact that the previous Government got it wrong in the case of RAF Quedgeley. If people are to be dismissed, we must ensure that they have the appropriate packages. That is not just a financial consideration. We need to retrain and give people the opportunity to find similar employment, which might be on other sites. Again, it was argued that the work force at both sites was weak and they were not able to access work within other Ministry of Defence establishments. That comment is much felt by the work force.

On a more general matter, has the MOD such a thing as a protocol on how it goes about closing a site and dealing with the work force? It might be that the work force is subcontracted, because that is the way of the world, but the process needs to be more transparent and open. The debate is opportune, not only with regard to the two sites that concern me. I am sure that the problem has arisen elsewhere, and we have to do more. I have highlighted the relationship with SERCO. I do not intend to go off at a tangent, but as it is such an important provider of services for the MOD, I hope that it is brought into the loop. It was involved in both cases and will probably be involved if such circumstances arise at other sites.

The issue is one of fairness and morality. It is also about putting good, practical considerations into place. The decisions could have been handled better and the work force in both cases feel hurt. We can learn lessons from that and I hope that my right hon. Friend will address that, not just in the historical context, but in terms of today and the future.

1.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I begin by congratulating you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and your colleagues on your new positions.

I am pleased to be here to respond to the debate. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on securing it. He raises concerns about the Ministry of Defence's policy on site closures and disposals, and how those can affect civilian employees. I hope that my remarks will set out clearly the processes that the MOD now follows, and address the points that my hon. Friend makes. I shall also deal with Mr. Deryck Waterhouse, who was formerly employed at RAF Quedgeley. He has exchanged letters with the Ministry over a number of years and I am well acquainted with his claims.

The relevant facts are that until September 1984, the management of the storage activities carried out at Quedgeley was undertaken by Ministry of Defence civil servants. It was then contracted out to a private company, SERCO. At the time, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981—known as TUPE—were thought not to apply. More than 200 MOD staff were made redundant and then re-engaged or subsequently recruited by SERCO to do largely the same work.

In 1990, the work was again put out to competition and was brought back in-house. Again, the TUPE provisions were not thought to apply. Thus the staff involved were made redundant by SERCO and re-employed by the MOD on fixed-term appointments. Subsequently, as a result of the "Options for Change" review, it was decided to rationalise the RAF's equipment supply depots, with the effect that RAF Quedgeley ceased operations as a depot on 31 March 1996. It finally closed on 31 March 1997.

Before dealing with the details of Mr. Waterhouse's case, I shall say something about the process by which MOD sites are closed and disposed of. It is, of course, a major decision to close or change the role of a site. It may have long-standing connections with a local community and provide employment for members of it. If it is decided that a site should be retained for use by another service or by a different part of the MOD, the Department would try to ensure that as many former members of staff were re-employed as possible. If the site is to be closed and disposed of, it is the Department's usual practice to undertake an extensive staff preference exercise to establish whether individuals would wish to transfer to a new location or be redeployed locally. I can assure my hon. Friend that every effort is made to find people alternative postings within the Department and to minimise the need for redundancies. I shall ensure that such a difficult issue is handled sensitively and sensibly.

Any individual who is made redundant is, of course, fully compensated in accordance with the terms of the civil service compensation scheme. Highly experienced consultants are made available to help individuals review and assess their skills, achievements, priorities and ambitions for the future. Advice is also provided on self-employment options, planning for retirement and financial matters.

I should also like to make it clear that the MOD is fully committed to a policy of consultation with civilian personnel on all issues that are likely to affect them. It is routine to involve the recognised trades unions from the outset in any study, investigation or proposal that might lead to a change in a site's use, right through to the final implementation of the decision. There is a general principle to consult the recognised trade unions and staff associations in the following circumstances: first, when proposals are still at a formative stage; secondly, to provide adequate information at all times; thirdly, to give the trade unions sufficient time to respond; and, fourthly, to consider carefully and conscientiously all the points made before a final decision is reached. Once that final decision has been reached, consultation, especially on sensitive personnel questions, continues throughout the implementation process.

On the transfer of MOD staff to the private sector, the Department signed a groundbreaking agreement with the Confederation of British Industry, the Defence Manufacturers Association, the Business Services Association and the trades unions as long ago as 1998. That code aims to provide clarity on the application of the TUPE regulations; to maintain the integrity of the contractual process and equity of treatment between different bidders; to provide reassurance to MOD staff that issues concerning their transfer and future employment are fully addressed; and to enable the transfer of staff between the employer to be as smooth as possible.

It is important that we identify as early as possible whether TUPE is to be applied. Nowadays, it is generally assumed that TUPE will apply if there is a transfer of significant assets or of a major part of the work force. Non-TUPE bids are considered only if they are properly justified. Indeed, bidders are required to provide full information on their intentions for the work force. That might include, for instance, the way in which terms and conditions of employment, including pension arrangements, will be replicated and any proposals to amend civil service terms and conditions. Once again, the trade unions and individuals are fully consulted throughout the whole TUPE process. The code of practice has been a success and continues to enjoy the full support of industry and the trade unions. Had it been in place earlier, I am sure that the problems experienced by Mr. Waterhouse and his colleagues would not have occurred.

Turning to the problems faced by Mr. Waterhouse, it was initially—I emphasise initially—conceded at a preliminary hearing of an industrial tribunal that TUPE should have applied both in 1984 and in 1990. In January 1997, the tribunal found that the ex-employees, of whom Mr. Waterhouse is one, were entitled to compensation. However, on legal advice the MOD appealed to the employment appeals tribunal, which could not resolve the case immediately, as that, in turn, was dependent on a decision by the House of Lords. That decision was made in October 1998, when the House of Lords concluded that the fixed-term employments were valid.

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

Although I am conscious of Mr. Waterhouse's disappointment at that turn of affairs, because the decision by the House of Lords is the final word on the case, the Ministry has no proposals to provide further compensation. Indeed, because of the legal position, it would not be appropriate for it to offer further compensation. I am sorry that I can add nothing further to the details of the case.

My hon. Friend compared the process followed at Quedgeley with that followed at Aston Down. The contract for the operation of the defence storage and distribution centre at Aston Down was placed with SERCO. More recently, in April 2000, the MOD decided to close the depot in parallel with the formation of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency. That approach will result in considerable efficiencies and savings. However, the contract with SERCO was allowed to run its course until 31 March 2001, when the unit ceased operations. Stores held at Aston Down were relocated to other sites within the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, which owned Aston Down. SERCO is currently on site at Aston Down providing a site protection and security guarding service under a MOD contract sponsored by Defence Estates while the property is being marketed for disposal.

In conclusion, I shall say something about the reasons why the MOD disposes of surplus sites and the way in which it does so. Obviously, military requirements change as a result of changes in the security environment, technology and the nation's needs. Consequently, the estate occupied by the armed forces cannot, and must not, remain static, whether as barracks, storage depots, airfields and so on. The MOD does not aim to hold on to land that it does not need; it always intends to release it back on to the market so that it can be used productively by other sectors of the economy. In addition to making land available for redevelopment, the receipts which can come from disposal are of considerable benefit to the taxpayer, contributing to defraying the not inconsiderable costs of the armed forces.

When the MOD has surplus sites to dispose of, we work closely with the local planning authorities to achieve solutions which balance the needs of local communities with the taxpayers' interest in maximising the return on the sale. We seek to take a joined-up approach to align the Department's need to extract best value with the interests of other Departments. I recognise that sometimes those processes and marketing can be slow, but about 70 per cent. of all surplus sites are sold within a year of being handed over to Defence Estates, although they may occasionally be empty for some time before that happens.

As part of the strategic defence review, the Department was set a target of £700 million in estate disposal receipts over the four years to March 2002. That target was particularly challenging, given that the value of the sites identified in the review fell short of that figure. To date, receipts generated through property disposals against the £700 million target amount to over £690 million. We are therefore confident that the Department will achieve its target of £700 million by April. The sites involved range from small plots of land to airfields and are dispersed across the whole country.

The public service agreement in 2000 set a further demanding target for the Department. Defence Estates expects, however, to achieve a further £485 million from the disposal of land and property in the three years between the financial years 2001-02 and 2003-04. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that the disposals and the change that is required to meet the new challenges faced by the MOD are necessary; that process is extraordinarily beneficial for local communities, as it allows the land to be put to effective and productive use. It is obviously beneficial for the MOD as it releases financial assets that can then be used to support the rest of the Ministry's budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chamber thanks the Secretary of State for Defence for replying to the debate. Although the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell), who will initiate the next debate, is present, sadly the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), who will reply, is not, so, for the second time this morning, I must suspend the sitting in Westminster Hall until 1.30 pm.

1.25 pm

Sitting suspended.

Standard Spending Assessment (Havering)

1.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak today.

I bring this subject before hon. Members because there is a great injustice at the end of the east London corridor. Havering, the London borough in which my constituency is located, is given a raw funding deal year upon year by central Government. The coming year is no exception. Havering has consistently attracted one of the lowest levels of standard spending assessment funding, and consequently of grant per head of population, in London. That has led to massive underfunding, leaving my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) and the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer), who is not present, feeling badly let down and disadvantaged compared with their neighbours in other outer-London boroughs.

That simply cannot go on. The people of Romford and Havering deserve to be treated the same as people in every other outer-London borough. There is no excuse for their care homes, libraries, schools, parks and leisure services being so badly underfunded. We must remember that that underfunding results only from arbitrary calculations based on what bureaucrats think the borough is like, which often relates to 10-year-old census information and bears no relation to the true situation.

To demonstrate those points, I should like to consider a few examples of how the continued underfunding has had such a detrimental effect on council services and infrastructure. In the past five years, spending on libraries has been 28 per cent. less than the outer-London average, peaking at 32 per cent. in the financial year 1996-97 and slowly falling to a low of 22 per cent. for the year 1999-2000. It is now creeping back up, and the figure last year was 23 per cent. Equally, spending on highways maintenance has averaged 17 per cent. less than the outer-London average over the past three years.

I could go on, but I think that those two examples demonstrate very clearly that lower central Government funding means that Havering is unable to deliver the same service levels as comparable boroughs, which leaves the council in a difficult position: it either has to allow spending to drop even further or to tax more. So, what did the Labour council opt to do? It decided on the high-tax option, forcing local people to pay a higher proportion of the cost of local services, yet we are now told that there are also to be cuts in services.

For Havering, it is a lose-lose situation. Indeed, because of those forced increases, council tax in Havering is now the third highest in London, and a 22 per cent. increase is in the pipeline for the coming year. I shall call that difference the Havering tax, as it is levied on Havering people only because their borough is not given a fair allocation of resources from central Government. Perhaps the Minister will tell us what criteria he uses to decide the grant for Havering, which seems so utterly unfair to my constituents and the people of my borough.

I do not blame all the increases on the lack of SSA funding. A proportion of the increases stems from the waste and inefficiency of the past 12 years, during which time the Labour party has dominated our town hall in Havering. Equally, there is little doubt that if Government funding had been fairer in all those years—and, indeed, during the years of Conservative government—the tax increases would not have been so rapid.

That is not where the story ends. Not only do my constituents have to pay significantly more council tax, but the budgeted net expenditure per head still manages to be the eighth lowest in London. Indeed, Havering's budget is £12 million more than the standard spending assessment for this year, but the spending level per head of population remains low, at 27 per cent. less than the average in neighbouring authorities. So, people in Havering are awarded less per head by central Government than people in comparable boroughs. They pay more council tax than their neighbours to compensate and yet the remaining shortfall is such that spending remains very poor.

This year's SSA has brought some small and welcome changes, but it does not even begin to remedy the situation. Even though the abolition of the council tax benefit limitation scheme will save Havering taxpayers £925,000 and revision of the formula for area cost adjustment will save the council £1.4 million, Havering's SSA per head of population is still 12 per cent. less than the average for outer London and 19 per cent. less than that in our neighbouring authorities of Barking and Dagenham, Newham and Redbridge. Worse still, our total external support for 2002-03 is a massive 38 per cent. less than that of our neighbours.

Furthermore, the new settlement has done nothing to relieve the pressure on, for example, Havering's social services budget, which has a projected overspend of £1.5 million. That reflects the increasing number of children who need looking after and, therefore, the need to increase staffing levels. Indeed, the joint review of Havering social services that was conducted last year reported to the council with an action plan that required immediate funding of £950 million. I urge the Minister to do all that he can to ensure that Havering has enough funds for this most urgent of needs.

To make matters worse, my constituents feel equally aggrieved about the fact that Havering has to pay its share to the Greater London Authority and other centralised services, but takes so little back in return. Perhaps the Minister can tell us how Havering has benefited from the creation of the Greater London Authority, bearing in mind the amount that we have to pay towards its costs. Hornchurch has lost a fire engine and a police station has been closed in Collier row in my constituency.

If that is not enough, let us consider the example of the London borough grant scheme. Havering pays roughly £1 million a year into the scheme, but receives only approximately £50,000 back in local grants. The truth is that people in Havering are subsidising the rest of London. That has gone on for years and is unacceptable to me, to my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster and to everyone in my borough. We want serious and urgent action to be taken to put matters right.

[Mr. Andrew Rosindell]

What can be done? The local government finance review provides the ideal opportunity for the Government to put right the funding inequality that has disadvantaged Havering for so long. The most striking method of redressing the imbalance is changing the way in which the allocation is calculated.

The main problem is that the current calculation is based on indicators and arbitrary factors. It would be better and fairer to base it solely on population, as some calculations that the London borough of Havering has made demonstrate. From the 2001-02 SSA, the average spend per head for Havering was £855, compared with £1,161 for the neighbouring borough of Barking and Dagenham, £1,472 for Newham, and £1,027 for Redbridge. That clearly shows the appalling extent to which the people of Havering are unfairly treated.

If Havering had received the same grant per head, based on our population, as the other-London boroughs, it would have meant an extra £39.813 million, based on the Redbridge grant; £70.757 million based on Barking and Dagenham's grant; and a stunning £139.578 million based on Newham's figure. Those figures are not insignificant. They would have gone a long way towards keeping open the care homes in Romford that have had to close. They would mean that Romford town could again have a swimming pool and leisure centre, which the council closed. They would also allow the run-down parks to be returned to their former safe and pleasant state.

I look to the Minister for some assurances. Will he ensure that any review of the formula tackles the needs of the London borough of Havering? Will he personally ensure that the years of underfunding in Havering, under Labour and Conservative Governments, are redressed? Will he also examine the case for population-based funding? Lastly, will he guarantee that Havering will never be the underdog of London again?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): The hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) has sought my permission and that of the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) and of the Minister to participate in the debate. I am happy to call her.

1.42 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I congratulate my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on securing the debate, which gives us the opportunity to highlight the specific financial difficulties that the London borough of Havering experiences. Local residents are alarmed that, after an increase in council tax last year of 12.5 per cent., they now face another rise of up to 23 per cent., which is what the council would have to charge if it set a budget at current approvals plus inflation. It is going through the budget-setting procedure and considering a package of cuts to try to mitigate the increase.

The formula under which the SSA is currently calculated serves Havering badly. Unemployment and benefit take-up are low in Upminster, and we have few houses in multiple occupation. Such factors do not serve Havering well. I was under the impression that green belt affected the local government settlement. Havering council believes that too, because it has said so in a succession of local meetings. I was surprised to be told by the Minister in answer to a written question:

> "Under the current formula the amount of green belt has no direct effect on the level of grant an authority receives through the Local Government Finance Settlement."—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 714W.]

I should appreciate some clarification of that in the Minister's closing remarks.

The council has expressed its disappointment that there is no safety valve in the interim before the review of the formula in 2003. It stated:

> "We would like to see the rate of Council Tax increase over a number of years as one of the criteria for eligibility of Safety Valve Grant. Havering's cumulative percentage increase in Council Tax has been 34 per cent. higher than the outer London average, despite an extensive savings programme and the use of reserves . . . Poverty and deprivation are the prime cost drivers for need to spend on additional educational needs."

I have a specific anxiety about special educational needs. Havering is well served by three special needs schools. Until last September, there was a special needs nursery unit at Mead primary school in Harold Hill. Since September, no children have been referred to the unit, despite the great need throughout the borough. I am gravely worried about its future.

The council also stated:

> "Consideration should be given to splitting the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block so that those services, which are driven by activity rather than deprivation, such as refuse collection, waste disposal, and Concessionary Fares, are fully reflected in the formula, thereby ensuring a fairer distribution of resources."

As my hon. Friend has pointed out, Havering fares badly when compared with neighbouring boroughs. I shall not repeat the statistics and services that my hon. Friend detailed, but I want to concentrate on education. Last week, I met a group of primary school heads in Upminster. The education budget is already running at £1.4 million below SSA, and they are worried that a further cut of £1.4 million is proposed. That means that the education budget will run at £2.8 million below SSA.

The education budget constitutes the lion's share of any council's expenditure. The lion's share of any school's expenditure is its staffing budget. The teachers whom I met told me that they are worried about losing non-teaching assistants and about the maintenance of their buildings. Given the Government's total inclusion policy whereby children with special needs are placed in mainstream schools, the need for non-teaching assistants is acute. Schools need more of them, not fewer.

Another problem is the army of carers for elderly people which the council will have to find in the wake of its phased closure of elderly persons' homes. That is another budgetary device. There is a serious delayed discharge problem in the local hospitals. Some elderly patients who are no longer clinically ill need to be discharged but are too frail to return to their homes. The absence of care beds in the public and private sector means that elderly people must be cared for in their homes, which will require a large increase in the number of carers. Havering has the lowest number of carers per head of population in London.

In a debate on the local government White Paper on 11 December 2001, I asked:

> "What assistance can the Secretary of State offer . . . local authorities such as the London borough of Havering, which receive a perversely low settlement under the current system? What help can he offer the council tax payers who suffered the third highest increase in the country last year—12.5 per cent.—and who face a possible increase this year of more than 20 per cent.?

The reply was surprising. The Secretary of State said:

> "As for Havering, on any judgment the settlement announced last week is obviously generous. The local council in Havering will have to explain why it is even considering a council tax increase at the suggested level. Given the funding that is being made available and, indeed, the additional funds that may be made available as a result of the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme—which will benefit a number of local councils—the council needs to consider the level of council tax increase that it should be setting. There is no good reason for that proposed increase, as we have made clear."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 725-6.]

I would be grateful for an explanation of the difference of opinion between the local council and the Government.

1.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I congratulate the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on securing this Adjournment debate, which gives us an opportunity to debate the local government finance settlement for 2002-03. I hope that he will understand that I have a limited amount of time in which to deal with the points that he has raised today, but I shall attempt to address them in the time available.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) mentioned, in reading out an answer that she had received from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, that the overall settlement this year is another good one for local authorities. It demonstrates our commitment to investing in modern local government, and we want all councils to have the funds to improve their services while keeping to reasonable tax increases. We shall certainly work closely with local government as we consider the spending plans for 2003-04 onwards in the context of the spending review.

The debate could be conducted in terms of overall settlements, and of what the Government want to happen in local government. The hon. Gentleman asked me for a number of specific assurances about Havering, which would detach Havering from the rest of the country, in terms of a fairer and more transparent settlement for local government as a whole.

Mr. Rosindell: I was suggesting that the grant be calculated per head of population. Surely that would be consistent across the country, so how would it detach Havering from the rest of Britain?

Dr. Whitehead: I had intended to cover that point in a moment. I would caution the hon. Gentleman to beware of his wishes, because they might come true. If the formula of a simple settlement on a head of population basis were to be implemented, it would immediately strip away all the considerations that go into the SSA, which attempt to adjust the system according to a series of indicators over and above the population figure per local authority. Those considerations are currently used to adjust the amount of money that a local authority receives in grants, and affects the relation of that to its SSA.

The notion of the standard spending assessment—which was introduced by the Conservative Government at the end of the 1980s—was ferociously to equalise out the theory of what would come to local authorities in the form of grants for the provision of a standard basket of services, based on the collection of a large number of indicators for the SSA arrangement.

The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that all that should be removed, and that we should introduce a grant system calculated per head of population. If we were to do that—presumably across the whole country—he might find that Havering would lose out substantially. The formula would be adjusted nationally to take account of the shire counties and various other areas that do not have many indicators positively in their favour in terms of additional needs over and above head of population. Such areas would, therefore, get a substantially greater proportion of the overall cake in the settlement. Consequently, Havering—which has some positive indicators, but not as many as some other local authorities—could lose a substantial amount of money in that general redistribution. The hon. Gentleman would probably be rather upset about that, so I would caution him against going down that route for a local government settlement.

Mr. Rosindell: Perhaps we could see the figures.

Dr. Whitehead: It is not possible to provide exact figures; if we did, we would have to recast the entire country according to the hon. Gentleman's nostrums for the future of standard spending assessment, involving per capita distribution. Discussions that will be held over the coming year on what is a fair, just and transparent settlement will have to take account of a series of factors. If he could see the overall effect that a per head of population outcome would have nationally, I suspect that it would not be one that he would want.

The hon. Member for Upminster suggested, when referring to those formula inputs, that the existence of green belt in a borough made a difference. I can only re-emphasise what I said in my letter to her, which is that that is not a consideration when we calculate a local authority's overall SSA. There are a number of other factors, however, and the hon. Gentleman asked which ones were taken into account in Havering.

Havering does receive a lower grant increase than the London average of 1.2 per cent., because it has a steady population. It has a decrease in pupils aged five to 10 greater than the London average of 0.1 per cent. I am not saying that the settlement for Havering, or for a number of other local authorities, is absolutely perfect. I am suggesting that, as a result of a number of indicators, SSAs come out in particular ways.

The SSA system tends to have several other long-term outcomes. First, it institutionalises the effects of certain local authorities having had low budgets in the early

[Dr. Whitehead]

1990s when the SSA system was introduced. That tends to roll over as the system runs forward. Secondly, if the population of an authority stays static or decreases, it tends to cause problems for its funding because the money either does not come in or is taken away by the SSA system at a speed with which the authority may not be able to cope. For example, if there is one fewer child in a classroom—a decrease in pupils results in a decrease in grant—it is not easy to reduce the number of teachers by one twenty-ninth at the same time. Those problems are built into the SSA system.

I can confirm that the Government have announced their intention to pursue a root-and-branch review of the way in which the SSA system works, in order to introduce a new system of calculation of grants for local authorities based on a simplified, more transparent system. The new system will take into account to a greater extent an assessment of need, accurately based on what a local authority is doing. That system would come in for the next financial year.

The hon. Gentleman has already made a specific proposal, but if he or his local authority have any thoughts on aspects of the scheme, their views would be very welcome. This review is being conducted to ensure that the future system distributes the available money on a fairer, more transparent and more equitable basis. I would, however, caution hon. Members that, under such schemes, there will always be winners and losers.

One of the problems that has come my way is that a different form of SSA calculation—not related to the philosophy of how the SSA originally came about—could well be appropriate for the future, but many hon. Members have particular views about how an extension of the SSA system, or a tweaking of the indicators, might solve the problem of a local authority. I suggest that we need a system for local government that is robust, that has the confidence of local government in terms of how it works and its transparency, and that produces a just and equitable distribution of the available money. The Government are committed to doing that over the next year.

I can assure the hon. Members for Romford and for Upminster that I will take into consideration the points that they have raised about the way in which the SSA system works, and about the particular pressures on social services budgets. It is recognised nationally that such pressures exist, particularly in relation to the importation into those budgets of very large packages that might result from a court order. That can distort a social services budget when a local authority is working within a fixed budget.

The Government believe that there is a good settlement overall for 2002-03, but there will be winners and losers. The consultation period on the settlement has now passed, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that what has been submitted in writing will be carefully considered when the final settlement is announced. Indeed, Havering submitted a substantial document, "Justice for Havering", a while ago. The hon. Gentleman's remarks today have also been very valuable.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 24 January 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Walking (Towns and Cities)

[Relevant documents: Eleventh Report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee Session 2000-01, HC 167-1, and the Government's response thereto, CM 5277.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

2.30 pm

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this debate on the Select Committee's report on walking in towns and cities. I record my appreciation of the hard work of the other members of the Committee, of the Clerk and all the other people in the Clerk's Department who helped us to prepare it. In particular, I thank our advisers, Tim Pharaoh and Rodney Tolley, who gave us a great deal of advice during our inquiry.

This inquiry was part of the Select Committee's continuing work in the last Parliament. We looked into all the issues around urban renaissance, such as allotments, parks, cemeteries and public spaces, and the urban White Paper. Returning to walking was another opportunity for us to look at all the issues surrounding the public environment.

A contradiction has developed in the past 40 years, in that many of us can say that we have become much more a part of a global village. We have friends and acquaintances all over the world yet many of us know little about the people who live down our street. Our lives have become more fragmented; work, shopping and leisure activities all take place increasingly further apart.

The fragmentation of our lives works perfectly well, but only up to a point, and that is the crucial issue. Such fragmentation places extreme demands on resources. Air travel guzzles up fuel, and along with car travel, it is a major cause of global warming. Furthermore, a lot of people are excluded from that global village and the fragmentation of our daily lives is inefficient.

I would argue that the key is to start reassembling the urban environment to reduce the amount of travel that people have to do. Is it really necessary that people have to travel 30 or 40 miles at the weekend to go to a country park, so that they can stroll for 15 minutes, because the local park is in such an appalling state? Do we really need to have people travelling along a traffic-snarled motorway to get to some out-of-town shopping centre because we have destroyed the local high street? Do we want to have out-of-town cemeteries or crematoriums because the space in local cemeteries has been used up? Is it logical for people to drive to a fitness centre to walk on a treadmill because the local street is covered in dog fouling and litter, and it is such a yucky place that people do not want to walk there? Once we start thinking about those issues, it is really a question of putting our environment back together. Once we start talking about putting our environment back together, we see that walking is a central issue.

Let us face it—walking is efficient. For journeys up to half a mile, it is quicker than almost anything else, even the bicycle. If one takes into account the time that it takes to get the bicycle out and then lock it up, walking is more efficient for short journeys. Walking is very cheap. I suppose that one has to pay eventually for the shoe leather, but apart from that it costs nothing. Walking is also available the instant one wants it. There is no question of queuing for the bus or having to wait; it is right there. Walking is efficient.

Probably the most important thing for our inquiry was the reminder to everyone that walking is healthy. One of the worst public health problems in this country is the number of people who suffer from heart disease yet we are told that one of the best ways of preventing heart disease is to have two 15-minute walks a day. That is a relatively short walk, but it will do more to improve health and keep heart disease at bay than almost anything else.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I know that the hon. Gentleman sets a good example because he walks a great deal for leisure. Will he tell us how far his Committee walked during the inquiry?

Andrew Bennett: I can surprise the hon. Gentleman; the Committee visited Europe and the members were very good. They walked a substantial amount. One or two members of the Committee are not built for walking, but some of the members walked a considerable distance. Although it is easy for MPs to cast stones at others, the way in which the Palace of Westminster is laid out encourages walking. The distance that an MP walks in the building during the day is surprising. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Committee walked a substantial distance while considering the issues.

Walking is healthy, and it is educational. If one goes into the centre of London and walks about, one can see a marvellous collection of stones and rocks that have been used in the buildings. It is an opportunity to have a walking geology lesson. Couch potatoes could watch "Changing Rooms" or "Ground Force", or they could walk around the neighbourhood and stare without too much trouble into other people's front rooms and see what colour of decoration they have, look at the work that they are doing in their gardens, and talk to them as well. Walking is an enjoyable and social activity.

The Committee discovered that during recent years, walking had declined as an activity. It has decreased by 13 per cent. during the past 15 years. I have some reservations about the figures. If I travel to the local hardware shop, I will walk for about a quarter of a mile, there and back. If I tick a statistical box, that counts as a walking trip. However, if I travel to B&Q by car, that counts as a car journey. However, when I arrive at B&Q, unless I am lucky, I find a substantial number of other cars in the car park, and by the time that I have walked across the car park, and then up and down the aisles, I have probably walked further than I did to the hardware shop. I am sceptical about the figures. It is standard for a Select Committee to ask for better statistics, but it would be helpful if we had more information.

[Andrew Bennett]

However, there is obvious evidence that walking is declining. For most parents and grandparents, it is a tremendous thrill to see their 16-month-old child making those first stuttering steps across the carpet. Most youngsters have learned to walk efficiently by the age of two. The trouble is that, by the time they are five or six, they have decided that walking is not fashionable, and that the best thing to do is to persuade parents to ferry them around in cars to school, to see their friends, to parties and everywhere else.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): The nub of the matter is that in parents' eyes it is safer to drive the children to school than to let them walk. Is that not one of the areas that we looked at?

Andrew Bennett: It certainly is. In fact, the next point on my list is the urban environment. Too often, it is a hostile jungle for walkers—adults and, even more so, youngsters. Sadly, in this country, there are about 10 deaths from road accidents each day, and a large proportion of the victims are pedestrians. We should work much harder to make the urban environment safe for children and adults.

In far too many areas, there are narrow pavements and railings. We cannot do it this afternoon—we are not allowed to—but it would be interesting for us all to walk towards the abbey and watch people crossing the road. They have to go through a series of pens and are allowed to cross only one bit at a time, supposedly for their safety. We should also remember that, while people are corralled in pens, waiting to cross the road, they are subject to the worst of diesel and petrol fumes. Whether young children are in a pram or holding an adult's hand, their heads are almost exactly at the level of the exhaust pipes.

What can be done to encourage walkers and reclaim the urban environment for them? One of the most important initiatives is pedestrianisation. It is possible to carry out successful pedestrianisation schemes that would make the urban environment in town centres much more attractive. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) asked how far the Committee had walked. One of the places that we visited was Milan. On a very cold day, the Committee walked a substantial distance through the centre of Milan in a pedestrianised area. Traffic going from one side of the city to the other is completely cut out. The city also has pedestrianised areas in some local neighbourhoods.

If it is possible for a city such as Milan to have a pedestrianised core, why not London? After great fanfare, the Mayor of London's plan for a pedestrianised area from the National Gallery to Parliament has been watered down to merely removing the buses from the front of the National Gallery. Just think how it would have changed the centre of London to be able to walk in a pedestrianised area from the National Gallery, across Trafalgar square and down Whitehall to Parliament. At present, Parliament square is a barren area.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such a scheme would make it very difficult for Ministers' cars to get to the Houses of Parliament?

Andrew Bennett: There is a simple solution—let Ministers walk. It would be perfectly reasonable for the Prime Minister to come out of Downing street and walk to Westminster. I suspect that it would be as efficient as using a car. Of course, there is the slight problem of Members of Parliament getting their cars into the car park, but such problems are solved in other cities. Parliament square, which is no more than a grotty roundabout, could be opened up. We could have stone paving in the centre of it.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I speak as someone who regularly commutes by rail to Westminster. In defence of the Prime Minister, there are security concerns around his walking in central Westminster. However, the hon. Gentleman makes a fascinating point, and I hope that the Minister will make a commitment to give up his car and walk between his Department and Westminster.

Andrew Bennett: I will not push the Minister. However, Parliament square could be an attractive place for people. At present, I do not think that anyone would argue that it is. We could have one or two pavement cafés. Perhaps a café on one corner could do Speaker's teas and one on the other corner could do Lord Chancellor's cream teas.

There can be some humour about these matters, but if we start to look to develop pedestrianised areas, we can make them attractive. A large number of cities across Europe have pedestrianised areas. Why not here? People tell me that one of the reasons why we cannot pedestrianise areas and have pavement cafés and such attractions is the climate in Britain; that it rains too much. That is nonsense. Some of the pavement cafés in big cities in Europe are in wetter and colder places than London, but they still thrive. It is an attitude. I suggest that pedestrianisation can work. The Select Committee heard some good evidence from Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and York that pedestrianisation schemes work, that the local population and visitors like them and that they encourage walking.

To a certain extent, we were pleased with the Government's response to the report. One of the issues is guidance on crossings. I plead with the Minister to look more carefully into giving clear guidance to local authorities on complicated zig-zag crossings. They are expensive, discouraging to walkers and they do not improve safety. We must do more about getting youngsters to use their feet and walk. There have been some successes such as walking buses, in which a group of parents collect children and bring them to school on foot, but a great deal more could be done.

We must make sure that the streets are safer. Fear of crime is part of the problem. The best way to get over it is to make sure that there is not one isolated person but lots of people walking down the street. That creates the feeling that it is safer. Apart from on very crowded streets where there may be pick-pocketing, it makes walking far safer on the whole.

We would like the Government to commit to a national walking strategy. They could edge in that direction. I know that some Ministers claim that they do not want to be known as the Minister for silly walks, but that is a defensive position—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The parrot sketch.

Andrew Bennett: I am not sure whether all these comments are going on the record and who is going to be the dead parrot.

When the Committee published its report and some of the evidence, there was some sad feeling about conflict between walkers and cyclists. It seems sad that two groups who do not do well out of the transport strategy in this country should almost be at war.

The hon. Member for Cotswold asked where the Committee went. One of the places was Ferrara—an interesting example of a city which has squeezed out the motor car. It is virtually entirely pedestrianised, with cobbled streets, and cyclists and walkers get on together perfectly well. One member of the Committee could comfortably have been riding a bicycle and would not have looked out of place. I make a plea to walkers and cyclists in urban areas in Britain to get on with each other rather than be in conflict.

One of the problems is that a lot of local authorities have given a low priority to walking so there is a lack of skilled people within local authorities to promote walker-friendly street design. I hope that the Minister can tell us something about what the Government are doing to encourage the development of skills and best practice in local authorities.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am not sure whether this matter was covered in the report, but it is important. We must always ensure that pedestrians are properly consulted about traffic calming schemes. There are some areas in which such schemes have become highly controversial and motorists see them as totally negative departures. In such cases, the pedestrian loses both ways. Traffic calming schemes have been changed or ripped up but, more important, we often do not consider from the outset how much safer an area should be for the pedestrian. The relevant authorities must ensure that they listen to pedestrians as well as drivers.

Andrew Bennett: Is it important for the authorities not only to listen to pedestrians but to ensure that they have people with expertise who understand walking. One problem seems to be that local authorities are pushed into big schemes. Expenditure on big bypasses or roads is seen as a priority to which staff will pay much attention, while smaller changes that would make walking more attractive are ignored. We must ensure that local authorities can examine and aggregate a series of schemes in their transport strategies and realise that improving facilities for walkers may be much better value for money than a big scheme.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman has been generous in giving way and is making a thoughtful and serious speech. Does he agree that local planning officers often pay great attention to the number of car parking spaces in new developments but completely ignore the pedestrian? Crime, particularly at night, is a problem, and there are many innovative ways involving architecture by which the risk could be reduced for walkers.

Andrew Bennett: I accept that, and it is important to consider such developments in the round and ensure that it is easy for people to walk to and from them.

I could go through the list of recommendations in the report, but it would not be helpful. I hope that the majority of hon. Members have read the report, and anyone who has not can find it on the Committee website. I commend the report and hope that we hear the Government telling us that they will give higher priority to the encouragement of walking.

2.52 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I apologise for being a couple of minutes late at the start.

I speak as a member of the Select Committee, but one who was appointed to it after the report was completed and it became the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee rather than the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee. The report is valuable and important, and makes some salient points. I am sorry not to have been around for the inquiry, particularly as I did not have the opportunity to walk round Milan and other cities with the Committee's members.

The report is important for many reasons. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) referred to a variety of issues, including health. As we have seen from many recent reports, obesity and lack of exercise are becoming particular problems in this country, and ones to which I plead at least partially guilty. The lessons in the report are well taken by both Committee members and those outside the House.

As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to raise the issue of health and the contribution that walking can make. Recent statistics show that one in five of the population is officially classified as obese and that obesity is directly linked to several serious and life-threatening illnesses. Tackling the problem will be a fundamental part of improving the quality of health of our society as a whole, and walking is undoubtedly one way of doing that. Our time is precious, we all live in busy environments, and many people have substantial work or family commitments. In a world where sports facilities, such as a gym, are often not close to hand during the routine day, walking has a crucial role to play in improving public health. The charity Weight Concern said recently that Britons could be described as

"the fat people of Europe."

In that context the report is very welcome. It is a timely reminder to the Government and the people of this country of the role that walking can play.

I want to pick up on a number of recommendations in the report. The report is right to cite the changes that have taken place in our urban and suburban environments over the past 30 or 40 years as a significant factor in reducing the amount that people walk. If one looks at the developments that took place in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, it is clear that communities were built around the car. One simply has to look at the way that towns such as Milton Keynes, Warrington and others have been laid out to understand what a driving force the car was in the development of those communities. In later years we have all come to realise that that cannot be the only driver of community development.

Three or four years ago, I went regularly on business to Detroit, and I was struck by the fact that it was almost impossible to cross the road on foot. To go to the shopping mall across the road from the office, one had

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little choice but to drive, even though it was only a few hundred yards. In this country we would not have thought twice about making that journey on foot. There it was impossible, given the domination of the car in the environment. It would be wrong for future community development in Britain to allow the car to be as dominant as it has been. Equally, we would be wrong to develop without thought for the motor car. As in all things, a proper balance must be struck.

The realisation that the motor car cannot be the only factor in generating community development is one of the reasons why we have seen a change of emphasis over the past 15 years in a number of areas. There has been a resurgence of interest in the railways and in travelling by train, and in the early 1990s trams were reintroduced for a first time in a generation. It is also the reason why walking and access to walking has to be a priority in future developments in our society.

The ability to walk to a local centre is an important part of the development of a new area. An area of new housing has been built to the west of Epsom over the past seven years. It was planned 20 years ago. Residents are profoundly unhappy: effectively a number of linked housing estates have been built on the fringes of Epsom and they want a heart to their community. At the moment there is a debate about the construction of a primary school, but they need more than that. Communities of a substantial size—that one will eventually comprise 5,000 people—need access to a small local shopping centre, public amenities and a general practitioner's surgery. We must learn from what has been done in the past. We must build centres that people can walk to and walk around, as well as simply creating drop-in points for cars. Everyone in those new communities says that they want that and we would be foolish to ignore them.

Given all that, why are the Government taking their current approach to planning? They are enforcing the construction of up to a million new houses in the south-east over the next 15 to 20 years. Similar developments are taking place all around the country, such as an area near to where my family lives in Cheshire, and in the west country. When the plans are turned into real construction sites, the impetus for constructing houses tends to come from developers who buy parcels of land that they eventually push through for development. Local planners sometimes look around until they find the least controversial option for new housing developments. The proposals create the prospect of planning being imposed from the centre. Where is the strategy to create new communities that would support people walking around them rather than driving from centre to centre? Where is the strategy to create an environment that supports walking in small communities? The report rightly states that new housing developments have been and continue to be constructed at the edge of towns or villages at densities too low to support local services. The proposed new housing for the next 15 years will worsen that situation. I hope that the Government, even at this stage, will change their approach to planning and think more about the community implications of their proposals. I hope that the Minister takes that message back to his colleagues.

We need to encourage community development that creates an environment in which people will walk. We also need to concentrate future developments in places where development is integrated with existing communities or creates new communities. The possibility of strengthening village communities, as well as creating new ones, has always existed. Development regenerates areas of our cities; we should not simply build over green land but should bring people back into the heart of the cities, giving them communities around which they can walk and of which they can be part. Doing so will prevent the threat of green areas disappearing and being swamped by increased traffic levels. However, I fear that we will continue with the process that the Committee rightly highlighted of pock-marking new developments around the south-east without any community strategy.

The report also looked at the implications for walking of out-of-town shopping. We should not try to turn back the clock. Whether we like it or not, people do not want the shopping environments of 30 or 40 years ago. They do not want to carry heavy bags of shopping up and down high streets from shop to shop. They want to drive their car to a supermarket, fill the trolley with the week's shopping and drive home again. To believe otherwise is foolish. They want to go to substantial shopping environments, such as Bluewater and Lakeside. One need only look at the queues at such centres at sale times, bank holidays or even just on Saturdays, to know that we cannot go back to the traditional high street as the sole focus of shopping.

I entirely support the principle of encouraging walking, but we must not do so by chasing cars out of town centres; that is the surest way of killing town centres. I am concerned by what the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish said about pedestrianisation—not because it does not have a role to play but because it can have a devastating effect if it is done wrongly. The town centres closest to me—one in my constituency and one just outside—are Epsom and Leatherhead. Some years ago, Leatherhead pedestrianised the whole high street: since then the centre has virtually died. Indeed, the council is now looking at ways of bringing cars back into it. By contrast, Epsom has never pedestrianised its town centre. Some people complain bitterly about the volumes of traffic but Epsom is a noticeably more flourishing shopping centre than Leatherhead.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I know the town centre in Epsom well because my parents live in Epsom. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's assessment: other factors are also involved in the fact that Leatherhead is going downhill. Epsom, with its one-way system, is an unattractive environment and would benefit from a different traffic scheme, possibly pedestrianisation.

Chris Grayling: I was going to say that I believe in a well-thought-out mix of pedestrianisation. I have specific ideas about how Epsom could achieve that.

In the hon. Gentleman's borough, Sutton, the town centre integrates pedestrianisation well. However, the car is still present. The smaller centres, which endure the competition that centres such as Kingston generate, suffer when they drive the car out of the centre. I look at Leatherhead and think that that was a mistake.

When the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish says that pedestrianisation has to be the way forward, I do not fundamentally disagree, but a balance has to be struck. Pedestrianisation must give the walker greater access to town centres. The old days of walking through town centres on narrow pavements, where one falls off the edge as a bus or a flood of cars rushes past, cannot be right. To drive cars well away from the town centre would kill businesses and push the shoppers into the competing out-of-town centres.

The report is clearly critical of the Government's local transport plans, and the balance between their resourcing of those and large projects at the centre. The Select Committee said:

> "The Government has opted to fund big rather than small schemes in its 10 Year Plan, but does not know which offer the best value for money. This oversight must be addressed. We recommend that the Government ensure that in future a higher proportion of funds in Local Transport Settlements, commensurate with the importance of walking as a mode of transport, be spent on the measures put forward in the National Walking Strategy we propose."

That point was reinforced by the Civic Trust in its submission:

> "Unfortunately too much of the money made available through the Ten Year Transport Plan will be directed towards big infrastructure projects that benefit inter-urban travellers. Investment in the walking environment was given a low priority"

Those two contributions highlight the fact that a balance must be struck between major transport schemes that absorb substantial amounts of money, and locally generated smaller schemes that can make a difference to people's quality of life. Big plans grab headlines and create a sense of dynamism and momentum. The funding required to build Crossrail for London is about £5 billion. However, for the same amount of money, 20 light rail schemes could be built, and for a small proportion of that, hundreds of pedestrian and traffic improvements could be built. As the Government plan spending on transport, they should be mindful of the impact of smaller schemes.

Other barriers to walking are visible to those of us, such as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who represent urban constituencies. Fear of crime, as the report highlights, is a powerful driver of people off their feet and into cars. If we want people to walk into urban environments, we need tough action on major and minor crime. We must have zero tolerance in town centres because people will not walk around centres if they are constantly bumping into people who are drunk, urinating in the gutter, or behaving in a rowdy manner. That is particularly true of the older generation, who—perhaps wrongly—are intimidated by gangs of young people. Although we have to achieve a common-sense balance in the use of our streets, police officers reassure pedestrians, particularly the older generation, that they are walking in a safe environment.

It is a particular problem in town centres in urban areas that have become centres of entertainment as much as centres of shopping. That is certainly true in Wimbledon, where I lived before, and it is becoming true in Epsom. I imagine that it is also true in Sutton. More and more, centres are becoming a focal point for pubs, clubs and other entertainment facilities. For many centres, that is a necessary transition, because competing with big shopping outlets and big centres such as Kingston is increasingly difficult. Those centres have little option other than to diversify, but they must do so thoughtfully and avoid causing undue disruption to their communities.

Diversification can work only if local people still feel free to walk in their own town centres. That is why community policing is so important, and I pay tribute to Surrey police, who have put an increased focus on getting police on to the streets. We have excellent beat officers in Epsom town centre and around the area, and their presence is extremely important in reassuring pedestrians that they can go out and walk.

It is equally important to tackle problems such as vandalism and graffiti. Whether we are talking about people walking in town centres or down alleyways, if they are in a dirty, unkempt, vandalised and graffiti-ridden environment, they will feel uncomfortable about being there and will be driven off our streets. The Committee's report rightly points that out. The fact that street crime is rising so fast in places such as London is a real concern, even in areas that are not directly affected to the same degree as some of the city's central parts.

Mr. Donohoe: Does the hon. Gentleman concede the point that was made by the Select Committee's Chairman? If more pedestrians were around, that crime would not happen.

Chris Grayling: In making a judgment, we need to consider the reasons for the crime. Clearly, there is a chicken and egg scenario. If more people are around, there is a greater disincentive to crime, but in reality some crimes take place in broad daylight in packed town centres. I am referring to the theft of mobile phones and quick bag snatching. Street crime does not always take place down dark alleyways. In that respect, the presence and visibility of police in an urban centre is particularly important.

The report rightly points out that speed is a serious problem for pedestrians:

> "The proximity to fast-moving traffic is unpleasant for and intimidates pedestrians and it puts many people off walking altogether."

I hope that the Government will hear and take seriously that important and salient point. I hope that the Minister will take seriously the Committee's comments on danger reduction, because too often decisions about safety are taken after an accident instead of before. I want us to think about dangerous blackspots for pedestrians before, rather than after, someone is seriously injured or killed.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend may have raised one of the most important points in the debate. Is he aware that our pedestrian fatality rate of 2.2 per 100,000 walkers is the 10th worst record in Europe? Indeed, a recent report suggested that as many as a third of all deaths of boys between 10 and 14 could be attributed to accidents while walking. Clearly, traffic speed and dangerous driving are very serious issues.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend raises a significant issue, which the Select Committee will investigate

[Chris Grayling]

shortly. I hope that the Government will take careful note of the report and recommendations that arise from that particularly important investigation.

Traffic calming is not always the solution. I am particularly concerned because, under Government guidelines, speed cameras are to be installed after, rather than before, accidents have taken place. I am also concerned about some of the restrictions on highlighting speed limits. Next week, I shall introduce a ten-minute Bill to address the illegality of putting up repeater signs in 30 mph speed limits. That is nonsense, so I hope that the Government will support the Bill, which will give local authorities the right to put 30 mph speed limit repeater signs in areas where they feel that that is appropriate.

Walking requires the space to walk. One of the things that the Committee has learned in its more recent inquiry about the new planning guidelines, PPG17, is the importance of good management of our open spaces. We heard a number of items of evidence, not least that from the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), about the absence in many areas of open spaces. It is a matter of careful thought and planning to ensure that urban open spaces are there, that they are well looked after, and that they are well protected.

Like the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, I praise the many initiatives that have taken place to reduce the number of cars doing the school run. The walking buses in many parts of the country, which the hon. Member mentioned, are an admirable initiative to be commended. With the support of the Government, I also commend those local authorities, like my own in Surrey, that are investing in a new school bus scheme, based on the United States model.

Equally, we must remember that walking to school is not practical for all families. Often parents have children at different schools and have little option but to take the car in the mornings. That means that we must place in the hands of local authorities, adequate resources to make sure that provisions for proper pedestrian crossings close to schools are made for pupils. Recently, there was a tragic case in my constituency where a young girl was killed on a stretch of road that parents had raised concerns about for a number of years. Happily, that stretch of road will now have a pedestrian crossing, but it is tragic when an accident of that kind has to occur to generate the momentum to put one in place.

For a number of years, I have had concerns about cyclists in cities, who pay scant regard to pedestrians. They will go through pedestrian crossings at high speed and when the lights are against them. They will weave in and out of traffic where pedestrians are crossing the road. I would like to see a greater enforcement of our highways regulations for cyclists, as well as motorists.

The report also raised the issue of subsidies for local centres. Should we be providing support—in the way that we do in some places to village shops—to smaller local urban centres? I ask the Minister to look carefully at this issue. I know that it has been a matter of some debate in recent months, but it is the case, as all too many of the retailers in my constituency tell me, that their business rates are calculated on the same principles and the same frontage basis as the giant supermarkets. That cannot be right.

The report has revealed many issues that drive to the heart of the strength and weaknesses of today's communities. It has made a number of salient and important points. I hope that the Government will listen and take stock of this valuable contribution from the Select Committee.

3.18 pm

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I welcome the report. I was a member of the Committee, and visited those wonderful European cities. One of the things that I discovered from that visit, and also from other visits that we made within the United Kingdom, was that there is no simple solution to the problem. The Urban Affairs Sub-Committee will be looking at new towns. Although I am not on that Committee, I will no doubt want to contribute at some point. Having stayed in a new town, and having stayed in the same town before it was a new town—indeed, having stayed there since I was a young boy—I can say that the new town, even with many of the engineering feats that it created in trying to improve the lot of the pedestrian, actually went back a way. I remember as a kid going for a walk around the town every Sunday with my father. This was well before any pedestrianisation. It took three or four hours to walk around the town, and we were able to do it without any great problems. I am a standing token of the fact that I was not damaged in any way, although some might argue that I was. However, I managed to get through that period.

Since the creation of the new town, there have been problems in every respect. The shopping centre in the middle of the town was well frequented when I was a boy. There was a direct road through the middle of it, but the shops were busy and well used. The high street was pedestrianised, and today the street is dead. It is full of litter and has charity shops but nothing else.They knocked down the bridge that was a focus of attention in the town before it became a new town and built a shopping centre, which I describe as the biggest toilet in Europe, across the river. The shopping centre has been disastrous for the high street. In the past two or three years, the development of a retail park on a brownfield site has drawn the centre of gravity even further away from what was the town centre when I was a boy.

Pardon the pun: people vote with their feet. They go where it is most convenient. In the main town in my constituency, the people vote with their feet and do most of their shopping in the new centre, yet a great proportion of households are without a car. The people have to walk. A clutter of buses in one street demonstrates that. I do not say anything against them, but the people in the west of Scotland and in my constituency have perhaps the greatest chance of suffering ill health. As I said, there is not a simple solution to the problem.

The town's environment has become worse as well. There is litter everywhere. If they are challenged, people have the cheek to say that it is the council's fault. They do not think that they should not drop litter but that the council should pick it up. Clearly, that is part of the problem. One of the things that gets my goat more than anything else is chewing gum dropped in the streets. All the beautiful walkways that have been created in the pedestrianised areas are littered with chewing gum. Perhaps the Government could do something about that. Finally, the beautiful pedestrianised area has the most vandalism. There was none of that when I was a youngster, and the Government should give it far more consideration than they have.

One of the more positive aspects of the new town was the creation of cycle paths. Even though the Chairman of the Committee might not think so, I actively try to keep my weight down. One of the things that I do is cycle on the paths. However, I have had more cheek from people out walking their dogs than anyone else. They will not give way to cyclists. One day, a guy with a hawk confronted me on one of the cycle routes. He was going to release it if I did not get off my bike and walk past him. Those are the problems that we face. The Chairman mentioned the conflict between cyclists and pedestrians. I put it down to the fact that there is less courtesy between people now than when I was a youngster. It is not all doom and gloom, and this week the shopping centre has a new owner. Having talked to him, I believe that he is more likely to bring a change to the environment and a change of culture among the members of the public who use the shopping centre.

I turn to more general points. We are on the eve of the Burns night celebrations. As someone who has already attended five Burns suppers and who is attending one tomorrow and one on Saturday—

Bob Russell: What about tonight?

Mr. Donohoe: Tonight I am travelling home, and I have to say that I am not walking. It seems appropriate to mention a little competition. Members who are into the internet could key it up at www.haggishunt.com. They could win a weekend in the Gleneagles hotel if they spot the golden haggis. One of the webcams shows a picture—this is why I relate this story—of the pedestrianised area of Buchanan street in Glasgow. I have watched it all morning out of curiosity. It changes every 60 seconds. One of the greatest problems with pedestrianised areas is delivery vans. The drivers show no courtesy to people. There must be more restriction on the movement of traffic around the shopping centre. In many cases, the pedestrianised areas have been destroyed by the intrusion of buses, which have been allowed in. The Government have not considered that as they might.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett), the Chairman of the Select Committee, mentioned the Parliament square crossing, which the Committee considered. It is heavily used in the evidence that we presented to the Government as an example of where pedestrians have been treated in the wrong way. There was a simple argument: to look at the flow of traffic from the pedestrian's point of view. If any hon. Members have used the crossing—I am sure that they have—they will realise that it is the wrong way round. Pedestrians could and do walk from the House over to Millbank. In that circumstance, one would imagine that the pavement would go in the opposite direction. We made great play of that in taking evidence from those responsible, yet they have done nothing about it. I wonder which organisations have actually read the report and whether there has been any resultant activity by organisations that gave evidence and were given clear indications as to where things were wrong.

So what am I looking for from the Government? I am looking for more activity and for the necessary co-ordination between Departments, which does not exist. We mentioned children and school buses, which is a good initiative, but the Government do not seem to be putting over the message that this is something that should be created. There are problems with crime. There is no indication that the Government are taking action to address problems relating to vandalism and crime.

The topic that concerns me most is chewing gum. When the Transport Sub-Committee visited Chicago, we found that, unbelievably, the British consulate is in the Wrigley building. Outside that building is a man with an ice hammer—an ice blow thing—removing chewing gum from the pavement. Here is the corporate headquarters of the chewing gum company that has done so much to ruin the streets and the expensive stone plate pavements that have been created, and yet it has the same problem. The Minister might reflect on that, as it makes me think that the Singaporeans have got it right in banning chewing gum. The one thing that I have learned from years of negotiation is that we should try to leave the negotiating table with something. We should not ask for much, and if the Minister can do something about chewing gum, he will have made my day. I look forward to his response.

3.30 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester): I congratulate the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) on the first class and comprehensive way that he introduced his Committee's report and I commend the Committee for its various conclusions and recommendations. I regret that the Government have not taken on board all the recommendations, which were the result of considered thought. We live in hope that the Government are moving in the right direction, albeit slowly, and we look forward to further progress.

I am not anti-car and those who want to be pro-walking and cycling must stress that all forms of transport have their place. What is shocking is that successive Governments of all political parties have been guilty of decades of over-emphasis on the motor car to the exclusion of any other form of transport, including public transport—buses, rail, light railway or tram systems. Cycling and walking are very much at the bottom of the pile when it comes to central Government and local government thinking. I speak as someone who had many years' experience as a local councillor, and it seems that money for road schemes is more easily available than for cycle paths or pavements. That is surprising when we are told that walking accounts for more than a quarter of all trips and 80 per cent. of trips are under one mile.

Many hon. Members will know of other people—it is always others, not ourselves—who get in their car to travel just a few hundred yards. Although I made a relatively cheap point earlier, I believe nevertheless that leadership by example would do more than any number of Committee reports and presentations. On one famous occasion in May 1997 the Prime Minister walked from Downing street to the Palace of Westminster, but I

[Bob Russell]

have no recollection of a repeat trip being made. I invite the Minister to encourage his ministerial colleagues and civic leaders throughout the country to lead by example. Walking accounts for three times as many trips as all forms of public transport combined and 18 times as many trips as cycling. I am grateful to Living Streets, the new name for the Pedestrians Association, because it has been in the vanguard of promoting walking.

Walking is an excellent means of maintaining physical fitness. I am greatly amused, as we all are, by the fact that it tends to be young men who will travel in fast cars to a leisure centre, spend about an hour in the torture room and then head up to the bar for a drink and a few fags before driving home. They would save more money and their health would be better if they took a brisk two-hour walk instead.

Successive Governments have not helped by their attitude towards education. The freedom to go to whichever school one chooses has dramatically undermined the neighbourhood school. We know when it is school half term or holidays, as the number of vehicles on the road reduces by between 10 and 25 per cent., depending on the area, because many pupils are not being driven to schools on the other side of town by their parents. In the good old days, when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) was a young lad, most people went and walked to their local school. In the spirit of joined-up government, I invite the Minister to have a friendly word with his colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills and inquire whether education policy, particularly at secondary school level, is helpful to the concept of people keeping fit and walking to school. If they are being driven several miles past several other schools, it adds to congestion on the roads and ensures that they will be less fit.

Chris Grayling: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that to promote walking we should remove parental choice, which has been such an important part of improving standards in education in the past 20 years?

Bob Russell: I invite parents to consider the consequences. They must decide whether invoking parental choice to drive their child five miles to a so-called better school because they perceive that they will receive a better academic education is in the long-term life interests of their child if, as a consequence, they get breathing, mobility and heart problems at an earlier age than they would if they were fit. I would prefer that all of my children—all of whom went to their local state schools—walked or cycled to the local neighbourhood school and were fit than were driven five miles to a school that was perceived to be better and were less healthy as a result. That is parental choice, but central Government should put it on the line that perceived higher academic achievement may be at the cost of their children's health. I leave it at that.

Regular walking is a highly effective way to tackle the health problems that I mentioned. Obesity and coronary heart disease are on the increase—20 per cent. of four-year-olds are already too fat and the figure has been increasing year on year by one percentage point. No one has to be much of a rocket scientist to realise that if that continues, today's young people will hit health problems at an earlier age.

Streets and public space perform a vital role in community life and we have heard some lovely examples of how walking enhances people's quality of life. I recognise that shopping trends cannot be reversed in this generation, but equally it is up to central Government to give fiscal encouragement to the neighbourhood shops in residential suburbs and villages. We are talking today about walking in towns and cities and the Government would greatly help the survival of neighbourhood shopping areas, as well as those in town centres, if there was a fiscal encouragement to the shops. The Government should revisit their bold plan of a few years' ago, which they quickly dropped, to put some form of tax on out-of-town shopping centre car parks to subsidise the public transport network. I will leave the Minister with that thought because I suspect that he privately agrees, although he may not be allowed to say so publicly.

We have heard about speeding traffic, cracked flagstones, litter, graffiti, vandalism and the fear of crime, which all blight our streets. What has not been mentioned is street lighting. We must not assume that walking is a daylight activity only. I am not suggesting that people walk the streets at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning in Colchester, and those who do may be up to other activities, but the point is that on dark mornings and evenings, we need improved street lighting for pedestrian safety, but local authorities are strapped for cash, successive Governments have underfunded local authorities, and additional street lights in pedestrian areas do not feature highly on lists of priorities. Whenever my local council wants to rearrange the roundabout or move a pedestrian crossing 20 yd, central Government can apparently find money to pass down to Essex county council.

There is strong public dissatisfaction at the state of the street environment. If we want more people to walk, we have to make the streets more user friendly. We have to create communities where it is possible to walk. That involves several Government Departments, other public agencies, the private sector, the chambers of commerce and so on. A holistic approach must be adopted. We must also take account of the non-traffic function of the streets: street cafes, dare I say it, morris- dancing in the summer, street theatre or whatever are part and parcel of making our town centre streets more user friendly. People from the residential neighbourhood have to be got into the towns, however. That can be done by car—no one disputes that—but it can also be done by cycling and, wherever possible, by attractive pedestrian routes, either safely along main road arteries into the town, through suburban streets, or through parkland settings.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) touched briefly on light railways and trams. I urge the Minister to look at this. The Victorians got it right, but we lost the plot in the 20th century. I hope that in the 21st century we can realise the value of trams and light railways in our towns and cities. The Minister should see whether a tram or a light railway route is the answer to various problems in the relatively smaller towns with a population of about 100,000. Just to stick more buses on to congested roads and to say that it is public transport is not the answer. There must be another way.

It is disappointing that the Government have not taken on board some of the recommendations in the report. I am sure that the Committee will return to those and will continue to push for them. Why, in a 100-page, 10-year plan were only 10 paragraphs devoted to walking when it accounts for more than a quarter of all trips? I welcome the report. I welcome what has happened so far. Will the Minister confirm that this is merely the first step of the great march?

3.42 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) for suggesting this important issue for consideration by the Select Committee and for the way in which he chaired the inquiry. We often ignore the simplest things. We take walking for granted or simply do not think about it at all. During the inquiry we came to appreciate how important walking in urban areas is for urban regeneration and as something that is both enjoyable and healthy. I hope that the publication of the report will contribute to the process whereby walking is recognised as increasingly essential for health, good living and enjoyment and a significant part of urban renaissance and city renewal.

That renaissance must tackle social exclusion and promote sustainable development, making our surroundings more visually satisfying and more accessible and raising the standard and quality of living for all our citizens. That means that we need co-ordination in planning and implementation. Government, local and regional authorities have to work together to promote civic pride and respond to the needs and wishes of local communities. Those authorities must work closely with the voluntary sector and community groups, which often know the issues and can propose improvements to local environments. If the Minister assures us that the Government will do all that they can to secure co-ordination and encourage local and voluntary groups to suggest ideas and develop them wherever possible, we will have taken great strides forward.

Liverpool is an excellent example—[HON MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]—of a city in the process of renaissance and regeneration. I find it encouraging that my hon. Friends and the Minister are aware of the renewal of Liverpool and its importance as a city of great pride and strengths. Part of that regeneration is related to making the city attractive to those walking. The importance of walking in Liverpool is known to those promoting tourism and education. Liverpool's tourist guides have made a great contribution to the importance of walking by showing the fine attributes of Liverpool to visitors. The heritage trail, developed by the late and very lamented Sir Richard Foster and instigated by the national museums and galleries on Merseyside, has played an important part in increasing social awareness in Liverpool. The sculpture trails conducted by eminent sculptor Robin Riley, have shown residents and visitors the importance of artistic developments and public design on the streets of Liverpool.

Much of the excitement of Liverpool can be appreciated only through walking. I draw particular attention to the Hope street quarter, promoted by the Hope street association. Its significance was not recognised in the past, but today it is seen as an important place. If people walk the short distance along Hope street, between the Roman Catholic and the Anglican cathedrals, much of the splendour and many of the achievements of Liverpool can be seen and enjoyed.

The Royal Philharmonic hall is home to the splendid Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. That orchestra performs excellently in its city centre premises, but it also reaches out to local communities, conducts workshops for local children, and conducts concerts and workshops in Toxteth and other local areas, thus ensuring that young people from areas where they often do not realise their opportunities are encouraged to develop their musical abilities. In the same area, in Mount street, lies the home of the late poet Adrian Henri. There are refurbished buildings, such as Blackburn house, a national leader in promoting women's training, and the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, supported by Sir Paul McCartney, which is now a European centre for excellence in training for the performing arts. There is also the city farm, the Unity theatre, the Everyman theatre, the Liverpool School of Art and Design, Liverpool university and Liverpool John Moores university. Rodney street nearby is the home of the eminent photographer, the late Edward Chambré Hardman, whose photographic work was set to leave Liverpool until the National Trust stepped in. The trust will regenerate his home as part of the heritage centre in Liverpool with, I hope, the support of the heritage lottery fund. It will then be a centre that people can visit.

That half-mile walk in the city centre would show Liverpool's excellence in art, music, learning and enterprise. Walking there is enjoyable for what can be seen and experienced. I hope that that will contribute to the city's bid to become the capital of culture, to which hon. Members will hopefully lend their support. The bid is for the whole of the north-west, not just for the city of Liverpool. The north-west now recognises Liverpool's pre-eminence in the arts and other areas.

There is one flaw in the excellence of that area—the safe access of pedestrians to the facilities. There is no pedestrian crossing at the busy corner of Hardman street and Hope street. It is difficult to understand why the city council has not seen fit to provide a crossing there, in spite of repeated representations. Given the vastly increased funding that the Liberal Democrat-led city council received from the Government, I would hope that it could see fit to use some of the money to provide that pedestrian crossing. I wonder if the Minister could prevail on it to do so? That is an important example of the significance of crossings to allow people to circulate easily in areas of great importance.

Walking is important in city centres, but ease of access also matters for local neighbourhoods. I hope that walking will be seen as a priority in the local neighbourhoods in Liverpool such as Dingle, Smithdown, Kensington and Everton, where the work of regeneration companies and other initiatives—including Government-inspired initiatives—is under way. Local amenities in those areas should be encouraged and supported, so that people can shop in their area and find the facilities that they need without having to travel a long way. We also need to encourage the development of safety initiatives.

[Mrs. Louise Ellman]

I welcome the increased funding that was given to the Merseyside police and the introduction of the crime-fighting fund, which has meant that about 200 extra officers can be on the beat in Liverpool. I hope that there will be a continual concentration on neighbourhood policing to make local areas safer and make people feel safer. I also hope that the initiative taken by the Eldonian Group in Vauxhall to promote neighbourhood wardens will be taken up in other parts of the city.

As I said, walking in Liverpool city centre is enjoyable and shows the city's fine buildings, squares and achievements. However, it is marred by the number of formerly fine buildings that have been allowed to fall into disrepair as a result of blatant neglect. I praise the "Stop the Rot" campaign initiated by the *Liverpool Echo* for the example of civic leadership that that local newspaper has shown in drawing attention to the unacceptable dereliction of formerly fine buildings in the city centre. The paper has held meetings at which it has tried to hold the property developers and the city council to account and to secure action. I am pleased that the Rope Walks area is undergoing regeneration with Government support and European funding.

The biggest scandal concerns the Casartelli building, which fell down because of years of neglect. It was shameful that the city council allowed that to happen. I am also sad about the continued neglect of St. Andrew's church in Rodney street, which has been allowed to fall into dereliction and decay and now blights the local business area as well as the local environment. Again, I urge Liverpool city council to act.

Perhaps, above all I urge that action be taken about the empty post office site in the city centre, which has been virtually abandoned by the Walton group. It bought the site more than 10 years ago, but can only show us a list of broken promises. It stated that it would redevelop the site, but there has been no action. Indeed, my experience is that every time attention is drawn to the matter, a vehicle appears on the site but disappears a few days later. That site in the middle of the city centre, which is undergoing fast regeneration, still remains vacant. I call on the city council to act, through a compulsory purchase order if there is no other way. I ask the Minister to ensure that, as the Government review the criteria for compulsory purchase orders, some of the proposals made in the consultation process that is taking place are followed up. In particular, I ask them to recognise the importance of regeneration as a reason for seeking such an order when all other means have failed.

Liverpool Vision, the regeneration company set up by the Government, has a great opportunity to redesign the city centre, which has been identified as an engine of growth for the city and the sub-region. It is imperative that the city centre is accessible to all, that the magnificence of its old buildings and squares is preserved, that public spaces are expanded and that public transport links people to amenities. I hope that the light rail system for Liverpool, which was proposed somewhat belatedly, will be a successful part of the public transport network that links people to amenities and the city centre.

I ask the Minister to consider our planning policies and the recommendations in the Select Committee's report, in particular, our suggestion of a national walking strategy and local walking strategies. When assessments are made of planning issues, accessibility to amenities for pedestrians and ease of walking should be among the criteria against which judgments are made.

The Government have provided a lot of funds to Liverpool for regeneration purposes—£356 million in the past four years—and it is time for the city council to provide civic leadership, working with local voluntary groups, to ensure that the money is used to best effect.

I hope that the report and the Minister's response will help to give a higher profile throughout the country to the importance of walking for health, enjoyment and regeneration. I hope that that will contribute to renewing the city of Liverpool to bring enjoyment of its past, present and future to those who are enabled and encouraged to walk around the city.

3.59 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) on ensuring that this matter is debated. I echo many of his points, particularly the one about the pathological hatred of cyclists that some people seem to have. They forget that pedestrians are at much greater risk of injury from car drivers than from cyclists. Such hatred was best demonstrated by the incident that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) referred to, in which a man with a hawk encouraged him to get off his bike while he was using a cycle route.

I also agree with his point about reducing crime and the fear of crime by increasing the number of people who walk. However, it is not as simple as that. We must ensure that people use appropriate walking routes. For example, the shortest routes through the areas of Bramblewood close and Buckhurst avenue in my constituency are down small alleys at the back of people's houses. Unfortunately, there is a lot of graffiti along those routes, many garages are burgled and houses can be accessed from the back. We must enable people to use the shortest walking routes whenever possible, but some of them may not always be appropriate.

In other cases, the walking routes will be the most suitable and will be a significant improvement on what exists. The Roundshaw estate in my constituency is undergoing major renovations to change the 1960s system of streets in the sky—which means that there are no pavements beside the roads—to a more natural system of roads with pavements. People will be able to walk with a much greater degree of safety along the routes that they want to use, rather than being forced along routes that they do not want to take.

Perhaps I might commiserate with the Minister briefly, as he has been nominated by hon. Members here today as the Minister for silly walks and chewing gum. I do not know which of those he is demonstrating at the moment by leaving the Chamber. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) made some sensible comments, but he lost me when he started talking about the chicken and the egg; it is a pity that he is not here to explain that. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South referred to chewing gum. Perhaps we should consider a levy on chewing gum manufacturers so that they contribute financially towards the substantial costs of clean-up.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) made several telling points, including one about the consequences of parental choice in education. Incidentally, choice is more often than not the school choosing the pupil, rather than the parent choosing the school. However, there are health consequences for children if distances are too great to walk; for example, children who commute 20 or 30 miles by car from the south coast.

I welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) about the renaissance of Liverpool. I will draw that to the attention of the members of that authority. It seemed as though a substantial proportion of the comments made by the hon. Lady focused on attacking the city council, rather than on improving pedestrian facilities or commenting on the Select Committee report.

As I was coming to the House this morning, I decided that I would make a case study of my journey. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish referred to pens. There are pens on the corner of Stafford road and Woodcock road, and I always try to avoid them if the traffic is not too heavy by taking the shortest but riskier route along the so-called "desire lines". That sounds exciting, but it is not.

Andrew Bennett: The hon. Gentleman should push the traffic lights button so that he stops the traffic, even though he takes the desire line.

Tom Brake: I would be happy to push the button, but unfortunately there are no traffic lights. I follow the desire lines, which, for hon. Members who may not know, are the shortest line that the pedestrian would like to take between two points rather than being forced through sheep pens. The shortest route to Wallington station involves a steep flight of steps, which is not encouraging for pedestrians. One can always guarantee that one, two or three drivers will jump the red lights at the Vauxhall Bridge road and Victoria street junction not far from Victoria station. That happens every time I come home in the evening. The same tends to happen at the junction on St. Margaret's street. One or two drivers think that they are entitled to drive straight through a red light, because it has been red for only a couple of seconds. Those are some of the obstacles that are put in the way of pedestrians and the Government when they seek to increase the number of people who take trips on foot.

There are few signs that the Government will be in a position to tackle those problems. The signs in London are not good, as some of the police involved in controlling traffic speed will be posted elsewhere, thereby increasing the risk of speeding, which works against pedestrians. We have heard figures confirming that the issue needs to be addressed. A significant number of people walk, and many more journeys are made on foot than most people realise; as has been said, some 25 per cent. of journeys are made on foot. There is a need to assist them, and to promote walking for health and environmental reasons.

The Government's response has been welcomed reasonably warmly in different quarters. Living Streets said that the Government's reply included several positive commitments. Intelligent Space is a planning consultancy that specialises in pedestrian movement and safety issues, and I am grateful to its representatives for briefing me about their views on the proposal. They also welcomed the Government's response. However, that does not mean that there is no scope for improvement.

We need to address certain obstacles so that we can maximise the number of pedestrians. We need to tackle the increase in traffic and the underfunding of local authorities. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside that everything is fine and dandy and that local authorities throughout the country have received a bonanza of grants. That is not the view up and down the country.

Mrs. Ellman: I want to emphasise that Liverpool city council has received vastly more funding under this Government than it did under the previous Government. I do not suggest, however, that what it has is adequate to meet all needs. I continue to press for more funding.

Tom Brake: The hon. Lady did not make that point earlier in the debate. I welcome the fact that she does not consider the funding to be adequate and that she will continue to press for more funds for the city council and the Liverpool area. We need to address the almost exclusive focus on large transport projects and the ill-health implications of reduced walking, although that is clearly a vicious circle. We need to address the lack of strategy, and, more fundamentally, the lack of data on pedestrian movements on which a strategy can be built, and the failure to disseminate best practice.

Intelligent Space is in favour of a national walking strategy provided there is an associated budget. The Government are in favour of providing advice to encourage walking. Perhaps the Minister could say when they intend to reissue their document, as I understand that a new version is to be issued. They are broadly in favour of a strategy, but not of one with targets. According to "Encouraging walking: advice to local authorities",

> "The Government has decided not to adopt national targets, which are difficult for any of us to relate to our everyday behaviour".

However, the Government have adopted a plethora of targets in relation to many other areas where one could equally argue that it is difficult to relate them to our everyday behaviour. I am not sure why targets cannot be applicable in this instance.

Andrew Bennett: The hon. Gentleman was a member of the Select Committee. Sadly, he has left us. He will now know that one of the main targets for the Department is to reduce the number of targets.

Tom Brake: Indeed. I regret that I am no longer a member of the Select Committee. I would be happy if we introduced a target for walking and got rid of, say, 10 other targets in its place. There does not seem to be a satisfactory explanation as to why, for instance, a target for increasing rail journeys by 50 per cent. is one that we

[Tom Brake]

can relate to our everyday behaviour, but a target to increase the number of pedestrian trips is not. That does not seem to make sense. I hope that the Minister will be able to explain.

The Select Committee's report states that it supports national targets, but only if it can be demonstrated that they can be measured with sufficient accuracy. Intelligent Space, which specialises in this work, says that there is no problem with the ability to measure targets. The only problem is that no one is carrying out any measuring and monitoring. According to Intelligent Space, in regeneration schemes there is little, if any, measuring of what happened before and after or of the impact on pedestrian journeys. If that work is carried out, it will be much easier for the Government to measure trips and possibly to implement targets and measure progress against them.

The Government state on page 4 of their response that they are putting together a research strategy. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us what progress is being made. Intelligent Space pointed out that, because we do not have monitoring or the body of research, and because planners are not attuned to the idea of measuring pedestrian movements, we are probably missing out on significant quick gains in town centres where relatively small and inexpensive changes could be made to increase the number of people going to them. Benefits for local businesses could soon be demonstrated in terms of more people using the shops.

The Government say that they favour a national walking forum to disseminate best practice. I certainly support that. As the Government suggested, a website could be ideally suited to providing that forum. I want to know from the Minister whether a budget has been identified to set up such a website, because even a website will require money to get it up and running.

We need to tackle traffic and encourage more people to take trips on foot. One of the key recommendations from the Select Committee was to declassify some roads to give greater priority to pedestrians. I hope that the Minister will be able to explain why the Government do not see a case for the wholesale reclassification of urban roads or for a review of the criteria for determining their status.

The Government need to answer a number of other questions, particularly in relation to the small schemes. Are the Government in a position to demonstrate that small schemes can provide better value for money than the larger schemes? The Government are saying that they cannot look at the small schemes in the same way as the large schemes. Therefore, they are not able to demonstrate that the small schemes represent the same value for money as the larger schemes.

I hope that the Minister will look at that again. I suspect that, if there were a system for measuring the small schemes and making a direct value-for-money comparison, he would probably find that the addition of 1,000 pedestrian crossings, the removal of 1,000 sheep pens, or the creation of 1,000 cycle routes would probably contribute more economically, environmentally and from the point of view of health than one large project. However, we are not in a position to demonstrate that because there does not seem to be a system to make those comparisons. The Government need to address this as a matter of some urgency.

Is there any scope for allowing the small schemes to be bundled together in a large package of over £5 million? Are the Government encouraging local authorities to do that? Once the Government have looked at the local transport plans, will they attempt to provide any analysis of what they think will be the total benefit in terms of pedestrian schemes? Is that something that they are considering?

To demonstrate the Government's commitment, it would be useful if the Minister could comment on how the staffing levels have changed—clearly he will have to do this in writing—in the charging and local transport section of the Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions since 1995. I understand that the DTLR is specifically responsible for the National Cycling Forum, the National Walking Strategy Steering Group and the development of home zones. To see how the numbers within that Department have changed over the past seven years would demonstrate what level of commitment has been made to walking, cycling and home zones. It would give us a feel for where the Government are going.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester used the phrase, "One step in the great march." I invite the Minister to put his best foot forward and demonstrate personally and politically that he is committed to the pedestrian's cause.

4.20pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): It is great to see you in the Chair Mr. Conway, for this wide-ranging debate this afternoon. In a short speech, it will be impossible to cover everything that has been raised.

I recommend walking with dogs as an excellent way of losing weight. My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Grayling) pointed out that one in five of the population is obese. I am sure that we would all benefit from walking a little more. It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett). He and I started as ordinary members of the Committee some 10 years ago: he is now the Chairman and I am now the Opposition spokesman. He made an excellent and wide-ranging speech. I will cover many of the things that he covered such as safe crossing, walking buses, the national walking strategy and greater priority for walking from local authorities.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) quoted from Living Streets, formerly the Pedestrian Association, and that is the best point to start in summarising the debate. It states:

> "Speeding traffic, cracked flagstones, litter, graffiti, vandalism and the fear of crime blight streets and public spaces in communities throughout the UK."

That is a fair summary of why people do not walk more. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish alluded to the raw statistics and said that the Committee was sceptical about them. Nevertheless, they are on the Department's website and are perhaps worth putting on the record. The website states:

> "According to the 1993/95 national travel survey, walking accounts for 29 per cent. of journeys, including 82 per cent. of journeys under 1 mile"

It goes on to give some of the more alarming statistics to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

> "Main drivers of cars walk half the distance of adults living in households without a car."

It adds that there was a 12 per cent. drop between 1985-86 and 1993 to 1996 and, perhaps more alarmingly:

> "The fall in the average distances walked fell by even more (18 per cent.) largely reflecting that it was the longer walk journeys that have declined most steeply in recent years. The fall was largest for those aged 11 to 15."

That is particularly worrying. Our adolescents are becoming more susceptible to the problem of obesity. That will set the pattern for the rest of their lives. I see the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) nodding. I shall come on to speak about walking buses and reducing reliance on transport to take children to school.

Other hon. Members referred to the briefing that we received from Intelligent Space, which is an independent research consultancy specialising in pedestrian movements. We live in an age where it is possible to analyse these problems in greater depth than ever before. It makes five key points. It says that it is now possible to model pedestrian flows for new developments. Many people, including me in an intervention, said that the planning authorities could design new developments with walking much more in mind and also design urban regeneration schemes to give a greater primacy to walking.

The hon. Member for Colchester mentioned modern design techniques, and there are other innovative ways of making straight walkways through estates rather than having blind alleys. There are a number of other ways to reduce crime and make walking safer. The Government should look at that and consider whether it should be made part of the planning policy guidance so that all planning authorities have to consider those aspects, as my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell pointed out.

The briefing goes on to say that research shows that pedestrian movement is strongly influenced by desire lines—dreadful jargon, which the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington mentioned. It says that

> "walkers prefer to use simple, direct journeys. Desire lines analysis can be used to provide an objective basis for design guidance".

It goes on to say that segregation of pedestrians away from normal streets in most infrastructure works in the past 50 years would reduce pedestrian accidents and casualties—for which I have quoted the appalling figures. We could consider cycle and pedestrian lanes that are separated from busy roads by high kerbs to remove the risk of pedestrians and cyclists being inadvertently involved in an accident by cars straying into a cycle lane or on to a pavement. We should perhaps make parking on pavements and mounting pavements more serious offences—driving in London, one sees people mounting the pavement every day to avoid traffic jams. The law enforcement agencies should take such actions more seriously.

I recently visited my local branch of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, which told me that parking on pavements is a major problem for blind people because when they come across those huge objects, they do not know whether they are in the road or still on the pavement. We need to consider that problem far more seriously. Intelligent Space goes on to say:

> "Accident risk is greater if road crossings facilities are not located on 'desire lines' for pedestrian movement. Hindrances to crossing such as barriers are often of limited value in reducing risk in this respect".

It says finally:

> "Part of the social problems on many Council Estates may be attributed to their very unusual layouts".

I have commented on that.

We need new thinking on policies that encourage walking in our cities, incorporating better quality city parks, city centres and main highways so that people can walk more easily in cities and towns. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) mentioned urban renaissance. The former right hon. Member for Henley, Michael Heseltine, started the urban renaissance in many of our big cities. Indeed, some of the most successful urban regeneration schemes, such as the London Docklands scheme, were major renaissance schemes. I have seen such schemes in Glasgow and Leeds. Where we have successfully pedestrianised, we can encourage people to walk more because there is no other way of travelling in pedestrianised areas.

We have debated whether pedestrianisation is the right way forward. As a chartered surveyor, I declare an interest. I have studied town centre management schemes in detail and am keen on town centre management schemes, whereby the local authority, voluntary groups and, above all, businesses, become involved in drawing up schemes for the regeneration of our towns and cities. Getting all the stakeholders involved means that every interest, particularly business, feels ownership of those schemes and encourages others to make best use of them so that they work.

In case anyone thinks that such schemes do not work, I commend hon. Members to look at the scheme that was successfully launched in New York, which completely transformed the centre of the city. Litter was cleaned up, crime considerably reduced and more people encouraged to walk because large areas were pedestrianised. The Minister and the Government should consider such 21st-century innovative schemes. We need to examine how the schemes can be more easily funded because if they are going to work they need a small amount of funding.

I have already said that the quality of our public and municipal parks needs to be improved. Some local authorities take a proactive role. One need only look at Wandsworth to see some well kept parks, but some areas in our cities, including London, are not so well kept. When I did a three-week stint at the by-election in Leeds city centre, the main park was in an appalling state. Many schoolchildren used to walk through the park to get to school, and one could see hypodermic syringes every day. I walked through the park many times each day, and there did not seem to be any effort by any official to clear away those highly dangerous objects. It is no wonder that people find it unattractive to walk in parks when they see such rubbish being left around.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

We should examine how we can restore our parks. The Victorians and Edwardians laid out the parks that are the vital green lungs of our cities and the essence of what walkers should be able to enjoy in our city centres. They set out the parks, and we in the 20th and 21st centuries have let them decay. I hope that the Minister will encourage local authorities to ensure that the parks are regenerated, because it would benefit the general feeling and well-being in all our citizens. Features such as bandstands, lakes, pavilions, tea shops and, dare I say it, public conveniences should be smartened up so that they can be used and enjoyed.

Many hon. Members mentioned the planning and infrastructure of our country. I should declare that I am a chartered surveyor and deal with the planning department of my two local authorities almost every day. When I get complaints from my constituents about the design of developments, it is usually because the developments are too dense. The local planning authority pays great attention to the number of car parking spaces, but rarely does it insist on any section to deal with walking. Even walking to the local shop, school or surgery can provide beneficial exercise, and for many older people in our society who, for one reason or another, cannot drive, those walks are an absolute necessity. We should make it easy for our elderly people to walk.

Putting proper ramps for the disabled in our residential estates would be a start. How often do we see people struggling with a wheelchair because there is no drop kerb to allow them to get up and down? Other innovative changes could make our walkways and roads safer. We could make much greater use of closed circuit television cameras, and with digitalisation and mass production, CCTV cameras have become much smaller and cheaper. We use them in our city centres to protect shops and roadways, but not often in alleyways and walkways. Why not? That would be a major method of reassuring people and encouraging them to walk in the higher-crime areas.

Another step would be to have more free telephones, so that any incident could be reported and someone could respond more quickly. All too often in this country, we find dimly lit alleyways in which we cannot see from one end to the other. They are a long way from anywhere and exactly the sort of place at which someone gets mugged. Such changes would be a major incentive to reduce crime and encourage people to walk more, and we should make our urban streets and walkways more attractive.

Andrew Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the evidence shows that the numbers of street muggings of people out walking is low? The problem is the fear of crime, and if he is not careful, some of his suggestions will simply make people feel that the streets are less safe than they really are.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, and we must reassure people that it is safe to walk on our streets. If they are not walking and are frightened of crime, we must consider other methods to reassure them, and some of my suggestions would do that. I have a constant dialogue with my local police authority, and I tell them that policemen do not provide the same level of reassurance sitting in cars as they do walking on the beat. The authority says that it can use the men sitting in cars more productively because they can watch not only for traffic offences, but who is moving about. I believe that we need to get more police back on the beat, to provide precisely the reassurance about which the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish spoke.

Chris Grayling: Given the comments of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, will my hon. Friend consider that as there is a clear need for reassuring those who use cut-through alleyways, there would be practical benefit in the use of systems such as CCTV? The incidents that take place in those corners are often not serious crimes but gangs of kids writing graffiti on the walls. That is less likely to happen if cameras are there, and it is the presence of such graffiti and a dingy environment that makes such places unattractive to walk through.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend has, as usual, been prescient. The attractiveness of our streets, alleys and pavements is important. If people feel that areas are unsightly and insalubrious, they will not walk in them.

We should have a major drive against litter and graffiti. In preparation for this debate yesterday, I walked not three minutes from here to Leake court. I have a little picture that I should like show to the Chamber. It shows a nice old Georgian building that is now empty, boarded up and in a serious state of decay, and it shows me kneeling down with some litter. That is not the worst of it, as about 10 yd away, there was some nasty and unpleasant litter, including human excreta. Interestingly, the picture also shows a little notice, which says:

> "The West Lambeth Health Authority excludes liability for loss or damage to property. Removed vehicles may be reclaimed".

That notice is partially obscured by graffiti, which shows how often Lambeth health authority must have been round to check.

We should take a little more pride in our cities. It may have been the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) who said that if people did not drop litter in the first place, the council would not have the problem of collecting it. Just around the corner from Leake court, I found that where Lambeth council had provided litter bins, everything was spotlessly clean. There is a lesson to be learned—we need more litter bins, and they need to be emptied regularly. One goes around London and sees litter bins overflowing, particularly from fast food takeaway shops, and the litter going miles down the street. If they were emptied regularly, that would not happen. If we took pride, it would encourage more people to think that it was safe and salubrious to walk in such areas.

Other hon. Members mentioned the problem of school runs. The problem is a serious one, and the solution proposed by the Committee of encouraging schoolchildren to walk, where it is safe to do so and having provided the reassurances and mechanisms that I outlined, is a win-win situation. The so-called walking buses system described by the hon. Member for Colchester, whereby groups of children get together and walk to and from school, is an admirable idea. That is preferable to a parent driving one child to school in a big four-wheel drive vehicle, belching out fumes of every description. If we could encourage fewer parents to drive children to school, and more children to walk to school—perhaps under parental supervision—that would be a win-win situation. The children would be healthier, there would be fewer emissions from cars and less congestion, and those cars that need to be on the road would be able to travel more freely.

In certain places in London—Chelsea or Lewisham, for example—at 8.30 am and 3.30 pm, traffic comes to a standstill because people drive their children to school, and often commit the heinous crime of parking on the pavement. They block both traffic and pedestrians trying to get to the school.

We have covered much ground in the debate, and I want to allow the Minister plenty of time to wind up. The report made several recommendations, which have not all been taken up. I would like to ask the Minister questions about his intentions concerning those recommendations. The Government were criticised for their failure to publish a national strategy for walking, a point made by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. We have already discussed targets, but realistic targets have a part to play. They were also criticised for their failure to set up a national walking forum or a mechanism to judge the value for money of small transport investments compared with larger ones. Why do the Government think that it would be impractical to assess the costs and benefits of small walking and road safety schemes, using the same criteria applied to major road schemes?

What plans do the Government have to develop their appraisal techniques? I have referred to some of the new computer-generated analytical schemes. How will they develop their techniques to allow the value for money of small schemes to be allow with larger ones? How will the Government allow or encourage local authorities to bundle up small schemes so that they pass the £5 million threshold for major schemes in the local transport plan guidance? Why were only 10 paragraphs of the 100 page, 10-year-plan devoted to walking, when it accounts for a quarter of all trips? That is a lacuna in the plan.

Do the Government plan to publish their analysis of the total spending in local transport plans on schemes that benefit pedestrians? What plans do they have for revising the standard design guidance, such as the design manuals for roads and bridges, to take greater account of pedestrians? Planning policy guidance might be amended to oblige local planning authorities to pay greater attention to walking. Why have the staffing levels in the charging and local transport section of the DTLR not changed since 1995, a period covering the publication of the national cycling strategy? If officials in his Department thought about that strategy in more depth, we might make progress.

The debate has been wide-ranging and interesting. It covers many Departments, and the Minister answers for only one, albeit the lead one. I end where I started: we could all walk a little more. I mean everyone, including MPs, which is why I jocularly asked the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish how many miles the Select Committee had walked during its study. When I was a member of a Select Committee, we did not walk all that far. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South laughs. I meant to ask him about his study of www.haggishunt.com. It seems that he has spent all morning looking at this little creature running one way and then going in the opposite direction. I wonder how he had time to prepare his speech. That may be a subject for another day; no, he is going to intervene to tell us.

Mr. Donohoe: While watching the screen, it is still possible to work. The hon. Gentleman should know that.

Bob Russell: He can walk and chew gum at the same time.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Indeed, and work at the same time, too. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South is obviously of a very dextrous mind and able to do many things at once.

Chris Grayling: Not chew gum, though; he wants to scrap that.

Mr. Derek Conway (in the Chair): Order.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I think we are getting too jocular, Mr. Conway. This is an important debate.

There are many things that the Government and, as the representative of the lead Department, the Minister could do to encourage walking. Our grandparents used to do far more of it. These days it is too easy to get into the car to go five miles up the road—or 500 yd up the road in many instances—to do the shopping. Before we get in the car in future, we should all think would it not be better to walk?

4.45 pm

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on securing this debate on behalf of the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I also congratulate him on the quiet, calm and measured way in which he introduced the subject. The debate has been helpful and well considered, and the Government welcome the publication of "Walking in Towns and Cities", the report produced by the former Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs. I thank the Committee for that important contribution to the debate.

Creating the conditions that encourage people to walk more is a vital part of our integrated transport policy. We want to make walking safe, easy and convenient, and we want more people to feel able to make walking, in combination with public transport, a first choice for both short journeys and longer distances. The percentage of journeys made on foot has fallen from 35 per cent. in 1985-86 to 27 per cent. in the period 1997 to 1999. The proportion of journeys of less then a mile made on foot fell by less, from 83 per cent. to 80 per cent.

In introducing this debate, my hon. Friend made some important points. One of the first dealt with the contribution to health that can be made by walking. That is an important underlying message for us all. The

[Mr. David Jamieson]

hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) also mentioned it. My lissome form is evidence that I do a little walking myself. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's diameter indicates the same—perhaps he will tell us more about it.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I take great pleasure in taking my dogs for a walk—the trouble is that they live in my constituency, so I can only take them out at the weekend. However, I walk to and from the Palace of Westminster every day.

Mr. Jamieson: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to say that he likes exercise so much that he could watch it all day.

The hon. Gentleman made the point that walking on the streets can sometimes be a very educational exercise. I like walking in urban areas, particularly the more attractive ones. It can be as nice an experience as walking in the countryside. I am not sure about his suggestion that one might walk around the streets looking in the windows. In parts of my constituency, one might end up with broken legs rather than exercised legs if one spent too long looking in windows.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish emphasised the importance of cleaner air and cleaning up the environment along our roads so that people can enjoy walking. We have had considerable success in that respect, especially through working with our European colleagues to clean up emissions from engines, especially those of large vehicles. The new fuels that have come on to the market in the last few years, and the even cleaner fuels that we will have in future, will help to ensure that the urban environment in particular will become much cleaner.

The hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) is obsessed with how Ministers travel and asked about ministerial cars. Of course, being a Liberal Democrat, he will never know the inconvenience of travelling by ministerial car, but I assure him that I sometimes go on foot, even if my red boxes go by car. He has tabled written questions about whether Ministers travel by tube, and I can tell him that I travelled by tube today.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) is becoming quite a major player for the Opposition on transport issues. He regularly contributes to these debates and makes sound points. The hon. Member for Cotswold should watch out: someone behind him is coming up strongly.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *indicated assent.*

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman seems to agree.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell asked questions similar to those asked by the hon. Member for Colchester. He made a strong point about the contribution that walking could make to improving health and appearance and to reducing obesity. That is particularly true for children, many of whom become very overweight early on. It is disappointing that so many children are overweight. I recently visited Japan, where many more children walk to school and look far healthier than some children in this country. That is partly due to their diet and the type of exercise that they take. In addition, parents in Japan feel that their children are safe walking on the streets even in the evening and in busy and congested parts of cities. That perception has contributed to making their children healthier.

Out-of-town shops and people's ability to use their cars were mentioned. The constituency of the hon. Member for Cotswold may be better heeled than mine and perhaps some of my hon. Friends', but I ask him to bear in mind the fact that 40 per cent. of people in my constituency do not have access to a car. Often, walking to the local shops is the only choice, especially for some elderly people, younger people with families, and poorer people. For them, going by car is not an option. Simply to encourage out-of-town shopping without thinking about quality of life and local shops would be nonsensical.

We must find a balance between car use, public transport and pedestrianisation. I believe that that is possible. I had the pleasure of walking around Solihull in the west midlands; there is a large pedestrianised area, which is excellent and a pleasure to walk round. The town is clean and inviting, but there is also substantial car parking. Those who want to come into town by car can do so, but there are good bus and rail links as well, and people travel long distances into town by those forms of transport. In such ways, a compromise can be reached and a good environment for walking created.

Chris Grayling: I am delighted that, for once, the Minister has the opportunity to make a full speech; normally he ends up with a 10-minute run-through of the important points.

I endorse the need to protect local centres. My constituency, like his, has many people without cars, especially elderly people. Will he consider talking to his colleagues in the Department about the rating of small shops? A perennial issue facing small shopkeepers in my constituency is the fact that their rateable value is based on the same principles of shop frontage as that of Sainsbury's; they feel that they lose out as a result. If the Minister's Department addressed that issue, it would make a real difference to small local centres.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I shall not respond directly because it is outside my brief, but the point is well made and I will ensure that he receives a response.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) spoke graphically about the need for a quality environment in which people can walk. He drew on his childhood experiences, and as he went down memory lane, I remembered my own childhood. He made important points about health, but then got onto the sticky issue of chewing gum on pavements.

Bob Russell: Oh!

Mr. Jamieson: There is more. I should declare an interest: most of the chewing gum in this country is made at Wrigley's in my constituency. My constituents are major contributors to the manufacture of chewing gum, but the antisocial behaviour of people who discard chewing gum on pavements is not the fault of the people who make it.

I am sure that news of this debate will reach *The Herald*, the local newspaper of my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South. I can see the headline now: "Chewing Gum on Pavement: MP Steps In."

Bob Russell: Oh!

Mr. Jamieson: I said it would get worse. Now the Liberal Democrats are going to step in.

Tom Brake: I said earlier in the debate that the hon. Gentleman was the Minister for silly walks and chewing gum. He has now confirmed that he is merely the Minister for chewing gum.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman has made another well-considered contribution to the debate, for which we are grateful.

Mr. Donohoe: My hon. Friend is concerned about the headline in only one newspaper, but there are at least four local newspapers on my patch: the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, *The Irvine Herald and Kilwinning Chronicle*, the *Irvine Times* and the *Ayrshire Leader*.

Mr. Jamieson: I am certain that all those newspapers will report in considerable detail my hon. Friend's excellent comments about chewing gum and other matters.

The hon. Member for Colchester followed the usual Liberal Democrat line. He spoke about the need for more money for various road schemes, not for walking. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) did in her area, I suggest that he go to his local authority and find out how much of the extra funding provided by the Government for local transport plans has been used to address the needs that he raised. So many hon. Members say that the Government should be doing this, the Government should be doing that; I suggest that they find out about their local authority's transport plans and the contribution it makes to the projects for which they have ambitions in their area.

Bob Russell: Is the Minister aware that in the shire counties the highways authority is the county council, not the district council, as in Basildon or Colchester? My point was that the highways authority finds funds to spend on road schemes but not on alternatives. If he checks the record, he will find that that was what I said.

Mr. Jamieson: I do not need to check the record; that was his point. However, there is a fallacy in his remarks. The aim of creating better space for walking can be included in local transport plans. It is up to councillors and Members of Parliament to ensure not only that such objectives appear in the local transport plan but that the generous amounts of money that have been allocated by the Government are spent to achieve them. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman holds his highways authority to account and ensure that it is spending money on the projects that he supports.

Bob Russell: The authority may reply that the Government's priorities are illustrated by the fact that they had only 10 paragraphs on walking in a 100-page document; in other words, it is following the Government's line.

Mr. Jamieson: The local authority must consider its priorities and include them in its transport plan. Councillors consult their electorate and develop priorities. Members of Parliament may make a contribution as well. The number of paragraphs in our document is irrelevant. The hon. Gentleman should examine his local council's transport plan and ensure that it is carried out.

The hon. Members for Colchester and for Cotswold criticise our 10-year transport plan, but at least we have a plan. There is no hope of the Liberal Democrats ever being in government, but the last Conservative Government did not even have one paragraph, let alone 10. At least we now have 10 paragraphs about walking, which is more desirable than none at all.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Jamieson: In a moment. I an not quite done with the hon. Member for Colchester. He advanced a most extraordinary argument about restricting choice in secondary schools so that children would walk to their local school. Recently, I read in a national newspaper that the Liberal Democrats' leader had abandoned the penny on tax ambition for education. It is not the job of the Government to lecture parents or tell them where they should send their children to school. What is important is that we must create the right environment, so that parents feel able to send their children to a school that they can walk to. For a Government to start restricting people's choices about where they send their children—*[Interruption]*. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but I got the strong impression—the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell agrees with me—that it is now Liberal Democrat policy to restrict parents' choice of secondary schools so that their children can walk to their local school. Perhaps the Liberal Democrats' education spokesman will provide some clarity on that matter.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Under the last Conservative Government, we had a road-building programme, but under the Labour Government, hardly any money is being spent on new road projects. If the Minister were to come to my constituency and ask highways authority officials about how much money they have to spend in the local transport plan, they would tell him that they do not have enough money to carry out the minor road schemes they want. Things may be different in the inner cities, but if the Minister wants to encourage more walking in the shire counties, he will have to provide some mechanism to encourage local authorities to consider walking, just as the local planning authorities need more encouragement to consider walking when making planning decisions.

Mr. Jamieson: I am staggered by what I have just heard. The Labour Government have a plan, not only for rail, but for roads, for creating better access to buses, for walking and for all the other issues that we have discussed today.

[Mr. Jamieson]

I have travelled around this country opening or digging the first turf on new bypasses and roads. I often hear Conservative MPs express their pleasure about local developments. When I was up in Norfolk recently, the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), along with many Conservative local councillors, was full of praise for the amount of money that the Government, through the Highways Agency, are spending on many of that area's roads.

I return to the hon. Member for Colchester—I have still not finished with him. He complained that there is insufficient money for repairing or improving local roads. He should go back and look at what is being provided in the local transport plans. I challenge him to do that. Does he know how much is being provided in his local transport plan?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have looked at the local transport plan, and it is a very small sum compared to what is needed. If the Minister thinks that the settlement is generous, why did he, when considering the local transport plans, not give the go-ahead for the eastern spine road—an important scheme sponsored by the Wiltshire and Gloucestershire highways authorities? When he was lobbied and he was sympathetic, yet when it came down to a decision, he ruled it out of the local transport plan saying that there was not enough money.

Mr. Jamieson: I will not walk down that road. Instead, I will stroll on to other matters of importance. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside took us for a nice walk around Liverpool, which she called a city of renaissance. An excellent city, it also has some excellent MPs, one of whom is in the Chamber today. I know Liverpool very well and I recognise that it has had particular and special problems over the years, so I am delighted to hear of the renaissance. My hon. Friend said that much of Liverpool's environment can be appreciated by walking around it. I was also interested to hear her use the expression "the capital of culture". Liverpool has a long and fine record of cultural activity, so I was pleased to hear what she said, and I have some sympathy with it. She spoke of what is needed in the area, such as road crossings and other improvements for walking.

I listened to my hon. Friend with pleasure. However, listening to the hon. Member for Colchester, I thought how different are the ambitions of Liberal Democrats in Parliament to the ambitions of Liberal Democrats in charge in local government. Liberal Democrat Members are often embarrassed when they hear what Liberal Democrat councils are doing and how pitifully little they contribute to some of the issues that they raise.

Chris Grayling: I was going to help the Minister by reminding him that a Liberal Democrat council said recently that it had two policies—one local, the other national.

Mr. Jamieson: I thought that the Liberal Democrats had a different policy for every doorstep. I remember that the roads policy of Somerset county council, a Liberal council, was described as "benign neglect", but that is not what we hear from Liberal Democrat Members. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has touched a nerve.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) asked about the walking strategy document. The revised version will be published later this year. I am curious about the idea of a quota or target for walking. It sounds like an Albanian system under which so many million miles have to be walked and if they are not walked people are conscripted to do it. More important is creating an environment and places where people feel able to walk, and giving them opportunities to do so. That is more important than what the hon. Gentleman seems to want.

Tom Brake: I agree that it is important to create the environment for walking, but how will the hon. Gentleman, as Minister, know that he has been successful in his endeavours? On what will he focus if he has no targets?

Mr. Jamieson: We shall look out of the window and see more people walking.

Mr. Donohoe: You could try a dot.com.

Mr. Jamieson: Yes, we could look at the haggis website to see what is going on in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington asked about research. The answer is in the Government's response. The hon. Gentleman asks many questions, which are written out meticulously by his excellent researchers. Perhaps I should refer them to the documents, in the hope that they find the answers that the Government have already given.

The hon. Member for Cotswold raised several issues, and encouraged us to undertake various schemes, such as pedestrianisation, but those are things that the Conservative Government never did. It is rather curious—he must have undergone a process that made him change his mind. Perhaps he should contribute to his party's policies. He might then be able to tell us what those polices are.

Having tried to answer some of the specific points raised today, I shall try to flesh out our approach on walking in cities. Improving conditions for walking will help to increase the number of journeys made on foot, the many benefits of which have been mentioned today. Making it easier to walk safely can reduce social exclusion and improve access to jobs, schools and health care. Improving the walking environment can also revitalise many of our communities and make residential areas safer, better places. If more people walk in an area, crime and vandalism may be deterred. Walking can also play an important role in enhancing fitness and health, as hon. Members explained so well.

Our policies on planning, good urban environments, reallocation of road space, the establishment of home zones, traffic calming and ease of access to public transport tackle physical issues and enable people to choose to walk more. The important point is to create an environment in which people can actively make that choice, which is the point that I was trying to make to the hon. Member for Cotswold. Links with health and education policies, the road safety strategy, the speed policy review, developments in personal security and mobility issues, and policies on air and environmental quality also help to establish the conditions in which people may choose to make journeys on foot.

We want to tackle the issues that prevent people from feeling that they can walk: crime and the fear of crime, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish, concerns about speeding vehicles, and the poor quality of walking routes which prevents easy access. We are having some success in that respect, although the number of people killed on our roads is still distressingly high. I am pleased to say that that number is the lowest in the world, and we should be proud of that, but we must drive it down further still.

My hon. Friend mentioned getting children to walk to school, which is about creating safer environments around schools and improving road safety. However, there is a vicious circle: journeys to school are often made more dangerous by parents taking their children in the car—evidence shows that children on foot are often injured by parents driving their children to school. We must break that vicious circle, and several measures have been mentioned. Making journeys to school safer is vital not only to improving health, but to creating better environments for children.

We recognise that more needs to be done. We have created a policy framework to allow local authorities to take positive action to improve the walking environment in their area. I was surprised to hear some Opposition Members suggest that big Government could solve all the problems. In fact, it is often local people who must act, because they know best what is required in their area. We must get local authorities to come up with solutions. Gloucester is a good example: our funding helped to create a much better environment for walking and general road use, but only because local people used it to come up with local solutions. We can all learn from that example.

Under our integrated transport policy, we have encouraged local authorities, as part of their local transport plans, to develop walking strategies and encourage walking, both on short journeys and when accessing public transport. Local plans should include clear, measurable targets; it is up to the local authorities to include them and to determine what they should be.

Andrew Bennett: May I be a little mischievous? How many local transport strategies has my hon. Friend examined and how many contain local targets?

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend is not being mischievous at all. I have looked at a lot of strategies and most contain plans for walking. Many authorities include such measures, but we must tackle those that do not and ensure that our funding is used to better effect. Members of Parliament and local councillors should monitor such issues in their areas.

Mr. Donohoe: Will my hon. Friend give a commitment to write to local authorities that do not mention walking policy to insist that they give some thought to what they are about?

Mr. Jamieson: Such thoughts were going through my mind. Perhaps other hon. Members should look at their own local transport plans and see what is in them. It is up to local people to determine what their priorities are; it is not for us to do so.

Bob Russell: When the Minister goes back to his Department, will he inquire into the definition of "local people" and "local authorities"? If the highways authority is the county council, in a huge county like Essex, whose population exceeds 1 million, decisions are made, in effect, at county hall and not in the towns around the county.

Mr. Jamieson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that there are no local councillors to represent each part of the area? There must be councillors in Colchester who represent the people there. If they are not doing their job, I suggest that he goes out and campaigns to get them replaced. I do not know whether they are Liberal Democrats; perhaps he should look into that. Furthermore, it is for district councils to make representations as to what they want in their area.

Bob Russell *indicated assent.*

Mr. Jamieson: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me about that.

If we are to make walking a more attractive option in our towns and cities, we must ensure that we have a network of attractive and safe pedestrian routes. In their annual progress reports, local authorities highlighted the steps that they have taken to create facilities to encourage walking. In 2000-01, authorities established 91 km of new footways and footway improvements. Examples include the millennium bridge in Lancaster, which provides a link for cyclists and pedestrians between the city centre and the urban area to the north of the river Lune; a new pedestrian route from Newark to Peterborough; and a new three-mile pedestrian and cycle route along the banks of the Thames at Thurrock. Those developments have been made by local authorities using the excellent and generous grants that the Government have given them.

In April last year, the Prime Minister set out the Government's proposals for improving the quality of life in our towns and cities. The Government aim to tackle the minor nuisances that make our towns and cities unattractive places to live in. We are currently undertaking a cross-cutting review to examine what policies and funding are required to ensure improvements in the quality of public spaces. That review is due to be completed in March and will feed into the forthcoming spending review.

We are doing a lot to make people safer on our streets—that has been mentioned throughout the debate. The visibility of police on the street is being increased, and we are supporting a new neighbourhood warden programme that will help to prevent the antisocial behaviour which was mentioned by a number of speakers and which deters people from using the streets. We are also providing support for more CCTV projects across the country.

[Mr. Jamieson]

One of the clearest lessons that we can learn from successful towns and cities is to design spaces that suit the needs of people, not of traffic. Well designed streets and squares encourage people to use them and make walking a safe and pleasant experience. Places designed solely for the movement and parking of vehicles fail people, making walking an inconvenient and uncomfortable experience. Such places do not stand the test of time.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Listening to the Minister, one would think that everything to do with walking was absolutely wonderful under the present Government, but—whatever the statistics say—there has been a decline in the number of people walking in the past 10 years. When do the Government think that that trend will be reversed by the marvellous policies that the Minister is expounding?

Mr. Jamieson: I am not saying that everything is wonderful, but things are much better than they were when his party was in power. We are introducing measures to enable local authorities to tackle some of their problems. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that I am hard on Conservative Governments? He probably subscribes to the idea that there should be a great national act of amnesia. I can assure him that I shall not allow that to happen: we shall constantly remind people of how little his party did in government on some of the issues that he has mentioned. A debate on this subject would have been wholly different five years ago. We would not have talked about improvements, but about the sterile wasteland of cuts and neglect that typified the Conservatives' period in government.

Questions have been asked today about planning. We are reconfiguring our planning policies to deliver places for people. PPG3, planning for housing, is a good example, as is PPG13, in which we set out our transport planning policies. We have supported our policies with good practice guidance on design and better places to live, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside made graphically clear.

Our planning policies are designed to encourage walking in many ways. For example, in town centres we expect greater priority to be given to the needs of pedestrians, both in getting to town centres and getting around when they arrive. Our aim is attractive town centres: they should be places to be, not merely places to pass through in the car. We want day-to-day facilities to be located in local centres so that they are accessible by walking. We expect local councils to pay attention to the design of new development, wherever it is located, so that it helps to promote walking rather than hindering it.

We want an environment that values and encourages walking as a method of travel by integrating it with cycling and motorised modes. In some cases, that will mean a different allocation of road space. It can be reallocated by making physical changes to the layout of the carriageway and footway, and by adjusting the timing of traffic signals and pedestrian crossings. We cannot simply say that walking should be given the highest priority in all cases, as we must allocate road space in accordance with local needs and uses. In some cases, that will mean more space for pedestrians and slower vehicle speeds. It is also important to recognise that some routes will need to have higher vehicle priority to allow them to function effectively.

Tom Brake: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I will, but briefly, as I am mindful of the time.

Tom Brake: The Minister touched on small projects. I asked about that and I hope that he will now answer my question, which was about whether the Government were trying to assess the value-for-money nature of small projects as opposed to large ones. If they can develop a methodology that compares the two, they might find that they want to redirect money to small projects from large ones.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman makes a sensible point. Given the time restrictions, perhaps my Department will send him a note. I am sure that he will appreciate that, and he can then tick that question off the list that he makes of questions that we do not answer.

Tom Brake: One down; 300 to go.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman often contributes far more than I do to such debates. He talks on, and I have little time to answer. I have had more time than usual today to answer questions.

Tom Brake: You've had 45 minutes.

Mr. Jamieson: Yes, but I have given way many times to several hon. Members, including the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, who is now falling asleep.

The Department's local transport notes 1/95 and 2/95 provide guidance on assessing the need for a crossing, and deciding the type of crossing and the detailed design. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish raised such issues. We believe that the advice is sound: it does not advocate any specific form of crossing, but provides a decision framework and advice that should lead to good, safe and consistent pedestrian crossing design.

Some of the supplementary advice explains how puffin crossings can provide a straight crossing with a central island, rather than the staggered arrangement that was mentioned in connection with pelican crossings. Pedestrian crossings are only part of the walking environment. We believe that policy and technical advice for planners and engineers is needed to emphasise the importance of creating and maintaining complete walking routes and networks. We intend to develop such guidance.

The Government are committed to the development of home zones throughout England. Home zones are residential streets in which the road space is shared between drivers of motor vehicles and other road users, bearing in mind the wider needs of residents, including children and people who walk and cycle. I was delighted when earlier this month we announced that we would fund 61 schemes through the home zone challenge.

Despite all the work that has been done to create conditions that will allow an increase in walking, more action is needed. We agree with the Committee's recommendation that there is a need for a national walking strategy. We have begun to consider the content of that document and hope to publish it later in the year.

I am aware that my hon. Friend the. Member for Denton and Reddish wants to speak, but I shall conclude my remarks first. We also agree with the Select Committee that a forum to share good practice on walking and provide outside advice on policy should be established. We believe that an interactive website would be more useful than the traditional regular meeting of interest groups. We will explore that idea with other bodies that we know are interested. As a Government, we are committed to increasing levels of walking throughout the country. We have set in place the policy framework to allow that to happen. We will work with local authorities and other bodies, so that action is taken and we put the right conditions in place to enable people to choose to walk.

I am grateful for having been able to listen to hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber. There have been some excellent speeches. I am also grateful for the privilege and opportunity to present some of the Government's ideas on such an important subject.

5.25 pm

Andrew Bennett: I thank all hon. Members who have participated, especially my colleagues from the Select Committee, for whose support I am grateful. I want to make three brief points.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) was concerned about the number of staff in the walking section of the Department. The Committee was concerned about that as well, and we pressed the permanent secretary on the subject when he appeared before us 10 days ago. He assured us that if the people involved in that section felt that they needed extra staff, he could at least find those staff for them. I hope that the message has reached them; it reassured the Committee.

I was impressed by the description that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) gave of private affluence and public decay in this country, but I am not sure that his leader has the same message. Tackling public decay involves public expenditure, and the money has to come from somewhere.

I was grateful for the full response from my hon. Friend the Minister. On the chewing gum issue, perhaps he might persuade Wrigley to create more jobs in his constituency to clear up the mess that it creates.

The Committee will return to the report later in the year. We look forward to what the Minister has promised—the guidance, the strategy, the website—being up and running, perhaps for Easter.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Five o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 14 January 2002

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Recycling (Norman Shaw North)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what steps are taken to ensure that the contents of the recycling bags in Norman Shaw North are recycled. [26347]

Mrs. Roe *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The authorised contractor is obligated to separate and remove wastepaper for recycling. From 12 March, the contract specification will be strengthened to ensure that these procedures are monitored and reported regularly to the House authorities. If the hon. Member has any specific concerns about paper recycling, I hope he will raise them with the Serjeant at Arms.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the amounts paid to *(a)* senior counsel, *(b)* junior counsel, *(c)* judges and *(d)* secretarial and administrative support in respect of the Bloody Sunday inquiry in Londonderry. [23566]

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide details of the cost of the Saville inquiry in respect of *(a)* fees paid to junior and senior counsel, *(b)* fees paid to solicitors and *(c)* fees, expenses and other payments made to the chairman; and what is the total cost of the inquiry to date. [19988]

Mr. Browne: The cost of the Bloody Sunday inquiry to the Northern Ireland Office, as at 4 December 2001, is £52 million. This figure does not include costs to other Departments such as the Ministry of Defence.

The costs to the Northern Ireland Office can be broken down as follows:

NIO expenditure on Bloody Sunday inquiry from 1997–98 to December 2001

	£000
1. Tribunal members	
Salaries[1]; allowances[2]; rental of London accommodation for non-UK members	907
2. Inquiry Secretariat	
Salary costs	3,206
of which:	
solicitors and paralegals:	1,400
administrative staff (including witness liaison and press office):	1,806
3. Inquiry Counsel	
Fees and minor expenses	3,970
4. Counsel for the families	
Fees and expenses	3,743
of the payments at items three and four:	
to senior counsel:	4,093
to junior counsel:	3,620
5. Eversheds, solicitors[3]	
Fees and expenses	10,814
6. Solicitors for the families	
Fees and expenses	6,294
7. Other lawyers	
(Between them acting for a range of other clients, including soldiers not represented by one of the MOD-funded legal teams)	522
8. Inquiry experts[4]	
Fees and expenses	359
9. Information technology[5]	13,313
10. Accommodation	
(Rental of office accommodation in London and office and hearings accommodation in Londonderry)	3,690
11. Travel and Subsistence	
(For tribunal, and inquiry counsel and staff members)	1,344
12. Other	
(Including office services; security; construction work; tracing of witnesses; costs assessment of lawyers' bills)	3,838
Total	52,000

[1] Lord Saville continues to receive his salary as a Law Lord, currently £157,699 a year. He receives no salary from the NIO and so it is not included in the figure quoted at item one.

[2] The non-UK members of the tribunal are paid daily allowances of £50 (net) while in Londonderry and £75 (net) while in London. In addition these members are paid an allowance of £500 (net) for every month in which they spend at least a fortnight in the UK. Lord Saville is paid the daily Londonderry allowance, but neither of the other allowances. As at 4 December 2001 he had been paid a total of £7,400 in respect of this allowance. In addition the reasonable expenses incurred by members on tribunal business, and for travel to and from their home countries for the non-UK members, are met by the inquiry: the sums are included at item 11 in the table.

[3] Eversheds are the solicitors contracted by the inquiry to take witness statements. They have also provided professional support to inquiry counsel and solicitors.

[4] The experts concerned are in the fields of pathology, ballistics and explosives, sound, and history. The expenditure shown also includes that on the Peer Review Panel which has overseen the work of the pathology, ballistics, and sound experts.

[5] Expenditure includes that on real-time transcription of the hearings, and on the evidence display system.

Notes:

1. The table displays the expenditure position as at 4 December 2001. The late submission of some bills means that the figures shown for certain expenditure components, notably four, do not fully reflect the scale on which expenditure had been incurred by December 2001. In addition, a prospective Judicial Review could affect the position at four, and a prospective judgment of the Senior Costs Judge the position at six.
2. The expenditure figures include VAT where that is paid.
3. The Ministry of Defence meets nearly all the costs of the four legal teams which between them represent most of the soldiers.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost to date of the Saville inquiry; and what he expects the final cost to be. [24438]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The cost to date to the Ministry of Defence of the Saville inquiry is £14,454,453. This figure does not include costs to other Government Departments. It is not possible to provide an estimate of final cost, which is dependent on a number of factors beyond our control such as number of days in court and the number of witnesses called.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Temporary Contracts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people he expects to employ in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of (i) 51 weeks and (ii) less than 51 weeks duration in the next four years in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract. [25173]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of (i) 51 weeks and (ii) less than 51 weeks duration have been reemployed in the same or similar positions at a later date in each year since 1997. [25172]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

EU Military Staff

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* military and *(b)* civilian staff will be (i) employed by and (ii) seconded by member states to the EU military staff in Brussels; and how much this will cost per annum. [24987]

Mr. Bradshaw: The EU military staff has 135 permanent members. Within the EU military staff, there are 121 military personnel and 14 civilian personnel. All personnel are seconded and their salaries are paid by national Governments. Their operational expenses and allowances are met by the Council Secretariat and are included in the estimate of ESDP costs in the current financial year provided in answer to the hon. Member's previous question on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 913W.

Kosovo

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Parliamentary Secretary's letter of 8 July, what continuing action has been taken to protect Serbian churches in Kosovo. [25950]

Mr. MacShane: As part of their mandate to provide a safe and secure environment in Kosovo, NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) troops continue to guard Serbian churches in Kosovo. The protection of the remaining religious buildings and patrimonial sites is an important part of the international community's strategy of maintaining Kosovo as a multi-ethnic society. UK troops take an active part in this process.

Iran

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whom he has named as the new UK ambassador to Iran; when this matter was last discussed with Iran; and if he will make a statement. [27134]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not normal practice to comment on discussions about ambassadorial appointments before they have been agreed with the host Government. I can however confirm that we have nominated a new ambassador to Tehran and are awaiting agreement from the Iranian authorities.

Indo-Pakistani Relations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the crisis in Indo-Pakistani relations. [26522]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are concerned about the rising tensions between India and Pakistan. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has spoken on several occasions to his Indian, Pakistani and US counterparts in recent weeks. The UK continues to call for an end to external support for terrorism in Kashmir and urges both countries to exercise restraint and find a solution through meaningful dialogue. The Prime Minister reiterated this during this recent meetings with the Indian and Pakistani leaders on 6 and 7 January.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Pesticides

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will promote international measures to reduce the risk to rural workers in developing countries caused by the hazardous use of pesticides. [27435]

Clare Short: We fully support the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent (PIC), and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) which create a framework and promote political will to tackle the problems that poor management and hazardous use of pesticides pose to health, the environment and livelihoods in developing countries.

DFID also supports the revised Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)'s International Code of Conduct on the Distribution of Use of Pesticides, which provides a widely accepted framework of good practice relating to pesticide management. DFID complies with the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC)'s Guidelines for Aid Agencies on Pest and Pesticide Management.

DFID does not supply pesticides to developing countries through its programmes (except in emergency conditions such as locust plagues) or support pesticide subsidies. DFID promotes the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which was recognised in UNCED Agenda 21 as the preferred approach to crop protection for development programmes. IPM provides a means to promote crop protection strategies with minimal external inputs, and maximum consideration for the sustainability and better understanding of production systems, integrity of the environment, and safety of the producer and consumer. By reducing the need for pesticide applications through the use of pest-resistant crop varieties, natural enemies and cultivation techniques, IPM has increased the sustainability of farming and ecological systems at minimal cost and reduced health risks to farmers.

More information is available in a key-sheet for sustainable livelihoods on IPM (co-funded by DFID) from DFID or at the website address: http://www.odi.org.uk/keysheets/ipm/pdf.

UN Poverty Development Programme

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the United Kingdom's financial assistance to the United Nations Poverty Development Programme was in each of the last three years. [25902]

Clare Short: There is no UN Poverty Development Programme. Our core voluntary contribution to the United Nations Development Programme was £35 million in 1999; £35 million in 2000; and £37 million in 2001. We also provided additional non-core funding for a number of specific UNDP projects in a number of countries.

Afghanistan

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to provide assistance *(a)* directly and *(b)* through other agencies, to assist orphans in Afghanistan. [25910]

Clare Short: Every effort is being made to minimise the suffering of all vulnerable Afghans, including children and orphans. Our aim is to support the UN-led international humanitarian and recovery effort, for which we have provided assistance of £60 million through UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs since last September.

My Department has so far allocated around £10 million from these funds to UNICEF and other aid agencies to support activities focused on children, including orphans. We have also allocated over £2 million to the UN Trust Fund to support the Afghan Interim Administration, which includes a Department concerned with orphan affairs.

Humanitarian Service (Civilian Roster)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will introduce proposals to develop a national civilian roster for humanitarian assistance along the lines of the Danish International Humanitarian Service or the Norwegian NORDEM. [26671]

Clare Short *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* A mechanism for international disaster response exists under the coordination of the United Nations. My Department's priority is to improve and strengthen this mechanism, which involves the affected nations, the United Nations and Red Cross systems, non-governmental organisations and donor Governments.

While our ultimate aim is to build a better international humanitarian system, there is a role for donor Governments such as the UK to fill gaps in rapid direct response. The UK already has a capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies around the clock which is as respected as the Danish and Norwegian services mentioned, under arrangements existing within my Department.

We are able to field well-equipped teams of experts with a broad range of skills and also maintain stockpiles of relief items. As and when we need to complement our own existing specialist staff for emergencies we can call upon other organisations under existing arrangements, such as RedR (Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief) and International Health Exchange. With DFID support, these agencies maintain databases of suitably qualified disaster specialists including engineers, logisticians, and qualified medical staff who have been selected and trained beforehand for work in this area. My Department also manages the UK contribution to the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDAC) system under which qualified British experts are made available for overseas service.

In addition, DFID has established arrangements with other Government Departments to facilitate rapid disaster response. This includes the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who assist in global surveillance of disasters; the Home Office, with whom we have an arrangement for the deployment of UK Fire Service Search and Rescue personnel; and the Ministry of Defence from whom we can request the deployment of military assets, in support of emergency humanitarian operations.

Tanzania

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the World bank in respect of the UK air traffic control system to be sold to Tanzania. [26289]

Clare Short: There has been considerable discussion between DFID and the World bank about the proposed export of a BAE air traffic control system to Tanzania.

The World bank is concerned about the system's technical applicability and its value for money. These concerns were discussed with donors and undertakings given by the Government of Tanzania prior to the International Monetary Fund and World bank board meetings in November 2001. The Government of Tanzania undertook to work with the International Civil Aviation Organisation in identifying Tanzania's civil aviation requirements and to explore the modification of the contract with BAE to meet these requirements. On this base the bank and fund boards agreed that Tanzania would reach Completion Point under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative at their November meetings.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid has been given to Tanzania since 1997; and what forms it has taken. [25921]

Clare Short: In the financial years 1996–97 to 2000–01 DFID provided a total of £273.5 million in development assistance to Tanzania. This includes Project Aid, Programme Aid, Technical Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, as set out in the table.

DFID's Development Goal is to support Tanzania in institutionalising and implementing its Poverty Reduction Strategy (launched in 2000) to achieve its key targets for reducing income poverty, improving health and education outcomes and reducing vulnerability.

Bilateral aid to Tanzania 1996–97 to 2000–01

	£000
Project Aid	25,650
Programme Aid	159,217
Technical Co-operation	59,774
Grants/Other Aid in Kind	20,408
Humanitarian Assistance	8,454
Total	273,503

WALES

Job Losses (Nantgarw)

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Assembly Education Secretary on the measures which have been put in place by ELWa in response to the job losses at Nantgarw in South Wales. [23400]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Minister and meetings with other Assembly Ministers when we discuss a variety of issues.

I regret the decision taken by General Electric to shed around 350 jobs at its plant in Nantgarw and the effect this has had on those who have lost their jobs, on their families and on the community.

I understand that 310 workers at the GE plant took voluntary redundancy terms at the end of the 90 day consultation period, which ended on 3 January 2002. A further 10 took redundancy on compulsory terms and the remainder are still in negotiations with GE and the trade unions.

GE has set up a task force that comprised representatives from ELWa, the Employment Service, the Welsh Development Agency and the trade unions to help find retraining opportunities for those who have lost their jobs.

Concordats

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the concordats which have been agreed between UK Government Departments and the National Assembly for Wales. [25470]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In addition to the multilateral, "overarching" concordats (European policy issues; international affairs; assistance to industry; statistics) the Assembly has concordats with: Cabinet Office; Her Majesty's Treasury; Department of Health; Department for Work and Pensions; Lord Chancellor's Department; Ministry of Defence; Department of Trade and Industry; Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Health and Safety Executive; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Home Office; and also with the Wales Office.

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the criteria the Government use to evaluate the performance of the Children's Commissioner for Wales in carrying out his prescribed tasks and functions. [25469]

Mr. Paul Murphy: That is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

New Opportunities Fund

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the criteria by which LEAs have been assigned the new opportunities fund for sport allocation. [26288]

Mr. Caborn: Further to my answer to my hon. Friend of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 155–56W, the new opportunities fund determined the formula for these allocations by relating 50 per cent. of the funding available to the number of school pupils in an area and 50 per cent. to the deprivation of that area defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Swimming Pools

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans she has to provide the funding to refurbish and repair the United Kingdom's swimming pools; [26885]

(2) what plans she has to ensure that every major city in the United Kingdom has an Olympic-size swimming pool. [26886]

Mr. Caborn: Swimming has benefited from substantial lottery funding over recent years. Up to September 2001, the sport had received £383 million in project development costs, making swimming the largest single beneficiary of Sport England lottery funding among sports to date.

Sport England has worked closely with the Amateur Swimming Association to identify areas of need, and has agreed in principle to fund the development of eight new 50 metre pools in England. Funding has already been made available for 50 metre pools in Leeds, Liverpool and Loughborough.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will name those persons working within central Government on aspects of the public-private partnership for London Underground who have within the past five years *(a)* served on the board of, *(b)* been employed by and *(c)* had a material connection to any of the companies which make up the consortia which have been accorded preferred bidder status for the public-private partnership for London Underground. [14607]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Primary responsibility for this matter within my Department rests with the London Underground task group, which maintains a register of interests. No staff within the group have such connections.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he received the proposed final draft contracts between London Underground and the private infrastructure companies; and if he will make a statement. [26434]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure. Bids for the modernisation contracts were received by London Underground on 4 January, as expected.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the latest date is by which he estimates that London Underground will take delivery of new rolling stock. [26295]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 497–98W.

Jubilee Line

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the problems with the signalling system on the Jubilee line; and what measures will be taken to resolve them. [23551]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for London Underground. I have asked the Managing Director to reply and will place a copy of the letter in the House Library.

Housing Benefit

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of how many people were evicted by *(a)* private landlords and *(b)* social housing landlords because of local authority delay in paying housing benefit in 2001. [25035]

Ms Keeble: Such information is not available centrally. The Department for Work and Pensions is working with local authorities to reduce delays in processing housing benefit claims, including measures to involve landlords in verification of claims and to allow agency staff to determine claims. Draft national performance standards encourage local authorities to co-operate with landlords who are seeking information about the progress of housing benefit claims made by their tenants.

Plumbers and Electricians

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the number of prosecutions against contractors for dangerous plumbing and electrical work in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [25839]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Health and Safety Executive is the main enforcing authority for health and safety legislation in the work place. In the most recent year for which they have complete figures, April 2000 to March 2001, they were able to identify only one contractor who was prosecuted for dangerous electrical work. There may be other cases involving contractors in which electrical safety was a minor element which have not been identified. They were unable to identify any prosecutions for dangerous plumbing.

HSE has a complete record only of prosecutions it has carried out under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and related legislation dealing with health and safety in the workplace. HSE is not the sole enforcing authority. Health and safety in some premises, including shops, offices and warehouses, is enforced by local authorities. HSE does not have full information on the prosecutions carried out by these authorities.

Road Accidents

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of road accidents took place in 30 mph limits in the last three years for which figures are available. [26466]

Mr. Spellar: Injury accidents on roads with a 30 mph limit accounted for 65 per cent. of all injury road accidents in each of the years 1998, 1999 and 2000. No information is available regarding the proportion of damage only accidents which took place on roads with a 30mph limit.

Speed Limits

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal powers local authorities have to introduce 20mph speed limits. [26469]

Mr. Spellar: From 1999 local authorities have powers to introduce 20mph speed limits without the consent of the Secretary of State.

The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (Amendment) Act Order 1999 (S.I. 1999/1608) removed the consent requirement for local authorities to make 20mph speed limits. The legislation came into force on 16 June 1999.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal restrictions there are on road signage relating to speed limits. [26467]

Mr. Spellar: The designs and sizes of signs to be used for signing speed limits are specified in the Traffic Signs Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1519 Part I). Conditions for their placing are specified in the Traffic Signs General Directions Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1519 Part II as amended by SI 1995/2769).

Trains (Disabled Access)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the likely impact of providing disabled and disability access on the capacity of trains. [26307]

Ms Keeble: There is no evidence to suggest that providing access for disabled people has any impact on the overall capacity of trains. There may be some effect on the number of fixed seats but this will depend on the type of rolling stock, on its interior design and on other factors not related to access. However, it is possible to mitigate seat loss, for example, by the use of tip up seats in wheelchair spaces.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress made to establish a company limited by guarantee to bid for ownership of Railtrack and its assets, indicating by what date he expects the new company to be fully legally operational. [26292]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 859W.

New Deal for Communities

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much new deal for communities funding has been earmarked for expenditure on *(a)* building new homes and *(b)* repairing and improving existing stock in each of the new deal for communities areas. [25922]

Ms Keeble: The information is not available in the requested form.

The 39 NDC partnerships have been allocated a total of £2 billion over the next 10 years. All partnerships have proposals to build and improve housing stock within their neighbourhoods. As part of the NDC Evaluation Programme and reprofiling exercise, partnerships are currently reviewing their delivery plans with the aim of ensuring that their programmes will achieve the desired outcomes. It is therefore not the best time to collect this data from NDC partnerships in the form requested.

Planning Conditions

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what procedures he operates to check that conditions attached to planning appeal decisions are carried out; and if he will make a statement. [25968]

Ms Keeble: Responsibility for checking that planning conditions are complied with rests with the relevant local planning authority. They have powers to enforce their compliance.

Homelessness

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the assistance given to the homeless who are trying to get a permanent home; and what new measures have been introduced since 1997. [26632]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities have a duty to provide appropriate advice and assistance to anyone who is homeless. In addition, there are provisions in the Homelessness Bill to ensure that each local authority formulates and publishes a homelessness strategy. This will help ensure that accommodation will be available for people who are, or may become homeless, as well as helping to prevent homelessness in the first place.

Assistance is also provided for former rough sleepers in England through the work of the Rough Sleepers Unit. The RSU is ensuring that a further 1,000 permanent homes are available for former rough sleepers, bringing the total to more than 4,500. Most of these homes have already been provided with the remainder becoming available by late 2002.

The RSU's strategy has also ensured that services have been developed to support individuals through the transition to permanent housing. The unit funds services which:

1. prepare people for living inside by tackling addiction and mental health issues;
2. help in securing accommodation through, for example, the use of rent deposit schemes and help finding furniture etc.;
3. support former rough sleepers within their new homes through Tenancy Sustainment Teams, including youth, substance misuse, mental health and employment workers;
4. equip individuals with the skills needed to live independently, help to access benefits and link them back into education, training and employment.

I am also very concerned about the rising number of homeless households being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. We have now established a Bed and Breakfast Unit which will shortly be announcing targets to reduce numbers placed in B&B over the next two years.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what help is available to homeless people who have mental health problems and other health difficulties. [26630]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities have duties towards homeless people with mental health problems and other health difficulties under the Housing Act 1996. Under Part 6, reasonable preference must be given in the allocation of social housing to households who need settled accommodation on medical or welfare grounds. Under Part 7 of the Act, a local housing authority must secure accommodation for a person who is unintentionally homeless and vulnerable through mental illness or handicap or physical disability.

The Supporting People programme, which comes onstream on 1 April 2003, will provide housing-related support to vulnerable groups, including homeless people with mental health problems and other health difficulties.

The programme will provide support, with resettlement and rehabilitation, and will also help them to maintain tenancies, and prevent a recurrence of homelessness.

Supporting People will be based on partnership working, and the programme will be planned and delivered in collaboration with local health and social care agencies. Through Supporting People, service users with additional needs will be helped to access other specialist services.

The Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU), working closely with the Department of Health, funds services in England to help rough sleepers with mental health and substance misuse problems. These include specialist workers operating across all RSU funded services, and a range of hostels, specialist beds and permanent homes targeting those with mental health and substance misuse problems.

All homeless people, including rough sleepers, are eligible to access health care and advice and register with a GP. The Department of Health has also funded Personal Medical Services (PMS) pilots, some of which are targeted specifically towards homeless people.

The National Service Framework for Mental Health (NSF) is a 10-year programme spelling out national standards for mental health, what they aim to achieve, how they should be developed and delivered and how to measure performance. The standards in the NSF apply equally to the homeless. Specifically, Standard 1 relating to Health Promotion identifies rough sleepers as a "vulnerable" population.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will investigate the problem of homelessness in rural areas with specific reference to the single homeless. [27131]

Ms Keeble: The Countryside Agency is planning to publish research on preventing homelessness in rural areas in the next few months. This research investigated homelessness in rural areas including single homelessness and will provide good practice on what works in preventing homelessness and the delivery of services to homeless people in rural areas.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the levels of homelessness were in rural areas in each of the last five years, broken down by district. [27132]

Ms Keeble: I have placed the information requested in the Libraries of the House.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regulations are in place to control vehicle emissions; and what measures there are to enforce them. [25933]

Mr. Spellar: Separate sets of regulations to control vehicle emissions exist for new vehicles and for vehicles after sale.

Statutory regulations specify the standard to which new model types must be constructed before vehicles can enter service. These regulations apply European directives which specify emissions limits and detailed test procedures. The relevant regulations are the Motor Vehicles (EC Type Approval) Regulations 1998, the Motor Vehicles (Type Approval) (Great Britain) Regulations 1984, the Motor Vehicles (Type Approval for Goods Vehicles) Regulations 1982, and the Motor Cycles Etc (EC Type Approval) Regulations 1999, as amended. These are enforced by the Vehicle Certification Agency.

The Motor Vehicles (Approval) Regulations 2001 apply similar standards to those of type approval mainly for small numbers of imported cars and light goods vehicles (new or used) that are not type-approved at the manufacturing stage and these are enforced by the Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency (V.I.). Other vehicles not subject to type, or single vehicle, approval are regulated under the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 (C&U).

When in use vehicles must comply with emissions standards specified in the C&U Regulations. Compliance with C&U is assessed during a vehicle's annual roadworthiness inspection. In the case of heavy vehicles this is carried out by the V.I. and for passenger cars and light vans by privately operated (M.O.T) test centres under the supervision of the V.I. Roadside spot checks are also carried out by the V.I. and by local authorities.

Local Authority Asset Sales

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what amount of asset sales have been realised *(a)* by each local authority and *(b)* in total by local authorities in each of the last three years; [26143]

(2) what the total value was of the sale of local authority assets in each of the last four years; and if he will provide a detailed breakdown. [26147]

Dr. Whitehead: The total value of the sale of local authority fixed assets in England in each of the last four years is as follows:

Sale of fixed assets

	£ million
1997–98	2,135
1998–99	2,350
1999–2000	3,227
2000–01	3,107

Source:

Capital Outturn Return (COR2) for 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000, Capital Payments and Receipts (CPR4) for 2000–01

I am placing in the Libraries of the House the corresponding figures for individual local authorities in England for each of the relevant four years.

Buses (Essex)

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many miles were travelled by buses in the county of Essex on scheduled passenger journeys which were in receipt of the rural bus subsidy grant in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [26852]

Ms Keeble: The rural bus subsidy grant scheme was introduced in 1998–99. The figures for the county of Essex are as follows:

Financial year	*Local bus vehicle mileage*
1998–99	[1]127,500
1999–2000	865,300
2000–01	1,333,500

[1] First services started in January 1999.

Source:

Local authority annual returns to DTLR.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many miles were travelled by buses on scheduled passenger journeys in the county of Essex in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [26851]

Ms Keeble: The information has been estimated from the DTLR's annual survey of bus and coach operators for the financial years 1998–99 to 2000–01. The figures show estimated total vehicle miles operated on scheduled commercial and subsidised local bus services in the county of Essex, excluding the unitary authorities of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea.

Million

Financial year	*Scheduled local bus service vehicle miles*
1998–99	27.5
1999–2000	28.0
2000–01	29.1

Source:
DTLR annual survey of PSV operators.

Local Authority Funding

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what basis his indicative settlement for Worcestershire has been determined. [27116]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 167–70.

Thameslink 2000

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the most recent estimate is of the cost of the Thameslink 2000 project. [26149]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The scope and options for delivering the project, if powers are granted under the TWA Order, will influence the final cost. These matters are the subject of continuing discussions between Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority following the Procurement Review announced on 2 April. Although it is clear that project costs will be higher than previously estimated, until the outstanding matters have been resolved a meaningful estimate cannot be given.

Highways (Southern England)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what roads on the Isle of Wight and in Southampton, Portsmouth and Hampshire are the responsibility of his Department; what *(a)* agency and *(b)* other arrangements exist for the maintenance of those roads; and what consultation agents undertake with his Department on works and traffic management schemes affecting those roads. [26662]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 14 January 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about roads on the Isle of Wight and in the County of Hampshire.

The Highways Agency manages the motorway and trunk road network in England on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). Maintenance of these roads is carried out by Managing Agents and Term Maintenance Contractors. The roads we are responsible for in Hampshire are the M3, M27, M271 and the A3(M) Motorways and A3, A339, A34, A303, A27 and A31 all purpose trunk roads. We have no responsibility for roads on the Isle of Wight.

The Agency sets standards for works and traffic management, and the way they are carried out to a level agreed with the Department. Those standards are built in to the commissions we give to our agents.

Wimbledon Football Club

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions since November Lord Falconer has had with representatives of Merton borough council, concerning the former Wimbledon football club site. [27135]

Ms Keeble: My noble Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning Regeneration has had no discussions with representatives of Merton borough council about this issue since November.

Heathrow

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent changes there have been in the arrangements for the stacking of aircraft before landing at Heathrow; and if he will make a statement. [25860]

Mr. Jamieson: The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for approving the arrangements for the stacking of aircraft before landing at Heathrow and it has confirmed that there have been no recent changes to the arrangements that exist.

Home Sellers' Packs

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure that home sellers' packs include information on *(a)* a flooding history of the property and *(b)* whether the property entails riparian ownership. [27007]

Ms Keeble: Under the Government's proposals for sellers' packs, prospective buyers will be provided with key information about homes being marketed for sale. We are planning to go out to consultation in the spring to seek views on the contents of the sellers' pack. Information concerning flood risk and obligations that will transfer with the ownership of the property are among the items to be covered by the consultation.

In the meantime, the Environment Agency is currently engaged in discussions with the Law Society on making an 'Environment Agency Property Search Report', a standard part of the domestic and commercial conveyancing process in England and Wales. A pilot trial is running in North Wales and work is under way to extend this. Each Environment Agency report will include information on flood risk as well as other environmental data for which the agency has responsibility.

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the revenue support grant paid to smaller district authorities in the recent statement. [27130]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what provision he has made in his road-building programme for additional costs arising from the aggregates levy. [26512]

Mr. Jamieson: We estimate that the aggregates levy will add less than one per cent. to the cost of the 50 schemes in the Targeted Programme of Improvements. That estimate is likely to be high because of the increasing use of recycled aggregates which the levy was designed to encourage.

Chiltern Line Franchise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress with the renewal of the Chiltern line franchise; and when he expects a final agreement to be reached. [26518]

Mr. Jamieson: The new franchise agreement has been presented to the Strategic Rail Authority's board for their approval. If approval is granted the Secretary of State's consent is then required to enter into a new agreement.

Central Railway

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce a decision on the request of Central Railway plc for a hybrid Bill to implement their scheme. [26517]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are considering carefully Central Railway's proposals for a hybrid Bill. We will take a view on the issues raised by proposals and respond to Central Railway in due course.

Railways

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what inquiries he has received from Ernst and Young as to the level of Government funding to the rail network over the next *(a)* one year, *(b)* five years and *(c)* 10 years. [26892]

Mr. Byers: Ernst and Young, in their work on administration of Railtrack plc preparing for the transfer of the business out of administration, have asked my officials for information about the future funding of the railway industry.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from Ernst and Young on the level of future Government funding of the rail network. [26893]

Mr. Byers: None.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton dated 10 December with regard to Ms J Wallwork. [27287]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills replied to my right hon. Friend's letter of 10 December today, 14 January 2002.

Pre-school Organisations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many initiatives requiring action by pre-school organisations have been initiated by the Government in 2001. [23401]

Margaret Hodge: In addition to existing programmes, a total of five new programmes were launched by Government in 2001, providing enhanced opportunities for pre-school organisations and focused on increasing funding for the early years and child care sector and raising quality and standards for parents and children. A list is provided for information.

The expansion and development of existing early years programmes such as the universal nursery provision for all three and four-year-olds, has also provided a welcome boost to the sector.

Also introduced in September 2001 were the National Standards for Under 8s Day Care and Childminding, and the transfer of Regulation of Day Care to Ofsted.

Initiatives launched 2001:

1. The Local Network Fund:

This was launched in May 2001 to enable local voluntary and community groups to provide local solutions to child poverty. The fund provides grants up to £7,000 for work with children and young people aged 0–19. Projects run by voluntary organisations for pre-school children are already benefiting from the fund.

2. Universal Nursery Provision for three and four year olds:

Funding of £200 million has been made available in 2001–02 to provide up to 170,000 free part-time early education places for three-year-olds. The majority of these new free places are expected to be in the private, voluntary and independent sectors including pre-schools. To obtain this funding pre-schools must apply to their local education authority.

3. Day Care Expansion programme:

Supported with £4 million of ESF was introduced in March 2001. The grant is aimed at encouraging and assisting providers in all sectors to make the move to provision of longer care, ideally full day care but certainly not less than four hours. Application for funding would be through EYDCPs.

4. Playgroups provide day care/wraparound:

An initiative was introduced to aid the conversion, by 2004, of at least 21,000 playgroups places to move to day care/wraparound care provision. The aim of this initiative is to enable playgroup places to be converted from sessional provision to day care, or wraparound care, combining early years education and care. This assists parents by allowing them sufficient time to take up employment, training or educational opportunities. Capital funding of £6 million is being made available from 2002–03 to aid this conversion programme. This initiative contributes to the Government's strategic aim of creating 1.6 million new child care places by March 2004.

5. Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI):

This is part of the Government's wider Neighbourhood Childcare strategy. The NNI aims to create new child care places in day nurseries, in the most disadvantaged areas of the country. It aims to help reduce child poverty by helping parents take up work and training that will help them into work. It should also improve the life chances of children through access to quality care, early education and support.

National Standards for Under 8s Day Care and Childminding, and the transfer of Regulation of Day Care to Ofsted:

Regulation under OFSTED provides for a single, national policy on the regulation of day care providers and child minders, which will help to ensure consistency of policy and procedures across the whole of England.

Faith-based Schools

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many letters of *(a)* support and *(b)* opposition she has had to the Government's proposal for faith-based schools. [27023]

Mr. Timms: The Departmental team dealing with faith schools has received 340 letters since publication of the Government's proposals in the White Paper. Of those, *(a)* five supported an increase in faith schools and *(b)* 335 were opposed. In the main, the letters of opposition were objecting to faith schools in principle.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what response she has had from *(a)* the Church of England, *(b)* the Roman Catholic Church, *(c)* the non-conformist churches, *(d)* the Muslim community, *(e)* the Hindu community and *(f)* other faiths to the Government's proposal for faith-based schools. [27022]

Mr. Timms: The Government's proposal for faith-based schools was part of the White Paper, "Schools: achieving success", on which the churches and faith groups were consulted. Ministers and officials continue to hold meetings with them to listen to views on the implementation of the White Paper proposals and related matters.

A copy of the Interim Report on the White Paper consultation has been placed in the Library and the full report will be published in due course.

Rural Schools

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools there were in rural areas, broken down by (i) constituency and (ii) local education authority in each year since 1990. [24897]

Mr. Timms: At this level of detail the information requested is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information from the Register of Educational Establishments shows that at present there are an estimated 2,727 maintained primary schools (15.2 per cent. of all primary schools) and an estimated 78 maintained secondary schools (2.3 per cent. of all secondary schools) classified as being either wholly or predominantly rural.

School Lunches

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the price of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school lunches by local authority in descending order. [24971]

Mr. Timms: Information on the price of school lunches is not collected centrally.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given the Learning and Skills Council about provisions for the over 60s; and if she will make a statement. [25516]

Margaret Hodge: The Government are committed to creating a learning society in which everyone, of every age and in all circumstances enjoys learning throughout life. Research shows that learning has many benefits for older people in particular, including increased self-confidence, self-esteem and better health and well being, all helping to contribute to an independent and fulfilling lifestyle. We want to encourage more older people to take advantage of the benefits of learning, particularly older people who have not previously engaged in learning or who have been "hard to reach". So we are working to raise awareness of the value of later life learning via our Learning in Later Life Campaign; encouraging practitioners to share good practice; working with libraries, museums and galleries to help unlock their potential as places of learning; and undertaking research into the learning needs of older people.

Accordingly, in his remit letter to the Learning and Skills Council in November 2000, the then Secretary of State emphasised that learning can help to strengthen families; build stronger neighbourhoods; help older people to stay healthy and active, and encourage independence for all by opening up new opportunities. He also highlighted that many adults, including large numbers of older and retired learners, would want to pursue high quality and rigorous study for its own sake, and that he expected provision to be made available to meet their needs. To support this, we have increased funding for adult and community learning—provision which many older people access—to £165 million in 2002–03.

Higher Education

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many officials of her Department work on higher education policy. [25517]

Margaret Hodge: The higher education group in the Department comprises some 190 full-time equivalent officials, although staff elsewhere in the Department also contribute to higher education policy.

Social Exclusion

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent meetings she has held in order to co-ordinate policy on the implementation of the social exclusion unit's report on young people. [23460]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The principles and recommendations of the report from the social exclusion unit's policy action team (12) on young people continue to form the agenda of the children and young people's unit and the great majority of my meetings in my role as Minister responsible for young people are concerned with work taking forward its recommendations.

Two recent initiatives are of particular importance: the publication of the Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People, launched on 2 November, and the consultation on the Government's proposed Strategy for Children and Young People, which began on 21 November. The core principles provide a framework that Government Departments have agreed to work to in order to increase the effective involvement of children and young people in the design and provision of policies and services. The strategy sets out a framework for measuring and monitoring real-life outcomes in children and young people's lives—the consultation will help shape priorities for spending over £40 billion each year on services for children and young people. I have, of course, met Ministers with an interest in children and young people's issues to discuss and agree both documents which are key elements in the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Education Bill

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what powers *(a)* will be removed from local government and *(b)* she will gain under the Education Bill. [25928]

Mr. Timms: Our key aim in legislating through the Education Bill is to remove barriers to innovation and free providers to adopt new approaches to the delivery of education. An important part of this is the creation of a legislative framework that can be adapted more easily to changing circumstances so that we can be more responsive to schools and LEAs delivering services. The Bill does not signal any change in our view of the role of local government. We know that LEAs have an important role to play in school improvement and are committed to working with them.

All the measures in the Bill are consistent with our principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success. Where schools and LEAs are delivering good quality services, we will support them to do so. If services should fail the children and young people involved, then intervention will be swift and decisive, so that they receive the quality of education which is their right.

It is not, therefore, our intention to change the balance of powers between central and local government through the Education Bill.

Specialist Schools (South Tyneside)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how specialist schools in South Tyneside have performed compared with other schools in South Tyneside. [26039]

Mr. Timms: As shown in the table the two specialist schools in South Tyneside are performing above the LEA's average in relation to the percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C.

Percentage of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs grades A-C in 2001*

	Percentage
Harton School	40
St. Joseph's RC Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School	52
LEA average	39

Education Standard Spending

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the education standard spending per pupil in Swindon was in each of the last three years; and what the average was for all authorities was in those years. [26055]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the following table:

SSA per pupil (primary and secondary unit cost)

£

LEA Name	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Barking and Dagenham	3,021	3,152	3,331
Barnet	2,857	2,987	3,156
Barnsley	2,559	2,683	2,800
Bath and North East Somerset	2,428	2,528	2,618
Bedfordshire	2,566	2,693	2,841
Bexley	2,750	2,861	3,017
Birmingham	2,820	2,959	3,082
Blackburn	2,734	2,865	2,974
Blackpool	2,568	2,708	2,820
Bolton	2,560	2,674	2,782
Bournemouth	2,560	2,672	2,773
Bracknell Forest	2,608	2,722	2,869
Bradford	2,702	2,840	2,958
Brent	3,314	3,431	3,627
Brighton and Hove	2,703	2,839	2,999
Bromley	2,705	2,806	2,966
Buckinghamshire	2,575	2,701	2,844
Bury	2,465	2,589	2,701
Calderdale	2,567	2,688	2,803
Cambridgeshire	2,485	2,591	2,697
Camden	3,721	3,913	4,095
Cheshire	2,443	2,547	2,650
City of Bristol	2,599	2,723	2,845
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	2,694	2,844	2,970
City of London	3,459	3,514	3,470
Cornwall	2,574	2,682	2,799
Coventry	2,665	2,788	2,894
Croydon	2,933	3,061	3,231
Cumbria	2,538	2,660	2,771
Darlington	2,546	2,683	2,785
Derby	2,602	2,733	2,849
Derbyshire	2,440	2,553	2,665
Devon	2,540	2,649	2,753
Doncaster	2,659	2,775	2,872
Dorset	2,464	2,577	2,678
Dudley	2,448	2,550	2,662
Durham	2,574	2,704	2,820
Ealing	3,097	3,241	3,431
East Riding of Yorkshire	2,466	2,582	2,684
East Sussex	2,625	2,761	2,910
Enfield	2,976	3,098	[illegible]292
Essex	2,631	2,757	2,904
Gateshead	2,597	2,721	2,832
Gloucestershire	2,474	2,576	2,679
Greenwich	3,518	3,688	3,862
Hackney	3,941	4,118	4,295

SSA per pupil (primary and secondary unit cost)

£

LEA Name	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Halton	2,675	2,812	2,941
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,715	3,899	4,095
Hampshire	2,503	2,624	2,765
Haringey	3,395	3,545	3,752
Harrow	2,823	2,955	3,138
Hartlepool	2,627	2,767	2,888
Havering	2,713	2,824	2,982
Herefordshire	2,546	2,664	2,768
Hertfordshire	2,659	2,785	2,933
Hillingdon	2,817	2,943	3,104
Hounslow	3,038	3,170	3,361
Isle of Wight Council	2,706	2,862	3,019
Isles of Scilly	4,660	4,846	5,040
Islington	3,760	3,971	4,172
Kensington and Chelsea	3,616	3,854	4,112
Kent	2,627	2,757	2,905
Kingston upon Thames	2,699	2,805	2,963
Kirklees	2,589	2,706	2,822
Knowsley	2,965	3,129	3,240
Lambeth	3,956	4,148	4,340
Lancashire	2,540	2,666	2,778
Leeds	2,558	2,681	2,794
Leicester	2,768	2,900	3,031
Leicestershire	2,385	2,490	2,591
Lewisham	3,667	3,815	3,984
Lincolnshire	2,560	2,671	2,781
Liverpool	2,907	3,082	3,202
Luton	2,798	2,929	3,081
Manchester	2,996	3,162	3,292
Merton	2,881	3,004	3,178
Middlesbrough	2,758	2,903	3,043
Milton Keynes	2,658	2,776	2,926
Newbury	2,502	2,625	2,777
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,736	2,878	2,999
Newham	3,434	3,582	3,774
Norfolk	2,558	2,681	2,793
North East Lincolnshire	2,604	2,748	2,876
North Lincolnshire	2,577	2,700	2,806
North Somerset	2,454	2,559	2,660
North Tyneside	2,529	2,653	2,766
North Yorkshire	2,513	2,633	2,741
Northamptonshire	2,490	2,597	2,702
Northumberland	2,531	2,645	2,759
Nottingham City	2,800	2,928	3,054
Nottinghamshire	2,477	2,597	2,703
Oldham	2,636	2,758	2,879
Oxfordshire	2,559	2,687	2,838
Peterborough	2,656	2,784	2,903
Plymouth	2,558	2,695	2,802
Poole	2,431	2,524	2,636
Portsmouth	2,689	2,809	2,958
Reading	2,662	2,796	2,956
Redbridge	2,895	3,017	3,184
Redcar and Cleveland	2,641	2,758	2,880
Richmond upon Thames	2,643	2,747	2,909
Rochdale	2,650	2,788	2,900
Rochester and Gillingham	2,597	2,725	2,874
Rotherham	2,561	2,670	2,779
Rutland	2,442	2,536	2,628
Salford	2,676	2,799	2,921
Sandwell	2,689	2,797	2,926
Sefton	2,559	2,692	2,789
Sheffield	2,593	2,714	2,828
Shropshire	2,497	2,602	2,716
Slough	3,098	3,235	3,422
Solihull	2,437	2,537	2,636
Somerset	2,497	2,602	2,711
South Gloucestershire	2,370	2,463	2,556
South Tyneside	2,662	2,800	2,925
Southampton	2,730	2,867	3,033
Southend	2,678	2,811	2,959
Southwark	3,744	3,894	4,083
St. Helens	2,571	2,694	2,807
Staffordshire	2,422	2,530	2,637
Stockport	2,422	2,536	2,639
Stockton-on-Tees	2,592	2,712	2,826
Stoke on Trent	2,560	2,703	2,845
Suffolk	2,487	2,600	2,704
Sunderland	2,625	2,743	2,867
Surrey	2,615	2,735	2,892
Sutton	2,765	2,865	3,018
Swindon	2,465	2,577	2,675
Tameside	2,537	2,667	2,782
The Wrekin	2,571	2,695	2,806
Thurrock	2,779	2,909	3,054
Torbay	2,587	2,712	2,814
Tower Hamlets	4,035	4,191	4,406
Trafford	2,519	2,628	2,728
Wakefield	2,493	2,612	2,725
Walsall	2,591	2,706	2,809
Waltham Forest	3,173	3,289	3,485
Wandsworth	3,425	3,551	3,704
Warrington	2,424	2,529	2,632
Warwickshire	2,451	2,558	2,663
West Sussex	2,545	2,666	2,818
Westminster	3,536	3,721	3,891
Wigan	2,469	2,580	2,683
Wiltshire	2,480	2,585	2,686
Windsor and Maidenhead	2,639	2,774	2,922
Wirral	2,647	2,784	2,896
Wokingham	2,398	2,510	2,646
Wolverhampton	2,693	2,808	2,932
Worcestershire	2,434	2,541	2,644
York	2,442	2,555	2,654
Average for England	2,658	2,782	2,911

Education Funding (Sunderland)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the real terms increase has been in *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue budgets for the Sunderland education authority in each year from 1997 inclusive; and what the projected increase is in each of the next three years. [26123]

Mr. Timms: The information requested from 1997–98 to 2001–02 is in the following table. Allocations for subsequent years have not yet been finalised so comparable figures for 2002–03 to 2004–05 are not available.

Sunderland's recurrent and capital allocations in real terms

£ million

	Recurrent	*Increase*	*Capital*	*Increase*
1997–98	118.76	—	8.48	—
1998–99	125.47	+ 6.71	7.18	– 1.30
1999–2000	132.60	+ 7.13	8.43	+ 1.24
2000–01	145.23	+ 12.63	14.19	+ 5.77
2001–02	158.90	+ 13.68	27.83	+ 13.64

[1] SSA + grants

Note:

Figures rounded to two decimal places

Revenue Support Grant

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the category and amounts of each grant outside the revenue support grant which her

Department has provided to *(a)* Westminster city council and *(b)* Kensington and Chelsea in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [26249]

Mr. Timms: The following tables show the Department's allocated grants to Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea local education authorities in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Westminster local education authority

£

	2000–01	*2001–02*
Standards Fund	5,348,906	7,023,787
Teachers Pay Reform Grant[1]	589,113	604,461
Nursery Education Grant (three-year-olds)[2]	815,164	954,360
Nursery Education Grant (four-year-olds)	543,259	—
Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (early years)	—	9,711
Early Years Training and Support	15,260	66,589
Childcare Grant	239,842	1,426,779
School Standards Grant[2]	687,000	1,468,500
School Budget Support Grant	127,851	—
Education Action Zone	484,000	[3]—
Capital Grant	4,089,000	3,909,000

[1] Funding to date.

[2] 2001–02 figures may be subject to change.

[3] Funding made directly to the Education Action Zone in Westminster. Up to £550,000 grant is available to the zone in 2001–02, conditional on the zone receiving £250,000 in eligible private sector sponsorship.

Note:

Amounts are in cash terms

Kensington and Chelsea local education authority

£

	2000–01	*2001–02*
Standards Fund	2,948,447	4,377,269
Teachers Pay Reform Grant[1]	329,912	434,337
Nursery Education Grant (three-year-olds)[2]	341,506	475,200
Nursery Education Grant (four-year-olds)	262,079	—
Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (early years)	—	6,243
Early Years Training and Support	10,060	42,807
Childcare Grant	205,198	1,294,679
School Standards Grant[2]	430,000	944,500
School Budget Support Grant	69,706	—
Transitional Funding and Insurance Grant (former GM Schools)	100,078	123,581
Capital Grant	1,929,000	2,014,000

[1] Funding to date

[2] 2001–01 figures may be subject to change

Note:

Amounts are in cash terms

Teachers' Performance Management Assessment

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received regarding the success of teachers' performance management assessment; and if she will make a statement. [26568]

Mr. Timms: Ministers regularly receive representations about performance management and also about assessments under the threshold pay system.

All schools have established new performance management arrangements and initial performance reviews will be completed this year. Nearly 200,000 teachers in England have been assessed as meeting the threshold standards and promoted to the upper pay scale.

Standards Fund (Somerset)

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Standards Funds received by schools in Somerset local education authority in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [26573]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows allocations for the Standards Fund for Somerset local education authority in 2000–01 and 2001–02. The figures include both Government and local authority contributions. The amount actually paid to schools depends on local expenditure decisions by schools and the local authority.

Standards Fund allocations for Somerset county council

	£
2000–01	
Administrative support for small schools	1,042,727
Advanced skills teachers	168,000
Beacon schools	140,500
Best practice research scholarships	1,060
Class size initiative	2,821,469
Devolved formula capital for schools	3,325,935
Early excellence centres	109,440
Early years training and development	154,004
Education and health partnerships	51,878
Ethnic minority pupils and traveller achievement	246,840
Local authority music services	727,450
Key stage 3 numeracy: secondary schools conference	24,852
Literacy and numeracy: summer schools and key stage 3	176,000
Primary literacy and numeracy strategies	1,363,942
National grid for learning	5,521,192
New national curriculum	184,800
Performance management training	439,418
Qualifications	81,022
School improvement	2,776,315
School laboratories for the 21st century	250,561
School leadership	352,176
School security	228,176
Secondary school learning support units	117,710
Seed capital challenge	267,108
Small school support fund	340,822
Social inclusion, drugs and youth	814,302
Special educational needs	543,771
Specialist schools	815,716
Study support	79,911
Summer schools for gifted and talented pupils	27,000
Support for parent governor representatives	1,200
Supported early retirement scheme for heads	183,941
Teacher incentives	25,006
Teaching assistants	1,184,249
Working environment fund	214,780
Year 6 literacy and numeracy booster classes	436,571
Total	25,239,844
2001–02	
Advanced skills teachers	280,500
Beacon schools	232,500
Year 6 literacy and numeracy booster classes	495,228
Children in public care	56,420
Devolved formula capital for schools	2,692,912
Drugs, alcohol and tobacco	143,710
Early excellence centres	168,680
Early years training and development	181,344
Education health partnerships	53,002
Ethnic minority achievement	94,353
Gifted and talented children	36,000
Induction of newly qualified teachers	341,412
Information management strategy	310,994
Class size initiative	2,465,974
Transforming key stage 3	569,106
Learning support units	228,875
Literacy and numeracy summer schools	230,000
Local education authority music services	727,400
National curriculum	185,683
Primary literacy and numeracy strategies	1,711,941

Standards Fund allocations for Somerset county council

	£
NDS condition funding	1,093,901
National grid for learning	3,128,412
performance management	249,801
Playing for success	100,000
Qualifications	28,005
School achievement awards	522,600
School improvement	1,865,000
School laboratories	250,561
School leadership	267,597
School security	228,062
Seed capital challenge	303,588
Sick children	16,120
Small schools fund	1,370,467
Social inclusion: pupil support	865,800
Special educational needs	588,380
Specialist schools	885,063
Study support	518,252
Supported early retirement scheme for heads	80,000
Teaching assistants	1,787,640
Traveller children achievement	152,487
Year 9 booster classes	135,000
Total	25,672,770

School Standards Grant (Somerset)

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the direct grants for schools in Somerset local education authority in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [26574]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows School Standards Grant payable for each school in Somerset in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

School standards grant: Somerset LEA

School number	*School name*	*2000–01* £	*2001–02* £
1100	The Sedgemoor Centre	3,000	7,000
1101	The Mendip Centre	3,000	7,000
1102	Yeovil Centre	3,000	7,000
1103	The Taunton Centre	3,000	7,000
2001	Ashill Community Primary School	3,000	7,000
2008	Castle Cary Primary School	6,000	13,500
2019	Coxley Primary School	3,000	7,000
2020	Ditcheat Primary School	3,000	7,000
2022	Dunster First School	6,000	13,500
2028	Vallis First School	9,000	24,000
2029	Hambirdge Community Primary School	3,000	7,000
2030	Hemington Primary School	3,000	7,000
2032	Horrington Primary School	6,000	7,000
2034	Huish Episcopi Primary School	9,000	13,500
2038	Keinton Mandeville Primary School	6,000	13,500
2041	Kingsbury Episcopi Primary School	6,000	13,500
2043	Leigh-upon-Mendip First School	3,000	7,000
2045	Meare Village Primary School	3,000	7,000
2046	Merriott First School	3,000	7,000
2047	Milborne Port Primary School	6,000	13,500
2048	Minehead First School	9,000	24,000
2051	Nunney First School	3,000	7,000
2057	Priddy Primary School	3,000	7,000
2059	Countess Gytha Primary School	9,000	24,000
2062	Shepton Mallet Infants' School	6,000	13,500
2064	Somerton Infant School	6,000	13,500
2067	Stoke St. Michael Primary School	3,000	7,000
2068	Elmhurst Junior School	9,000	24,000
2069	Hindhayes Infant School	9,000	24,000
2070	Tatworth Primary School	9,000	13,500
2074	Stoberry Park Infant School	6,000	—
2081	Wincanton Primary School	9,000	24,000
2082	Winsham Primary School	3,000	7,000
2085	Wookey Primary School	3,000	7,000
2089	Manor Court Community Primary school	9,000	30,000
2102	Avishayes Community Primary School	9,000	24,000
2106	Bowlish Infant School	3,000	7,000
2110	Neroche Primary School	6,000	13,500
2112	Stoberry Park Junior School	6,000	—
2113	Brookside Community Primary School	9,000	24,000
2114	Hayesdown First School	9,000	24,000
2118	Wellesley Park Primary School	9,000	24,000
2150	Ashcott Primary School	6,000	13,500
2152	Eastover Community Primary School	9,000	30,000
2156	Hamp Community Jnuior School	9,000	24,000
2157	Hamp Nursery and Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2165	Burnham-on-Sea Infants' School	6,000	13,500
2166	Catcott Primary School	9,000	24,000
2168	Cossington Primary School	3,000	7,000
2169	East Huntspill School	3,000	7,000

School standards grant: Somerset LEA

School number	School name	2000–01	2001–02
			£
2170	Beechfielde Infant School	6,000	24,000
2172	Middlezcy Primary School	3,000	7,000
2174	Northmoor Green Primary School	3,000	7,000
2175	North Newton Community Primary School	3,000	7,000
2176	North Petherton Community Jnuior School	6,000	13,500
2177	Othery Village School	3,000	7,000
2178	Otterhampton Primary school	3,000	7,000
2179	Pawlett Primary school	3,000	7,000
2180	Puriton Primary School	6,000	13,500
2182	Somerset Bridge Primary School	6,000	13,500
2184	West Huntspill Community Primary School	6,000	13,500
2185	Westonzoyland Community Primary School	6,000	13,500
2186	Woolavington Community Priamry School	6,000	24,000
2190	North Petherton Infants' School	6,000	13,500
2200	Bishops Hull Primary School	9,000	24,000
2203	Churchstanton Primary School	6,000	7,000
2205	Lydeard St. Lawrence Community primary School	3,000	7,000
2206	Milverton Community Primary School	9,000	24,000
2210	Pitminster School	3,000	7,000
2211	Sampford Arundel Community Primary School	3,000	7,000
2212	Stawley Primary School	3,000	7,000
2215	Halcon Community Primary school	6,000	13,500
2216	North Town Community Primary School	9,000	24,000
2219	Priorswood Primary School	9,000	24,000
2221	Wellsprings Primary School	9,000	24,000
2224	Beech Grove Primary School	9,000	24,000
2226	West Buckland Community Primary School	3,000	7,000
2227	Wiveliscombe Primary School	9,000	24,000
2228	Parkfield Primary School	9,000	30,000
2229	Lyngford Park Primary Schol	9,000	24,000
2250	Wedmore First School	9,000	13,500
2255	Cheddar First School	9,000	24,000
2300	Barwick and Stoford Community Primary School	3,000	7,000
2302	East Coker Community Primary School	9,000	24,000
2306	South Petherton Junior School	6,000	13,500
2307	Castle Primary School	6,000	13,500
2309	Huish Primary School	9,000	30,000
2310	Milford Junior School	9,000	30,000
2311	Milford Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2312	Pen Mill Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2314	Reckleford Infant and Nursery School	6,000	13,500
2315	Parcroft Community Jnuior School	9,000	24,000
2316	Westfield Infants' Community School	9,000	24,000
2319	Grass Royal Junior School	9,000	24,000
2320	Birchfield Community Primary School	9,000	30,000
2323	Sedgemoor Manor Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2324	Sedgemoor Manor Community Jnuior School	9,000	30,000
2325	Westover Green Primary School	9,000	24,000
2326	Oake and Bradford Community Primary School	3,000	7,000
2327	Illchester Community School	9,000	24,000
2329	The Redstart Primary School	9,000	24,000
2330	Blackbrook Primary school	9,000	24,000
2331	Kingsmoor Primary School	6,000	13,500
2332	Holway Park Community Primary School	9,000	24,000
2333	Stoberry Park Community School	—	13,500
3001	Baltonsborough Church of England VC Primary School	3,000	7,000
3003	St. Mary and St. Peter's Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3008	Beckington Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3009	Berkley Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3010	Binegar Church of England VC Primary School	3,000	7,000
3017	Butleigh Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3020	Charlton Mackerell CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
3029	Bishop Henderson Church of England Primary School	6,000	24,000
3034	Compton Dundon CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
3035	Ashlands Church of England First School	6,000	13,500
3037	St. Bartholomew's Church of England First School	6,000	13,500
3039	Curry Mallet Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3040	Curry Rivel Church of England VC Primary School	6,000	13,500
3041	St. Aldhelm's Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3042	All Saints CofE School	6,000	13,500
3047	Evercreech Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500

School standards grant: Somerset LEA

£

School number	*School name*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
3048	Exford Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3057	Chirst Church CofE First School	6,000	13,500
3058	Trinity church of England First School	9,000	24,000
3060	St. John's Church of England VC Infants School	9,000	24,000
3061	St. Nicholas CofE Primary School, Henstridge	3,000	7,000
3062	High Ham Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3064	Hinton St. George Church of England School	3,000	7,000
3065	Horsington Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3066	Greenfylde Church of England First School	9,000	24,000
3072	Kinsdon Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3076	Lovington Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3078	Mells Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3079	St. Michael's Church of England First School	6,000	13,500
3080	Misterton Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3084	North Cadbury Church of England Primary School	3,000	13,500
3085	Oakhill Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3086	Old Cleeve CofE School, Washford	6,000	13,500
3098	Shepton Beauchamp Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3101	Stogumber CofE First School	3,000	7,000
3105	Abbas and Templecombe CofE Primary School	6,000	13,500
3110	Walton Church of England VC Primary School	6,000	13,500
3114	Wells Central CofE Junior School	9,000	24,000
3115	St. Cuthbert's Church of England Infants School	9,000	24,000
3119	St. Lawrence's CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
3121	West Pennard Church of England Primary School	9,000	24,000
3123	St. Peter's Church of England VC Junior School	6,000	13,500
3129	Upton Noble CofE VC Primary School	6,000	13,500
3132	St. Paul's Church of England VC Junior School	9,000	24,000
3151	St. Mary's VC Church of England Primary School	9,000	24,000
3152	St. Andrew's Church of England VC Junior School	9,000	24,000
3154	Cannington Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3156	St. John's church of England Junior School	9,000	24,000
3158	Nether Stowey Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3159	Spaxton CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
3175	Bishops Lydeard Church of England VC Primary School	9,000	24,000
3176	Cheddon Fitzpaine Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3178	Creech St. Michael Church of England Primary School	9,000	24,000
3179	Hatch Beauchamp Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3180	Kingston St. Mary Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3181	Langford Budville Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3182	North Curry CofE VC Primary School	6,000	13,500
3184	Norton Fitzwarren CofE VC Community School	6,000	13,500
3185	Nynehed Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3186	Rockwell Green Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3189	Staplegrove CofE Primary School	6,000	13,500
3190	Stoke St. Gregory Church of England Primary	3,000	7,000
3191	St. Andrew's Church of England Primary School	9,000	24,000
3195	West Monkton Church of England Primary School	9,000	24,000
3196	Burrowbridge Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3225	Axbridge Church of England First School	6,000	13,500
3226	Berrow Church of England Primary School	9,000	24,000
3227	Brent Knoll Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3232	East Brent Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3236	Lympsham Chruch of England VC First School	3,000	7,000
3237	Mark Church of England VC First School	6,000	13,500
3238	Shipham Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3240	Weare Church of England First School	6,000	13,500
3276	Ash Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3277	Chilthorne Domer Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3278	Haselbury Plucknett Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3281	Norton-sub-Hamdon Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3283	Preston CofE VC Primary School	9,000	30,000
3284	West Chinnock Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3285	West Coker CofE VC Primary School	6,000	7,000
3286	Ruishton Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3287	Rode Methodist VC First School	3,000	7,000
3288	Archbishop Cranmer CofE Community Primary School	9,000	24,000
3289	Wembdon St. George's CofE Primary School	9,000	24,000
3302	Buckland St. Mary Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3305	Chewton Mendip Church of England VA Primary School	6,000	13,500
3307	Combe St. Nicholas CofE VA Primary School	3,000	7,000

School standards grant: Somerset LEA

£

School number	*School name*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
3311	Croscombe Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3313	Crowcombe church of England VA First School	3,000	7,000
3314	Cutcombe Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3317	Draycott and Rodney Stoke CofE First School	3,000	7,000
3322	St. Benedict's Church of England VA Junior School	9,000	24,000
3329	Kilmersdon Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3331	Long Sutton CofE Primary School	6,000	13,500
3342	Norton St. Philip Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3344	St. Dubricius Church of England VA School	3,000	7,000
3353	Monteclefe Church of England Junior School	6,000	13,500
3356	Stogursey Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3358	St. Benedict's Catholic Primary School	9,000	24,000
3359	Timberscombe Church of England First School	3,000	7,000
3361	St. Joseph and St. Teresa Catholic Primary School	6,000	7,000
3369	St. John's Church of England VA First School, Frome	9,000	24,000
3371	St. Louis Catholic Primary School, Frome	6,000	13,500
3400	St. John and St. Francis CofE VA Primary School	9,000	30,000
3401	St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bridgwater	9,000	24,000
3402	St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School and Nursery	9,000	24,000
3433	Holy Trinity CofE VA Primary School	9,000	24,000
3436	Thurlbear Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3437	Trull Church of England VA Primary School	9,000	24,000
3438	St. George's Catholic School	9,000	24,000
3439	Bishop Henderson CofE Primary School, Taunton	9,000	30,000
3484	South Petherton Church of England Infants School	3,000	7,000
3485	St. Margaret's School, Tintinhull	3,000	7,000
3486	Martock Church of England Primary School	9,000	24,000
3487	St. Gildas Catholic Primary School	9,000	24,000
3488	Our Lady of Mount Carmel RC Primary School, Wincanton	6,000	13,500
3489	Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School	9,000	24,000
3490	Knights Templar CofE/Methodist Community School	9,000	24,000
3492	St. Vigor and St. John Church of England Primary School	6,000	24,000
3493	All Saints Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
4000	Frome Community College	50,000	82,000
4100	Bishop Fox's Community School	40,000	70,000
4201	Westfield Community School	40,000	70,000
4250	Ansford Community School	40,000	70,000
4257	Oakfield School	40,000	70,000
4258	St. Dunstan's Community School	40,000	70,000
4259	Huish Episcopi School	50,000	82,000
4273	King Arthur's Community School	40,000	70,000
4274	Holyrood Community School	50,000	82,000
4277	Dulverton Middle and Community School	30,000	58,000
4282	Whitstone	30,000	58,000
4283	Crispin School	40,000	70,000
4287	Maiden Beech Middle School	30,000	58,000
4288	Swanmead Community School	30,000	58,000
4290	Minehead Middle School	40,000	70,000
4291	The West Somerset Community College	50,000	70,000
4300	The Blake School	30,000	58,000
4304	The King Alfred School	50,000	82,000
4307	East Bridgwater Community School	30,000	70,000
4308	Chilton Trinity School	40,000	70,000
4309	Haygrove School	40,000	70,000
4354	Heathfield Community School	40,000	70,000
4355	Kingsmead Community School	40,000	70,000
4356	Court Fields Community School	40,000	70,000
4358	The Castle School	40,000	70,000
4359	Ladymead Community School	40,000	70,000
4410	Fairlands Middle School	30,000	58,000
4450	Stanchester Community School	40,000	70,000
4451	Bucklers Mead Community School	40,000	70,000
4455	Preston School	40,000	70,000
4504	The Blue School	50,000	82,000
4508	Wadham Church of England VC Community School	40,000	70,000
4552	Selwood Anglican/Methodist Middle School	40,000	70,000
4553	Danesfield CofE VC Community Middle School	30,000	58,000
4583	The Kings of Wessex Community School	40,000	70,000
4584	Hugh Sexey Church of England Middle School	30,000	58,000
4600	The St. Augustine of Canterbury School	30,000	58,000
5200	Bruton Primary School	9,000	24,000

School standards grant: Somerset LEA

£

School number	*School name*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
5201	St. John's Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
5202	Charlton Horethorne Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
5203	Enmore Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
5400	Sexey's School	30,000	58,000
5401	Brymore School	30,000	58,000
7003	Elmwood School	15,000	20,000
7006	The Priory School	15,000	20,000
7007	Fairmead School	15,000	28,000
7013	Penrose School	15,000	20,000
7014	Selworthy Special School	15,000	20,000
7016	Fiveways Special School	15,000	20,000
7018	Avalon School	15,000	20,000
7019	Critchill School	15,000	20,000
7020	Bartletts Elm Special School	15,000	20,000

Children in Care

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children in care *(a)* continue their education after the age of 16 years and *(b)* go on to university; and if she will make a statement. [24563]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Statistical information concerning the educational status of young people who have left care in England is not available, although we know anecdotally that very few care leavers go on to higher education. A new statistical collection which will provide information for care leavers aged 19 has recently been introduced by the Department, and the first year of data will cover 12 months ending 31 March 2002. This will identify the percentage of care leavers in education, training or employment. The Department plans to publish this information in autumn 2002.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many letters to hon. Members were sent by him during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December; and, of these, how many were *(a)* personally signed by him and *(b)* signed on his behalf by others. [25643]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Throughout my visit, I continued to deal with the work of my Department clearing letters and other business as appropriate.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what commercial sponsorship was *(a)* sought and *(b)* received for his activities during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December. [25642]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: None.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what was the total cost incurred by the travelling party during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December; [25637]

(2) at which hotels and other facilities he stayed during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December; [25639]

(3) how many officials accompanied him during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December. [25636]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Since 1999, this Government have published an annual list of overseas visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing more than £500 or more during each financial year. Details of visits overseas for 2001–02 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

My recent visit overseas was undertaken fully in accordance with the "Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what representations he made on behalf of UK companies during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December; [25641]

(2) on how many days during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December he had fewer than *(a)* two hours and *(b)* four hours of official meetings; [25645]

(3) which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of other Governments he met during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December; [25638]

(4) which agreements were reached with other Governments during his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December; and if he will publish the full text of each; [25640]

(5) if he will make a statement on the purposes and results of his official visits overseas between 26 November and 11 December. [25644]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: On behalf of the Prime Minister, I visited the United States, New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia and Vietnam from 27 November to 11 December. In the United States I had meetings with the UN Secretary General, the Vice-President and Senators. I visited

Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Vietnam as a guest of their Governments and met their Prime Ministers, other Ministers and businessmen.

I discussed the situation in Afghanistan and the global alliance against terrorism; the World Summit on Sustainable Development; and trade and other bilateral issues.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26976]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism in all Government Departments, and is available at: www.cabinet.office.gov.uk/civilservice/publications/sickness/index. htm.

For 2002 the contract for analysis of absence statistics has been awarded to AON Ltd. which will be conducting a thorough review of all the information currently collected and the needs and requirements of all users of the report.

The Cabinet Office has responsibilities for setting sick absence targets in the civil service as a whole and these are reflected in its Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) as follows:

a best quartile target of no more than 3.72 medical retirements per 1,000 employees by 2005;

no more than a civil service average of 7.2 days sick absence per person, per year by 2003 for the Civil Service as a whole.

The Cabinet Office is also committed to managing the attendance levels of its own employees and has set a target of 6.1 days per person per year by 2003. The medical retirement target is the same as that set for all Government Departments.

Urban Regeneration

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by his Department; how much each scheme has available to invest nationally; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough councils and *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25481]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for the Government Office network which administers schemes of the type referred to on behalf of other Departments. The aims and budgets for such schemes are the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for those Departments.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed to the Minister for Energy dated 13 June and 14 September relating to help for rural garages to install LPG facilities. [19983]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* I replied to the right hon. Gentleman on 12 December.

Nuclear Plants (Decommissioning)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the cost to date to public funds of decommissioning of nuclear power plants. [23924]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Between 1994–95 and 2000–01 the cost of decommissioning UKAEA's nuclear power plants amounted to £119.3 million. (Expenditure on decommissioning nuclear power plants owned by BNFL has been met from its own resources). Figures for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pre-pay Telephones

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent research she has commissioned into the use of pre-payment telephones for offensive anonymous calls; and what plans she has to require registration of pre-pay telephones. [24316]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* I have not commissioned research into the use of pre-payment mobile phones for offensive anonymous calls, nor do I have plans to require registration of such phones. Registration is easily falsified and compulsory registration would disadvantage many for whom low cost mobile phones are the only affordable form of telecommunications.

Air Traffic Control (Tanzania)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of Tanzania's need for a military air traffic control system; and if she will make a statement. [25828]

Nigel Griffiths: The assessment of a country's current or future defence requirements is exempt from disclosure under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the proposed BAE military air traffic control system for Tanzania will also be used for civil aviation. [25201]

Nigel Griffiths: This is a matter for the end user and the exporter.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the World bank regarding the pending sale by BAE Systems to the Government of Tanzania of an air traffic control system. [24976]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation has received no representation from the World bank regarding the sale of an air traffic control system to the Government of Tanzania.

Minimum Wage

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* penalties and *(b)* cautions have been issued against employers who have not complied with the national minimum wage in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) Scotland. [25435]

Alan Johnson: Since the introduction of the national minimum wage in April 1999, national minimum wage compliance officers have issued the following number of penalty and enforcement notices:

	Penalty notices	*Enforcement notices*
UK	90	362
Scotland	24	38

An enforcement notice requires an employer to start paying the national minimum wage and also to make up any past failure to pay the minimum wage. If an employer fails to comply with the enforcement notice, compliance officers can then issue a penalty notice which imposes a financial penalty equal to twice the hourly rate of the main national minimum wage rate (i.e. twice £4.10) per worker affected for every day that the enforcement notice is ignored.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on manufacturing industry in the Greater London area. [25905]

Alan Johnson: Manufacturing, which accounts for over 10 per cent. of GDP and nearly 300,000 jobs, remains an important part of London's economy. More people work in manufacturing in London than in Birmingham, Manchester or Sheffield. Figures based on the Office for National Statistics figures for 1998, which are the latest available, show performance of manufacturing industry in London, on a gross value added per employee basis, is 123.2 per cent. of the UK average. Manufacturing labour productivity in London is now the highest of the English regions.

As part of DTI's plans to establish a nationwide Manufacturing Advisory Service, the London Development Agency is taking forward plans to establish a Regional Centre for Manufacturing Excellence (RCME). The RCME will make available sources of practical help on all manufacturing related expertise and support issues, and act as the focal point for the regional delivery of support services to SME manufacturers.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who initiated the review which led to the increase in BNFL's liabilities announced in her statement to the House on 28 November 2001. [25942]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total cost of financial settlements made by BNFL was following its acquisition of *(a)* Sierra Nuclear Corporation, *(b)* Manufacturing Sciences Corporation and *(c)* Parajito Scientific Corporation. [25944]

Mr. Wilson: I understand from the company that there have been no financial settlements other than the original purchase price made by BNFL following the acquisition of these corporations.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on how the Working Time Directive is functioning; and how many prosecutions have been made against employees who are failing to implement it. [26789]

Alan Johnson: The Working Time Directive was implemented in Great Britain through the Working Time Regulations 1998 (SI 1998 No. 1833) and the amending regulations of 1999 and 2001 (SI 1999 No. 3372 and SI 2001 No. 3256 respectively). These regulations are functioning effectively in providing workers with entitlements to rest, paid annual leave and working time and night work protections.

In referring to the number of prosecutions against employees, I take my hon. Friend to mean employers. There are no readily available figures in this respect. However, 1,369 claims received by the Employment Tribunal Service for 2000–01 and 469 investigations completed by the Health and Safety Executive's Working Time Officers since the Regulations came into force, indicates that workers have not been dissuaded from asserting their rights and entitlements.

Employment (Terms and Conditions)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to *(a)* provide employees with a direct right to claim compensation from an employer on the grounds that no written statement of his or her employment terms and conditions exists, *(b)* oblige employers to provide employees with relevant information in disputes over payments or other entitlements, *(c)* entitle the parties in employment disputes to access to specialist advice through the legal services commission and *(d)* set up a Fair Employment Commission. [26439]

Alan Johnson: Providing employees with a right to compensation where the only issue is the absence of a written statement might encourage speculative claims where no real damage had been suffered. However, the Employment Bill, currently before Parliament, includes a proposal for employment tribunals to increase awards in cases brought under certain jurisdictions where it becomes evident that there was no written statement or that it was defective, and I believe this will do much to encourage compliance.

Information about the redress available to workers who are in dispute about statutory employment rights, including a range of free booklets on employment rights published by my Department, is widely available from Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and other sources. My Department has no plans to require employers to provide such information themselves or to set up a Fair Employment Commission. The Community Legal Service (CLS), administered by the Legal Services Commission, was launched to improve access to good quality legal and advice services throughout England and Wales, and this incudes access to advice on employment law issues. The CLS Fund provides for advice and assistance in all areas of employment law as well as representation before the Employment Appeal Tribunal, subject to the standard means and merits tests. It does not however provide for representation before Employment Tribunals. The Lord Chancellor will not make any decisions on extending CLS funding to representation at employment tribunal proceedings until the responses to the consultation on Sir Andrew Leggatt's review of tribunals have been fully analysed.

Unfair Dismissal

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to extend the time limit for bringing unfair dismissal claims. [26438]

Alan Johnson: The Employment Bill, currently before Parliament, contains powers to extend the time limits within which unfair dismissal and certain other claims need to be made to allow the relevant statutory dispute resolution procedure contained in the Bill to be completed.

Pylons

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the impact of *(a)* wayleaves and *(b)* easements in the construction of overhead pylons and the related impact on the price of property; and if she will make a statement. [26044]

Mr. Wilson: I have made no assessment. Compensation for a landowner for the presence of an overhead line is a matter to be settled voluntarily or if there is a dispute to be considered by the Lands Tribunal.

Overhead Transmission Lines

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken to ensure that the NGC respects the legal entry on to farmland in connection with the Lackenby to Shipton overhead transmission line; and if she will make a statement. [26223]

Mr. Wilson: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Member on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 593W.

Telecoms

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the progress that the UK is making in liberalising the telecoms sector. [25397]

Mr. Alexander: The UK telecoms market is fully liberalised and competition has developed rapidly in recent years, with the majority of customers having a choice of telecoms operator. The UK has one of the most competitive telecoms markets in the world.

Miners' Pensions

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 760W, on miners' pensions, if she will reassess the basis on which the Government's share of the surplus is determined; and if she will make a statement. [24870]

Mr. Wilson: I expect to make an announcement on this matter shortly.

Broadband

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place obligations on telecommunications providers to increase the availability of broadband technologies in rural areas; and if she will make a statement. [26422]

Mr. Alexander: The Office of Telecommunications (Oftel) sets the minimum service standard for telecommunications in the UK as part of the Universal Service Obligation on BT, taking into account the appropriate European legislation. Oftel have no plans at present to place obligations on telecommunications providers to make broadband services available. Oftel will keep the situation under review.

Consignia

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reach a decision as to whether Consignia should pay a dividend to Her Majesty's Government for the current financial year. [26566]

Mr. Alexander: I would expect the decision to be taken after the end of the current financial year.

WORK AND PENSIONS

State Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the basis was for the statement by Baroness Hollis on 18 December 2001, regarding the proportion of pensioners who will take up their entitlement to the state pension credit; and how many entitled non-recipients are implied by that assessment. [26799]

Mr. McCartney: We propose to introduce the pension credit from 2003. Details of how this will be done will be announced in due course. We expect the number of successful claimants to build up over time.

Minimum Funding Requirement

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will publish a summary of the responses to the consultation on the minimum funding requirement; and when he plans to reform the minimum funding requirement. [26800]

Mr. McCartney: On 7 March 2001 the Government announced proposals to replace the minimum funding requirement (MFR) with a long-term scheme specific standard in the context of a regime of transparency and disclosure, with additional measures to strengthen protection further.

Implementing these proposals in full will require primary legislation. In the meantime we are working with the pensions industry and other interested parties to develop proposals for legislation as soon as parliamentary time becomes available.

On 18 September 2001, we published "The Minimum Funding Requirement: The next stage of reform" which set out our plans for the next stage of reform of the MFR, including consultation on draft regulations to introduce interim changes to the current MFR. The consultation period on the draft regulations ended on 10 December, and we are currently considering the responses. We plan to make a summary of the responses publicly available, and introduce the regulations, before April this year.

State Pension (Hospital Stays)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money was raised in the last financial year as a result of docking state pensions because the recipients were in hospital for more than *(a)* six weeks and *(b)* 52 weeks. [14451]

Mr. McCartney: The rules for the adjustment of benefit for periods in hospital prevent double provision from public funds as the NHS provides free board and lodgings as well as free treatment. So the downrating rules are based on the principle that Social Security maintenance benefits, also paid out of state funds, should not be paid in full indefinitely where a person is in a NHS hospital and having their day to day living expenses met through the NHS.

These rules, which are laid down in law, have been applied with only minor modifications since the introduction of the national insurance scheme over 50 years ago.

Reduction in state pension expenditure due to hospital downrating in cash terms is as follows:

£ million (cash terms)

	Downrating type		
	6–52 weeks	*Over 52 weeks*	*Total*
1996–97	22	37	58
1997–98	22	33	55
1998–99	24	32	56
1999–2000	26	30	56
2000–01	28	29	57

Note:
Rounded to the nearest £ million

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the existing forms of state support for care that preclude any entitlement to attendance allowance; and whether he proposes to make any change in these arrangements. [20785]

Mr. McCartney: If a person satisfies the conditions of entitlement to attendance allowance it is paid unless that person is being maintained free of charge while receiving NHS treatment as an in-patient in a hospital or similar institution, or is provided with residential accommodation in circumstances where the cost of that accommodation is, or may be, borne wholly or partly out of public funds.

No changes to these arrangements are proposed.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in each of the last five years were entitled to the *(a)* middle and *(b)* higher care component of the disability living allowance (i) in the United Kingdom and *(ii)* in the London borough of Hillingdon. [20936]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table. The Northern Ireland Assembly is responsible for social security matters within Northern Ireland.

Number of DLA awards current in Great Britain and Hillingdon in the past five years

	Middle care	*Highest care*
Great Britain		
1997	530,100	359,400
1998	564,500	381,900
1999	590,200	391,900
2000	621,600	414,500
2001	670,400	453,600
Hillingdon		
1997	2,100	1,100
1998	1,900	1,285
1999	1,970	1,315
2000	2,080	1,405
2001	2,180	1,485

Note:
Figures refer to 31 May, based on 5 per cent. data, and rounded to nearest hundred (figures for Hillingdon from 1998, based on 100 per cent. data and rounded to nearest five).
Source:
DWP Information Centre

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disability living allowances have been withdrawn from individuals over the last three years; and how many were re-started after a successful appeal. [27020]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for disability living allowances have been received over the last three years; and what was the percentage of successful applications for each year. [27021]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Number of disability living allowance applications received and percentage successful within the last three years

	Applications received	*Successful applications*[1] *(percentage)*
January 1999-December 1999	390,920	47.4
January 2000-December 2000	405,830	50.8
January 2001-December 2001	411,990	51.8

[1] Successful applications do not include those which succeed following reconsideration or appeal.
Source:
DWP Information Centre: 100 per cent. data rounded

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in how many of the cases of fraud investigated by the Benefits Agency and dealt with by way of caution and administrative penalty since 1997 the person concerned has been previously subject to *(a)* caution and administrative penalty, *(b)* caution and administrative penalty within the preceding three years, *(c)* prosecution leading to conviction and *(d)* prosecution leading to conviction within the preceding three years. [23235]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available. However, our research suggests that approximately 5 per cent. of prosecutions involve a person with a previous conviction for benefit fraud. We are putting in place mechanisms to identify second and further convictions.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) of 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1166W, for what reasons the estimated cost of benefit fraud is different from the estimate offered by the Lord Chancellor in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 987W. [24238]

Malcolm Wicks: Our most recent estimate is that £2 billion is lost annually through benefit fraud in Great Britain. The figure quoted by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor in the answer to which the hon. Member refers is an estimate of the cost of fraud plus estimates for the cost of work related to fraud incurred by the Department, other Government Departments and local authorities.

Hospital Downrating Rules

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve the means of informing pensioners of their obligations to notify the Pension Service when they have been in hospital for more than six weeks. [24064]

Mr. McCartney: It is the responsibility of individuals to ensure they notify the Department of all relevant changes of circumstances. However, the introduction of the new Pension Service should make it easier for them to contact us.

Over time, the Pension Service will provide customers and staff with a wide range of contact channels through improved, modern technology including telephony, digital television and the adoption of internet technology. Call and contact centres will be open longer than current office hours allowing customers to contact the Pension Service when it is convenient for them. For example we expect our pension centres to be open Monday to Friday from 8 am to 8 pm.

The Pension Service will provide a better environment for our face to face services. This will mean Pension Service staff will meet customers in places they frequent such as the local library, age concern or health centres.

In the future, the replacement of existing computers and the development of new systems that share the same data will mean that customers will not have to repeat the same information and provide the same evidence many times over.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1301W, how many winter fuel payments have been returned to his Department in each year since 1997. [24214]

Mr. McCartney: Information regarding the number of payments returned in previous years is not available. This year, up to 7 December, 270 payments have been returned.

Savings Interest Rates

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much must a person hold in savings to receive a weekly income of £23, assuming that interest is paid at *(a)* the bank base rate and *(b)* 10 per cent. [24224]

Mr. McCartney: It requires a simple calculation to establish that a person would need savings of £29,900 to receive a weekly income of £23 if interest was paid at 4 per cent. per annum. Similarly savings around £12,000 would generate a weekly income of £23 if interest were paid at 10 per cent. per annum.

A pensioner with savings at these levels would be excluded from income support now. On the basis of illustrative rates, when pension credit is introduced in October 2003 a single pensioner with a full basic state pension and no other relevant income or capital other than savings of (a) £29,900 and (b) £12,000 would receive (a) £3.80 and (b) £18.20 a week.

Industrial Deafness

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received for industrial deafness to be classified as an industrial disease from *(a)* the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council and *(b)* other bodies or individuals; and if he will make a statement. [25028]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Sensorineural hearing loss due to noise at work has been on the list of Prescribed Diseases under the Industrial Injuries Scheme since 1974 (Prescribed Disease A10 [Occupational Deafness]). The full terms of the qualifying conditions, both in relation to the severity of the hearing loss and the prescribed occupations are set out in the Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Prescribed Diseases) Regulations 1985, Schedule 1.

In February 1997 the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council announced that it would be undertaking a review of the current schedule of occupational diseases for which benefits are paid. Subsequently, an Occupational Deafness Working Group was set up specifically to review prescribed disease A10 (Occupational Deafness). The council is currently working through all the evidence received and preparing a report to Ministers of its findings.

From time to time we receive correspondence from various bodies and individuals on the subject which we make available to the council.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to integrate provisions of digital hearing aids through the access to work scheme with NHS digital hearing aid provision; and if he will make a statement. [25368]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The Department has no plans to integrate NHS and Access to Work digital hearing aid provision.

The Access to Work Programme helps disabled people gain, or keep, a job, by providing practical advice and support to disabled people and their employers to overcome specific work-related obstacles which result from disability. Providing funding towards the purchase of a digital hearing aid is one of the ways Access to Work can help. NHS digital hearing aid provision is not limited to work-related needs.

The Employment Service (ES) has met with the NHS Executive and its purchasing agency to explore how the ES might access NHS Trust contracts with suppliers on assessment for and supply of digital hearing aids.

Employment Zones

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what studies have been recently undertaken of the effectiveness of employment zones; and if he will make a statement. [25468]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A robust and comprehensive evaluation of Employment Zones is currently being undertaken. The evaluation combines qualitative research, a cohort survey and an economic analysis. The qualitative research report is due in spring 2002, and the cohort study and economic analysis reports are due in autumn 2003.

The performance of Employment Zones is promising. Early indications are that about half of participants find work. We will need to consider the complete evaluation findings before deciding how to take the initiative further.

DEFENCE

International Terrorism

14. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on spending plans for the money announced in the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement for operations to combat terrorism. [24475]

Mr. Hoon: The Government have made an additional £100 million available to the Ministry of Defence for new equipment and immediate operational requirements needed for the campaign against international terrorism.

This will include equipment to improve our ability to work with the US and other allies; additional secure communications equipment; enhancements to our intelligence capabilities; and a range of small but significant enhancements to our forces for operations in Afghanistan.

31. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recent discussions with his US counterpart on defence issues relating to the international campaign against terrorism. [24493]

Mr. Hoon: I last met the US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, on 18–19 December during the course of the NATO Defence Ministers' meetings in Brussels. We continue to work closely with the United States in pursuit of our shared objectives in the campaign against international terrorism.

Kosovo

19. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what analysis he has made of the role of his Department in peacekeeping operations in Kosovo. [24481]

Mr. Ingram: British forces have made a significant contribution to the multi-national effort to build peace and stability in Kosovo. A detailed analysis of the early part of the Kosovo campaign was undertaken from which lessons have been drawn for the future.

Our forces continue to play a pivotal role in KFOR as lead nation of the MultiNational Brigade (Centre). We continue fully to support the UN Mission in Kosovo in its work to help the people of Kosovo in the reconstruction of their country.

29. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the land mines clearance programme in Kosovo to be complete. [24491]

Mr. Ingram: The primary responsibility for the clearance of land mines in Kosovo is that of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Within Kosovo, UNMIK works with non-governmental organisations, national military contingents and the indigenous Kosovo protection corps. British forces are not employed directly in land mine clearance, although KFOR troops continue to provide assistance to the UN when requested, to make areas safe for the return of displaced persons. The Government contribute through the provision of grants, specialist staff and equipment to the UN Mine Action Co-ordination Centre. The UN task is now regarded as largely complete, although there are still two areas west of Prizren, towards the border with Albania, that contain known minefields, where work will continue through 2002.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British troops are deployed in Kosovo. [24461]

Mr. Ingram: The UK currently contributes some 3,000 personnel to KFOR operations in Kosovo, though this figure fluctuates as a result of unit rotation and the deployment of differing sizes of battlegroup. The major elements currently deployed are Headquarters 20 Armoured Brigade, 1st Battalion the Royal Regiment of Wales and the Queens' Royal Hussars. The UK are the lead nation in Multi-national Brigade (Centre), where our forces operate primarily with Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian and Czech troops.

Tanzania

20. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what input his Department has had in the grant of an export licence for an air traffic control system for Tanzania. [24482]

Dr. Moonie: Export licensing decisions are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The Ministry of Defence provides advice to the Department of Trade and Industry, together with the other advisory Departments, as appropriate.

Territorial Army

21. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the role of the Territorial Army. [24483]

Dr. Moonie: The strategy for the Army, announced in March last year, identified a number of areas where further study was required to ensure the Army can undertake its role as effectively and efficiently as possible. These studies are on going and include how to maximise the contribution of the reserves in an expeditionary environment. In parallel, work on a new chapter of the Strategic Defence Review, following the 11 September attacks, is exploring the role that the armed forces, including the reserves, have in defending and protecting the United Kingdom.

Recruitment

22. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the recruitment figures for the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Royal Air Force in the last six months. [24484]

Mr. Ingram: The most recent figures show that between 1 April and 1 November 2001, the recruitment figure for the Royal Navy was 2,945, the Army 8,737 and the RAF 2,303.

27. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for recruitment to the armed services. [24489]

Mr. Ingram: In the current financial year the armed forces aim to recruit in excess of 24,800 young people. In order to achieve this, all three services are undertaking many initiatives both at national level and at local level. Included among the initiatives are: the use of multi-media advertising campaigns; attendance by services' recruiting teams at schools, youth clubs, careers fairs and graduate recruitment seminars; work experience placements within service establishments; personal development courses and look at life courses for people who express an interest in the armed forces; taster day visits to HM ships and service establishments; a dedicated careers website for each of the services; introduction by the Army of an on-line recruiting office, with plans for this concept to be replicated by the other services; specialist ethnic minority recruiting and diversity action teams aimed at promoting armed forces careers to ethnic minority communities; and a partnership with the Employment Service, making use of its local outlets Jobcentre Plus.

32. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recruitment and retention in the Army. [24494]

Mr. Ingram: We remain committed to delivering the military capability required of the Army in the Strategic Defence Review. This will require an increase in its strength from current levels, which we are tackling in a number of different ways. We are focusing on attracting more high quality potential recruits into the training organisations while reducing wastage. Measures introduced already, both regionally and nationally, have helped to hold retention levels steady and reduce the numbers of recruits dropping out of training.

Sierra Leone

23. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of British armed forces in Sierra Leone. [24485]

Mr. Hoon: As was announced on 18 December 2001, it has been decided to maintain the current military presence in Sierra Leone of 360 shore-based personnel over the period of presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2002. The military training and assistance programme continues to make good progress towards its goal of developing a professional, accountable and effective Sierra Leone Army, able to protect the security and integrity of Sierra Leone on its own. The International Military Advisory and Training Team in Sierra Leone, which Britain leads and to which we are the major contributors, will continue the task of developing the capacity of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces over the longer term.

Racial Equality

24. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent steps the armed forces have taken to promote racial equality within the services. [24486]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces have done much in recent years to promote racial equality and create an environment free from harassment and unlawful discrimination. This includes establishing confidential advice and support help lines; a network of equal opportunities advisers; equality training, focus groups and surveys; monitoring and evaluating ethnic minority recruitment, progression and retention; and a vigorous recruiting and outreach programme to encourage more ethnic minorities to join the armed forces.

Homeland Defence

25. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for increasing the funding of UK homeland defence. [24487]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence informed the House on 4 October that the Ministry of Defence would be conducting work designed to ensure that we have the right concepts, forces and capabilities to deal with the kind of asymmetric threat that we saw on 11 September.

This work is on-going and is addressing, among a wide range of issues, the balance between the contributions that the armed forces make to home defence and countering threats abroad. A key part of this work is exploring the role that the armed forces, including the reserves, have in defending and protecting the United Kingdom. But it should be recognised that the lead for domestic security lies with the civil authorities, and with the police in particular. The armed forces, of course, already provide assistance to the civil authorities in a range of ways.

We will need to examine fully the overall priorities for tackling terrorism through military and other means including intelligence, diplomacy, humanitarian and aid policies and domestic responses to the threat. Funding issues will be addressed during the spending review, which will conclude in the summer.

Human Rights Act

26. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of the Human Rights Act 1998 on the armed forces' *(a)* discipline and *(b)* effectiveness. [24488]

Mr. Ingram: The Armed Forces Discipline Act 2000 introduced certain changes to the discipline system to meet our obligations under the Human Rights Act. These are assessed to have reinforced the authority of the discipline system without impact on operational effectiveness. The discipline and effectiveness of the armed forces continue to be of a high order, as recent operations have amply shown.

Afghanistan

30. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of British armed forces in Afghanistan. [24492]

Mr. Hoon: As I told the House on 19 December and 10 January, the United Kingdom has agreed to lead the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

Under the terms of the Bonn Agreement of 5 December 2001, the ISAF will assist the Afghanistan Interim Administration to provide security and stability in Kabul. The ISAF will play a vital part in the international community's support to the Afghan people in the difficult task of rebuilding their country.

The UK will be lead nation of the ISAF for a limited period of three months. The UK will provide up to 1,800 personnel for the ISAF. In addition and in the short term, we are deploying nearly 300 Army and RAF personnel to help repair and operate Kabul International airport. As of today, we have some 600 troops in Kabul.

In total, the ISAF will be around 5,000 strong. So far some 1,000 troops have deployed to Kabul. In all, some 17 countries will be deploying troops alongside UK forces as part of the ISAF.

38. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of UK forces for the purpose of humanitarian relief in Afghanistan. [24500]

Mr. Hoon: UK forces are being deployed to Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force. The provision of humanitarian relief is outwith their mission of providing security assistance to the Afghanistan Interim Administration. They will, however, be in a position to identify potential humanitarian reconstruction projects.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the forces deployed in Afghanistan have unmodified SA80 rifles; and if he will make a statement. [26672]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* As of 11 January, all UK units deployed in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force have been re-equipped with modified SA80 rifles.

The programme of converting units to the modified SA80 is progressing very well. Every effort is being made to ensure that the rate of throughput of modified weapons is sufficient so that all UK service personnel deploying in future to Afghanistan, including engineer and logistic units, will have the upgraded weapon. However, a small number of individual augmentees in logistic and other support functions will not have received modified weapons prior to deployment.

RAF

33. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the RAF to reach full manning levels. [24495]

Mr. Ingram: The RAF is in broad manning balance, albeit shortfalls continue to exist in a number of branches and trades. The RAF aims to achieve its Public Service Agreement target of full manning by March 2004.

RAF Fire Services

34. **Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the Transport and General Workers Union to discuss the PPP/PFI plans for RAF fire services. [24496]

Mr. Ingram: I last met the Transport and General Workers Union to discuss the airfield support services project on 19 September 2001. This project is looking at the viability of a PFI solution for the provision of airfield support services to the Ministry of Defence.

Research

35. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans to research into scientific, technological and medical issues. [24497]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging scientific and technical research programme supported by a budget of around £450 million per annum. A summary breakdown of the two key elements of the programme—the Applied Research Programme and Corporate Research Programme—is available in MOD's Science and Innovation Strategy, recently published on the MOD's website. This document also describes our policy objectives and approach to research investment. There is also some additional medical research undertaken by the services addressing their specific operational needs.

Armed Forces Family Taskforce

36. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the armed forces family taskforce. [24498]

Mr. Ingram: The service families taskforce was set up in 1999 by the Government to deal with service family issues that were outside the control of the Ministry of Defence. It is headed by a ministerial group which last met on 15 November last year. I also meet with representatives of service families twice a year to discuss areas of concern. The service families taskforce has been involved in a wide range of issues since its conception. The main areas of progress over the last year are:

(a) The MOD is being consulted by the Department of Health in the drafting of new adoption legislation to ensure that service families will not be disadvantaged.

(b) We have resolved the problems that some service families had encountered, as a result of the payment of local overseas allowance, in claiming working families tax credit on return to the UK from an overseas posting.

(c) We have resolved the problems that some service spouses had encountered, due to the interpretation of residency status, in claiming Child Support Agency payments when on an overseas posting.

(d) Discussions are taking place with the Department for Education and Skills, and with local education authorities, to see what measures can be taken to improve the schools admissions process for service families.

(e) Discussions are taking place with the NHS waiting and booking team on the problems service families face when transferring between NHS trust areas.

(f) Discussions are taking place with the Department for Work and Pensions to identify any problems service families have faced in the claiming of benefits while on overseas postings.

(g) Since 1 April 2001 service spouses have been able to open stakeholder pensions while on an overseas posting.

Golden Jubilee

37. **Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on military participation in the London celebrations of Her Majesty the Queen's golden jubilee. [24499]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces, both regular and volunteer reserves, will make a full contribution to the London celebrations of Her Majesty the Queen's golden jubilee, including participation at the service of thanksgiving which will take place on 4 June 2002. The details are being finalised.

Reserve Forces

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the reserve forces in the continuing campaign against international terrorism. [27683]

Dr. Moonie: Since the Call-out Order (16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1132) was signed last October to permit reservists to support the campaign against international terrorism, 74 reservists from all three services have been called out. Reservists have been supporting the operation on other forms of service. We are immensely grateful to all of them. As a further measure to support the current level of operations, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has authorised the compulsory call-out of up to 140 specialist Territorial Army personnel to provide intelligence support to headquarters organisations in the UK and to the UK forces deployed in Afghanistan. This action is fully in accordance with our stated intention as part of the Strategic Defence Review to make our reserve forces more usable, integrated and relevant. We believe that the compulsory call-out will be welcomed by the personnel involved and their employers.

Operation Veritas

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what accommodation is available for air crews deployed on Operation Veritas and based at Muscat; how many *(a)* aircrew and *(b)* personnel may be accommodated in one tent (i) on exercise and (ii) on operations; how long each aircrew's shift is; how much sleep each aircrew gets between shifts; if an aircrew on different shifts may be accommodated in the same tent; if accommodation at Muscat accords with Group Air Staff Order GASO 9072; and if crews are accommodated in local hotels (A) at his Department's expense and (B) at their own expense. [24374]

Mr. Ingram: Aircrews deployed to the region on Operation Veritas are accommodated in two types of air-conditioned tent. On exercises, the normal occupancy of the first type of tent is up to 24 aircrew, on Operation Veritas the number is under 20. The second type of tent, which is slightly smaller, can accommodate up to 14 aircrew on exercises but on Operation Veritas the occupancy is 10 or lower. During unit handovers numbers have been exceeded for short periods.

Non-aircrew are mainly accommodated in the smaller tents without air conditioning. Where possible non-aircrew on night duty, who need to sleep in the heat of the day, are accommodated in the large air-conditioned tents.

The length of aircrews' shifts varies according to the type of aircraft and sortie flown. The length of time between shifts can also vary but is not usually less than 10 hours. Aircrew on different shifts may be accommodated in the same tent but silence is enforced around tents when personnel are asleep. Deployed personnel are not accommodated in hotels except for those who have been in theatre for over four months and are entitled to a period of publicly funded rest and recuperation.

It is recognised that the living conditions for many of our personnel deployed to the middle east on Operation Veritas are challenging but they are in accordance with operational standards for accommodation. UK forces have successfully risen to this challenge and made a major contribution to the Coalition effort over Afghanistan. However, plans are in place to upgrade the living conditions of all RAF personnel on Operation Veritas by March.

Defence Procurement

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by his Department on equipment purchased in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the USA and *(c)* the rest of the world in each of the last 10 years. [25117]

Dr. Moonie: Ministry of Defence equipment expenditure (including VAT and R and D spend) in the last 10 years was:

£ million

Year	*Equipment expenditure at current prices*
1991–92	9,758
1992–93	8,711
1993–94	9,200
1994–95	8,819
1995–96	8,537
1996–97	9,100
1997–98	9,003
1998–99	9,889
1999–2000	9,715
2000–01[1]	10,008

[1] This is the 'latest agreed' estimate

The breakdown between the UK, the US and the rest of the world is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces Pension Scheme

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will include members of all United Kingdom part-time forces in the armed forces pension scheme. [25918]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces pension scheme is an occupational pension scheme providing pension provision for members of the regular armed services. The scheme also provides pensions for members of the reserve forces who serve respectively on full-time or part-time commitments under sections 24 or 25 of the Reserve Forces Act (RFA) 1996.

The scheme does not provide pensions for members of the volunteer reserve forces serving under sections 22 or 27 of the RFA 1996 or for part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment. This reflects the ad hoc nature of their service. However, those who are not included in the armed forces pension scheme are contracted-in to the state earnings-related pension scheme (SERPS) and are eligible for pension benefits under that arrangement.

Benefits are available under the attributable benefits arrangements to members of the volunteer forces or their dependants if they are injured or killed as a result of their service, which are comparable to those of their regular service counterparts.

Since 8 October 2001, payroll deduction facilities have been available to enable members of the volunteer reserves to make contributions into the armed forces stakeholder pension scheme which was introduced in response to regulations under the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1998 to provide pensions to cover those who are excluded from the AFPS.

Naval Deployments

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy ships have been deployed for periods exceeding five months in each of the past four years. [26680]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Following is a list of Royal Navy ships which have been deployed for periods exceeding five months in each of the past four years. It is standard practice to deploy ships for six month periods.

Ship	*From*	*To*	*Reason for deployment*	*Period of deployment (months)*
1998				
Invincible	2 September 1997	26 March 1998	USA/Gulf	6
Monmouth	5 September 1997	1 March 1998	Op. Palliser	6
Newcastle	17 November 1997	10 July 1998	Atlantic Patrol Task (north)	8
Coventry	1 January 1998	5 June 1998	Armilla	6
Manchester	12 January 1998	9 July 1998	Standing Naval Force Atlantic	6
Montrose	12 January 1998	6 August 1998	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	7
Cornwall	16 February 1998	14 August 1998	Op. Resilient	6
York	5 March 1998	23 October 1998	Armilla	7
Grafton	14 April 1998	21 December 1998	Armilla	8
Edinburgh	27 April 1998	26 November 1998	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	7
Lancaster	15 June 1998	25 November 1998	Standing Naval Force Atlantic	5
Sheffield	17 June 1998	18 December 1998	Atlantic Patrol Task (north)	6
Sutherland	4 September 1998	26 March 1999	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	6
Cumberland	8 September 1998	13 May 1999	Armilla	8
1999				
Norfolk	5 January 1999	17 June 1999	Standing Naval Force Atlantic	5
Newcastle	9 January 1999	27 May 1999	Armilla	5
Marlborough	12 January 1999	1 July 1999	Atlantic Patrol Task (north)	6
Iron Duke	15 January 1999	27 July 1999	Standing Naval Force Mediterranean	6
Westminster	26 January 1999	12 July 1999	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	6
Glasgow	1 March 1999	11 November 1999	Five Powers Defence Agreement	8
Birmingham	3 May 1999	11 November 1999	Armilla	6
Northumberland	7 June 1999	7 December 1999	Atlantic Patrol Task (North)	6
Exeter	13 September 1999	10 March 2000	Armilla	6
Somerset	13 September 1999	8 March 2000	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	6
2000				
Campbeltown	7 January 2000	27 July 2000	Standing Naval Force Atlantic	6
Montrose	10 January 2000	28 July 2000	Standing Naval Force Mediterranean	6
Illustrious	15 January 2000	14 June 2000	Gulf	5
Monmouth	18 January 2000	27 July 2000	Armilla	6
Manchester	31 January 2000	21 July 2000	Atlantic Patrol Task (north)	6
Southampton	11 February 2000	18 August 2000	Armilla	6

Ship	*From*	*To*	*Reason for deployment*	*Period of deployment (months)*
Newcastle	2 May 2000	23 November 2000	Five Powers Defence Agreement	6
Argyll	8 May 2000	10 November 2000	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	6
Marlborough	27 May 2000	3 November 2000	Armilla	6
York	31 August 2000	18 December 2000	Standing Naval Force Mediterranean	5
Iron Duke	16 September 2000	23 February 2001	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	5
Cumberland	18 September 2000	21 March 2001	Armilla	6
2001				
Lancaster	22 January 2001	26 July 2001	Armilla	6
Glasgow	5 February 2001	3 August 2001	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	6
Sheffield	8 February 2001	9 August	Atlantic Patrol Task (north)	6
Gloucester	19 March 2001	19 October 2001	Five Powers Defence Agreement	7
Edinburgh	15 May 2001	16 November 2001	Atlantic Patrol Task (south)	6
Northumberland	4 June 2001	31 December 2001	Armilla	6

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of Royal Naval personnel are involved in operations. [26681]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 531–32W.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy ships have been away from their base port in excess of 60 per cent. of the time, averaged over the past two years. [26675]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Over the past two years, two ships have been deployed from their home bases for an average of more than 60 per cent. of the time. HMS Triumph, was deployed from her home base at Devonport for an average of 68 per cent. of the time; and HMS Lancaster was deployed from her home base at Portsmouth for an average of 64 per cent. of the time over the past two years.

Ptarmigan System

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement outlining the extent to which the deficiencies in the Ptarmigan communications system impairs the operational effectiveness of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps. [23775]

Mr. Ingram: The Ptarmigan system has supported successful operations by the ARRC during recent deployments to Bosnia and Kosovo. However, if advances in modern computing and communications technology are to be fully utilised by our forces, we recognise that Ptarmigan does not offer, in the longer term, the most effective solution. Therefore, plans are in place to replace Ptarmigan through Project Falcon from 2006 onwards. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Dr. Moonie) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 829W, for evidence of our continuing commitment to maximising the ARRC's operational effectiveness through the full range of modern and robust communications systems.

Export Licences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 680 approvals have been given each year since 1 May 1997; how many have led to export licence applications; and how many such licences have been approved. [25733]

Dr. Moonie: The F680 process is an informal process under which companies can obtain advice on the prospects for approval of exports at the marketing stage. The F680 also gives formal clearance for release of classified information, where required, for marketing purposes. The number of clearances for each of the years for which data are held, is as follows:

Year	*F680s cleared*
1999	1,736
2000	1,847
2001	2,042

It is not possible to correlate data about F680 clearances with data relating to the export licensing process since the processes are quite separate. For example, F680s may be seeking advice in general terms about marketing prospects which may relate partially to the export that is eventually licensed. It is routinely made clear to exporters that advice in response to F680 applications does not prejudge a decision on the eventual consideration of an export licence application.

RAF Deployments

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of personnel have exceeded 140 nights away from home, in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available, in *(a)* 33 Squadron, *(b)* 10 Squadron, *(c)* 101 Squadron, *(d)* 24 Squadron, *(e)* 30 Squadron, *(f)* 47 Squadron, *(g)* 70 Squadron, *(h)* 7 Squadron, *(i)* 18 Squadron and *(j)* 27 Squadron. [26678]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The RAF Separated Service Recording System records periods of absence of three days or more. The table shows the percentage of RAF personnel on each squadron who have exceeded 140 days away from home on separated service in the 12-month period ending 30 September 2001.

Percentage of trained strength spending more than 140 days away from home

Squadron	Operational/routine tasks	All reasons[1]
33	4.4	14.9
10	1.6	7.6
101	1.8	11.3
24	0	0
30	0.9	0.9
47	3.8	3.8
70	1.8	1.8
7	1.6	5.9
18	2.5	6.8
27	1.4	5.1

[1] Includes absences due to normal career development training, resettlement and expedition training, sport and permanent detachments from parent unit.

RAF commitments are regularly reviewed and adjusted as soon as circumstances allow. Operational deployments continue only for as long as is necessary to meet agreed objectives.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contractual safeguards are in place in the event of a company winning a Ministry of Defence contract going bankrupt; and if he will make a statement. [25869]

Dr. Moonie: In the event of various circumstances of insolvency or bankruptcy such as the appointment of an administrative receiver, or a receiver, or a company being wound up, the Ministry of Defence has the right to terminate the contract without recompense to the contractor. This is achieved by the terms of DEFCON 515 (Bankruptcy and Insolvency) which is included in all MOD headquarters contracts. The most effective means of dealing with this issue is to have a system that reduces the risk of placing contracts with suppliers of limited financial capability. The MOD employs such a system, but that risk cannot be entirely eliminated.

Territorial Reserve

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change the status of the territorial reserve to that of a UK national guard. [25858]

Dr. Moonie: As part of the work we are currently conducting on a new chapter to the Strategic Defence Review, we are examining the role that the armed forces, including the reserves, have in defending and protecting the United Kingdom. As a result of this work we may conclude that there should be a greater or changed role for the reserves in security of the United Kingdom. If this is the case, we will want to consult the reserves and their employers.

Agency Costs

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent in the last four complete financial years with agencies supplying *(a)* IT, *(b)* accounting and *(c)* finance personnel on a contractual basis; and how many (i) such contracts and (ii) man years this represents. [25014]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, much of the information sought is available in the Ministry of Defence's annual returns of expenditure on External Assistance, which includes the categories of Finance and Accounting, and Information and Control Systems. Copies are available in the Library of the House, covering the period 1995–96 to 1999–2000.

BAE Systems (Tanzania Contract)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance the Government have offered BAE Systems to secure a contract in Tanzania to supply an air traffic control system. [25202]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence, primarily through the Defence Export Services Organisation, is responsible for co-ordinating Government support for legitimate defence exports. In carrying out these responsibilities, assistance is available to defence equipment exporters in support of overseas marketing campaigns. It is, however, not our policy to provide details of individual campaigns for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Beacon Project

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the status of the proposed beacon project linking NHS hospital trusts and TA field hospitals. [25792]

Dr. Moonie: As the hon. Member may be aware, TA field hospitals have had informal relationships with local NHS trusts for many years. The beacon project aims to formalise these relationships and develop mutually beneficial initiatives offering personal development, leadership training and professional development to NHS trust members and also to increase TA recruitment. A pilot project has been approved by my Department and the Department of Health and links Preston Acute Hospital National Health Trust and Chorley and South Ribble Health Trust with 207 (Manchester) Field Hospital (Volunteers). This project has held five meetings to date.

Service Personnel

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision has been made for armed forces personnel on active service abroad this Christmas. [R] [25353]

Mr. Ingram: The majority of service personnel on operational deployments overseas this Christmas were in receipt of the standard operational welfare package (OWP), which includes 20 minutes of publicly funded telephone calls per week, free forces aerogrammes, concessionary mail and parcel rates, access to the internet and e-mail, newspapers and book packs, BFBS TV and radio, televisions, video recorders and video tapes, Expeditionary Forces Institute shops and publicly funded laundry.

In addition all personnel deployed over the Christmas week and in receipt of the OWP were granted an additional 20 minutes of publicly funded telephone time. Tesco donated Christmas parcels for all deployed personnel, Clinton Cards provided free Christmas cards for service personnel to send to their families and friends and most locations received an additional distribution of paperback books.

C130 Hercules

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* C130Ks and *(b)* C130Js are suitable for deployment to Afghanistan. [26350]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

RAF Bases

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to close a runway at RAF Lyneham. [26624]

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Member is aware that a study has been commissioned as part of the Ministry of Defence's normal planning process, to consider the future roles of RAF Lyneham, RAF Brize Norton and RAF St. Mawgan. The study will examine the most cost-effective way to base the Air Transport Fleet, taking account of the competition for the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft. It will explore opportunities for the exploitation of spare capacity at the three stations in the light of decisions about the above aircraft types. This will involve consideration of all aspects of the operations of each station. The study will report in the summer and I will inform the House of the details of its conclusions.

Tour Intervals

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the tour intervals were for the *(a)* Royal Armoured Corps, *(b)* Royal Artillery, *(c)* Royal Engineers, *(d)* Royal Signals and *(e)* Parachute Regiment in the last year for which figures are available. [26676]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The tour intervals for the corps in question during the year April 2000 to March 2001, the most recently available information, are set out in the table:

Tour intervals in 2000–01

Months

Arm	*Length of interval*
Royal Armoured Corps	26
Royal Artillery	42
Royal Engineers	34
Royal Signals	24
Parachute Regiment	18[1]

[1] Tour intervals are calculated on the basis of deployments of six months or more. During the period Parachute Regiment elements were also deployed to Macedonia but as this was for three months it has not been included.

Army Deployments

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of *(a)* the Army and *(b)* Land Command is (i) committed and (ii) warned to deploy for operations. [26677]

Mr. Ingram: 27 per cent. of the Army is committed to operations with 2 per cent. warned for deployment to Afghanistan. 38 per cent. of Land Command is committed to operations with 3 per cent. warned for deployment to Afghanistan.

Naval Accident

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the inquiry into the loss of Royal Navy Merlin EH101 ZH844, at Rassay on 27 October 2001 has been completed; and if he will publish the results. [26090]

Dr. Moonie: The report on the internal investigation into the loss of Royal Navy Merlin ZH844 has been completed, and its findings are currently being studied by the staff of the Commodore Naval Aviation. Once this study is complete, a Military Aircraft Accident Summary will be produced and a copy placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Fleet Auxiliaries

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what primary casualty receiving facilities have been provided on each of the Fort class RFAs; how many beds are provided; and what medical personnel serve on these ships. [26679]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* All Fort class Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) ships carry primary health care medical personnel, who would usually consist of a civilian Medical Officer and/or a Medical Assistant. RFA Fort George was fitted with a surgical capability during 2001 and has 12 beds. The primary health care medical personnel would be augmented, when necessary, by a surgical team and supporting medical and nursing personnel. RFA Fort Victoria is due to be fitted with the same surgical capability during 2002.

Translation Services

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what translation services he ensures are available for health trusts in *(a)* England and *(b)* Staffordshire. [13497]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan sets NHS a target of having a free and nationally available translation service available from all national health service premises via NHS Direct by 2003. These services will be a pivotal building block in achieving the patient-centred services envisioned in the NHS Plan and the targets set in the various National Service Frameworks.

We do not keep data centrally about services in Staffordshire.

Health Authority Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest forecast figures for underspending or overspending for the present financial year that have been submitted by each health authority in the south-east of England to the NHS South East Regional Office. [19317]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The latest (as at 31 October 2001) reported forecast year end over and underspends for health authorities in the south-east region are in the table.

	£000
	Forecast outturn 2001–02
Berkshire	0
Buckinghamshire	–212
East Kent	0
East Surrey	–2,100
East Sussex	0
Isle of Wight/Portsmouth/South East Hampshire	–450
North and Mid Hampshire	–1,138
Northamptonshire	0
Oxfordshire	0
Southampton and South West Hampshire	–269
West Kent	0
West Surrey	–3,316
West Sussex	0
Overall total	–7,485

Notes:

1. The minus figures detailed indicate an overspending.
2. '0' indicates a break even position.

Within the south-east region seven out of the 13 health authorities are projecting a balanced year end position while the remaining six have a projected aggregate overspend of £7.5 million. These overspends range from £212,000 to £3.3 million.

The South East Regional Office is continuing to work with these six health authorities to identify what action will be necessary for them to achieve operational financial balance by the end of the financial year.

Orthopaedic Operations

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients who see an orthopaedic surgeon went on to have an operation in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [23126]

Jacqui Smith: Patients who attend national health service trauma and orthopaedic out-patient clinics are treated in a range of ways, such as non-surgical treatment, physiotherapy, drug treatment and receive advice on lifestyle changes. A significant number of these patients will not need hospital admission. In 2000–01 there were:

1,724,943 new patients treated in trauma and orthopaedic clinics;

661,430 consultant episodes of trauma and orthopaedic care where surgery was performed. This figure does not equate to the number of patients as some may be operated on on more than one occasion during the year.

Mrs. Vyan Gresty

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the care of Mrs. Vyan Gresty by Harrow and Hillingdon Healthcare Trust. [23042]

Mr. Hutton: We are not aware of any representations relating to the care of this patient.

Lou Gehrig's Disease

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom by nation and region, are diagnosed as having Lou Gehrig's disease; and what percentage of these are veterans of the Gulf War in the last year for which figures are available. [23207]

Jacqui Smith: Lou Gehrig's disease is classified as motor neurone disease (MND) in this country and there are between 5,000 and 6,000 sufferers of MND in the United Kingdom. Worldwide, the annual incidence of MND is estimated to be 1.5 new cases per 100,000 people. To date, the Ministry of Defence is aware of five veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf conflict who have been diagnosed with motor neurone disease, one of whom died in 1992. The table shows the hospital admission figures for motor neurone disease in 2000–01.

Admissions for motor neurone disease by region of residence, NHS hospitals, England 2000–01

	Number
Regional office	
Northern and Yorkshire	396
Trent	330
West Midlands	169
North West	320
Eastern	347
London	269
South East	359
South West	259
England (NOS)	1
Scotland	2
Wales	16
Foreign	6
Not known	4
Total	2,514

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of *(a)* the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition and *(b)* its sub groups. [23882]

Yvette Cooper: Membership of the committee, its subgroups and working groups, is shown in the table. Papers relating to the committee and its groups are available through the committee's website www.sacn.gov.uk.

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN)

Main committee members	
Chair	
Professor Alan Jackson	Professor of Human Nutrition, Southampton University
Members	
Professor Peter Aggett (OBE)	Head of School, Lancashire Postgraduate School of Medicine and Health, Professor of Child Health and Nutrition, University of Lancashire
Professor Annie Anderson	Research Professor of Food Choice at the Centre for Public Health Nutrition Research, University of Dundee
Professor Sheila Bingham	Deputy Director of the Medical Research Council's Dunn Human Nutrition Unit, Cambridge
Professor John Cummings	Clinical Scientist at Department of Molecular and Cellular Pathology, University of Dundee

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN)

Main committee members	
Ms Gillian Fine	Company Nutritionist at Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd.
Ms Paulette Jones	Senior Mentoring Development Officer, Divert Trust, London
Dr. Tim Key	Reader in Epidemiology at the University of Oxford, works at ICRF Cancer Epidemiology Unit in the Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford
Professor Peter Kopelmann	Professor of Clinical Medicine, Assistant Warden (Education), Barts and The London, Queen Mary's School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of London
Dr. Ann Prentice	Director, MRC Human Nutrition Research, Cambridge
Professor Andrew Rugg-Gunn	University Clinical Professor, Newcastle University Dental School
Dr. Anita Thomas	Practising Consultant Physician in general (internal) and geriatric medicine, Derriford hospital, Plymouth
Mrs. Stella Walsh Senior Lecturer	Leeds Metropolitan University, National Federation of Consumer Groups
Dr. Anthony Williams	Senior Lecturer and Consultant in Neonatal Paediatrics, St. George's hospital, London
Professor Christine Williams	Professor of Human Nutrition, University of Reading
Working Group on Iron	
Chair	
Professor Peter Aggett	Professor of Child Health and Nutrition, Head of School, Lancashire Postgraduate School of Medicine and Health. Member of SACN
Vice Chairman	
Dr. Ann Prentice	Director, MRC Human Nutrition Research, Cambridge. Member of SACN
International Observer	
Dr. Bruno de Benoist	Senior Adviser, Micronutrients, Department of Nutrition for Health and Development. World Health Organisation
Members	
Dr. Philip Calder	Fetal Origins of Adult Disease Division, University of Southampton, School of Medicine
Professor Sue Fairweather-Tait	Head of Nutrition and Consumer Science Division, Institute of Food Research
Professor Sally Grantham-McGregor	Centre for International Child Health, Institute of Child Health
Ms Paulette Jones	Senior Mentoring Development Officer. Divert Trust. Lay Member of SACN
Dr. Tim Key	ICRF Cancer Epidemiology Unit, Radcliffe Infirmary Oxford. Member of SACN
Professor Joe Lunec	Director of Chemical Pathology, Leicester University
Professor Martin Pippard	Professor of Haematology, University of Dundee Medical School
Professor Mark Worwood	Department of Haematology, University of Wales Hospital
Subgroup on Risk	
Professor John Cummings (Chair)	SACN Member
Professor Christine Williams	SACN Member
Dr. Tim Key	SACN Member
Subgroup on Salt	
Professor Alan Jackson (Chair)	SACN Member
Professor Peter Aggett	SACN Member
Professor Sheila Bingham	SACN Member
Gill Fine	SACN Member

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what scientific evidence the Food Standards Agency based its statement on dietary salt and its effect on human health contained in its announcement on salt in bread on 29 November; and for what reason the statement was made by FSA before the salt review by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition had been completed. [23890]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised that the statement was based on the finding of the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy, as recently endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer in his annual report for 2001, as well as the large body of scientific evidence on the issues. The statement is without prejudice to the work that the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition currently has in hand on salt.

Health Expenditure

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate health spending per head of population by health authority for 2002. [24011]

Mr. Hutton: Health authority allocations for 2002–03 per weighted head of population for each health authority in England are shown in the table:

£

Health authority	*2002–03*
Avon	809
Barking and Havering	814
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	798
Barnsley	808
Bedfordshire	775
Berkshire	776
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	858
Birmingham	821
Bradford	809
Brent and Harrow	843
Buckinghamshire	784
Bury and Rochdale	817

	£
Health authority	*[1]2002–03*
Calderdale and Kirklees	809
Cambridgeshire	791
Camden and Islington	867
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	829
County Durham	804
Coventry	809
Croydon	797
Doncaster	826
Dorset	832
Dudley	813
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	817
East Kent	834
East Lancashire	824
East London and the City	794
East Riding	828
East Surrey	846
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	829
Gateshead and South Tyneside	823
Gloucestershire	834
Herefordshire	814
Hertfordshire	815
Hillingdon	824
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	824
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	757
Kingston and Richmond	810
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	852
Leeds	832
Leicestershire	789
Lincolnshire	811
Liverpool	846
Manchester	842
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	827
Morecambe Bay	851
Newcastle and North Tyneside	834
Norfolk	808
North and East Devon	821
North and Mid Hampshire	807
North Cheshire	839
North Cumbria	820
North Derbyshire	823
North Essex	797
North Nottinghamshire	814
North Staffordshire	815
North West Lancashire	832
North Yorkshire	802
Northamptonshire	807
Northumberland	821
Nottingham	806
Oxfordshire	788
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	843
Rotherham	822
Salford and Trafford	839
Sandwell	820
Sefton	861
Sheffield	838
Shropshire	803
Solihull	817
Somerset	813
South and West Devon	830
South Cheshire	830
South Derbyshire	797
South Essex	789
South Humber	839
South Lancashire	829
South Staffordshire	804
Southampton and South West Hampshire	807
St. Helen's and Knowsley	822
Stockport	812
Suffolk	814
Sunderland	833
Tees	808
Wakefield	818
Walsall	808
Warwickshire	820
West Kent	817
West Pennine	809
West Surrey	839
West Sussex	821
Wigan and Bolton	799
Wiltshire	812
Wirral	853
Wolverhampton	814
Worcestershire	810
England Total	817

[1] Allocation per weighted head of population

Headaches

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the term headaches was not included in the National Service Framework on long-term neurological conditions. [24057]

Jacqui Smith: Ministers have not yet made any decisions about the scope and content of this National Service Framework other than outlining that it will draw out some of the common issues faced by people with a long-term condition. It will also pay particular attention to specific neurological diseases.

Foster Care

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on (1) what his estimate is of the cost of bringing up a child in foster care in the age groups *(a)* up to four, *(b)* five to seven, *(c)* eight to 13 and *(d)* 14 to 18 years; [24567]

(2) the nationwide variation of expenses given to foster carers; and what plans he has to introduce a uniformed national level of payments. [24562]

Jacqui Smith: Each local authority determines and pays its own rate of allowance and many provide enhanced allowances to provide for those children with special needs or where recruitment of carers might be a problem locally.

There are many contributing factors which might affect the rates of allowance payable—for instance, the number of looked after children the local authority is caring for, the available pool of foster carers and whether special skills are needed by the foster carer to look after a particular child. It is therefore right, we believe, that each local authority determines and pays its own rate of allowance, taking into account the circumstances that exist locally.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the status of the Fostering Network's UK national standards for foster care in relation to the national minimum standards. [24565]

Jacqui Smith: The United Kingdom National Standards for Foster Care provide a framework for the provision of high quality foster care for children and young people throughout the UK. Their scope is much wider than the new National Minimum Standards. Although without a statutory basis, the UK National

Standards will remain in place and work alongside the National Minimum Standards as good practice for fostering service providers.

The National Minimum Standards underpin the new Fostering Services Regulations, which come into force in April 2002. These have a statutory basis and will ensure that a minimum level of care is provided throughout the sector. They are not intended to be aspirational or references to best practice, but represent a core level of welfare provision that no establishment should fall below.

Food Hygiene

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken to improve food hygiene in meat-selling shops in the past five years. [24442]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) (Butchers' Shops) Amendment Regulations 2000 (SI 2000 No. 930) were introduced in England in response to the recommendation in the Pennington report for the licensing of retail butchers' shops. These regulations, which came into force on 1 May 2000, require retail butchers and other retail outlets selling both unwrapped raw meat and ready to eat food to obtain an annual licence from their local food authority. Businesses must satisfy certain hygiene conditions before a licence can be issued, including compliance with existing food hygiene legislation, the operation of effective food safety management controls based on the principles of the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points system (HACCP) and appropriate food hygiene training for food handling and supervisory staff. Similarly oriented legislation has also been put in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We have also made £4.5 million available to fund a free training and support initiative to help retail butchers in England introduce effective HACCP food safety management controls in their shops prior to the introduction of the licensing regulations. Approximately 7,500 butchers in England received help through this initiative which ran from 1998 to 2000. Funding was also made available in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to assist butchers in implementing the new requirements over a similar time period.

National Healthy School Standard

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of financial support has been given to the National Healthy School Standard. [24581]

Yvette Cooper: In 2001–02 the Department has provided central support to the National Healthy School Standard of £5.8 million and the Department for Education and Skills has provided £2 million.

Osteoporosis

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the publication date is of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy's report on the role of diet in the prevention of osteoporosis. [24445]

Yvette Cooper: The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) published a report on "Nutrition and Bone Health" in 1998. The report made a number of recommendations including that

> "a healthy lifestyle to maintain bone health should be encouraged at all ages".

To complement the report the Health Education Authority produced a fact sheet, "Nutrition and Bone Health", summing up the COMA recommendations in a user-friendly format.

COMA has been replaced by a new Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) which held its first meeting in June 2001. SACN is a committee of independent experts which will advise Government, via the Chief Medical Officers and the Food Standards Agency (FSA), on matters relating to nutrition, diet and health. Osteoporosis is not a named area of work within the Committee's current work programme. Information about the work of SACN can be obtained from the Committee's website www.sacn.gov.uk.

Blood Donors

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individual blood donors there were in each of the last five years. [24444]

Yvette Cooper: Figures received from the National Blood Service show that the number of individual blood donors for the last five years (based on mid year averages) are:

	Million
	Number
2001	1.828
2000	1.893
1999	1.839
1998	1.906
1997	1.981

Chief Medical Officer (Annual Report)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the decision was taken to publish a shortened version of the Chief Medical Officer's annual report. [24590]

Yvette Cooper: The length and content of the Chief Medical Officer's annual report is a matter for the Chief Medical Officer of the day. The present Chief Medical Officer considered the length and format of the previous reports after taking up post in the autumn of 1998. He also reviewed the range of publications produced under the auspices of the Chief Medical Officer. He decided that the previous format which included detailed accounts of the Government's policies in relation to health and health care were now well covered in other publications and Government websites. With this is mind he decided to focus the report on a number of specific topics of importance to the public health. He began working personally on this new report in the spring of 2001 and it was published on 10 December 2001.

Nutrition

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the proportion of patients who are undernourished in the NHS. [24595]

Yvette Cooper: For the wider community, Government surveys such as the National Diet and Nutrition Surveys and the Health Survey for England provide data on the prevalence of over and under nutrition for children and adults and by age and region.

Statistics are available for the number of episodes of hospital in-patient care with a primary diagnosis relating to malnutrition. The incidence of reported cases of malnutrition is rare (there were a total of 252 cases in 2000–01) but tends to increase with age.

In the NHS Plan, we made a commitment to reduce under-nutrition by developing a hospital nutrition policy to improve the outcome of care of patients by 2004. A number of strategies are in place to manage, monitor and screen patients for under-nutrition in hospitals, residential care and the wider community. Nutritional screening is recommended for the care of specific groups, such as those outlined in the "National Service Framework for Older People".

Websites

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is of *(a)* establishing and *(b)* maintaining the (i) Galaxy H, (ii) Welltown, (iii) Wired for Health, (iv) Mind Body Soul and (v) LifeBytes websites; and how many hits there were in the last year in each case. [24617]

Yvette Cooper: The "Wired for Health" websites were set up progressively by the Health Development Agency between April 1998 and February 2001. The separate costs of each of the sites have not been recorded in the form requested.

The total project costs were as follows:

Financial year	*£000*
1998–99	108
1999–2000	207
2000–01	266
April 2001-November 2001	96

Website	*Number of hits*
1 December 2000 to 30 November 2001	
Wired for Health	2,398,642
Mind, Body and Soul	3,805,962
LifeBytes	1,577,085
1 March 2001 to 30 November 2001[1]	
Galaxy-H	3,640,195
Welltown	3,065,236

[1] the Galaxy-Hon. and Welltown sites were launched in February 2001

Nursing Posts

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time and whole-time equivalent nursing posts *(a)* are vacant and *(b)* have been vacant for over three months in each region in the UK. [25880]

Mr. Hutton: Results from the 2001 national health service vacancy survey can be found on the internet at www.doh.gov.uk/public/vacancysurvey.htm.

We collect only whole-time equivalent data for three month vacancies in England.

Matters relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Administrations.

Department of Health vacancy survey March 2001 three month vacancies for qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors—by region in England

	Whole time equivalents
England	9,000
Northern and Yorkshire	760
Trent	410
West Midlands	810
North West	940
Eastern	720
London	2,960
South East	1,750
South West	560

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
2. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.
3. England totals include staff from Special Health Authorities.
4. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001

Health Expenditure, Wigan and Bolton

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual *(a)* percentage and *(b)* cash increases in the funding for the Wigan and Bolton health authority have been since the general election in 1997; and what moneys have been received by the Royal Bolton Hospital in addition to their health authority allocations during the same period. [24884]

Mr. Hutton: The annual percentage and cash increases in funding received by the Wigan and Bolton health authority are shown in the table.

	Wigan and Bolton HA		*North West*
Year	*Percentage increases*	*Cash increases £000*	*Percentage increases*
1997–98	4.62	11,928	4.1
1998–99	5.41	14,021	4.84
1999–2000	7.18	24,996	6.52
2000–01	6.78	25,414	6.18
2001–02	9.10	37,252	8.91
2002–03	10.17	45,361	9.70

Note:

Figures shown are 'headline' opening allocation increases each year

The funding received by the Bolton Hospitals National Health Service Trust from 1997–98 to 2001–02 is as follows:

	(£ million)	*Increase (Percentage)*
Wigan and Bolton health authority	30.5	38.22
All other income	5.7	57.03
Total	36.2	40.31

Notes:

1. The contract value with the Wigan and Bolton health authority in any one year may be subject to some (relatively minor) distortion to the extent that as a host some income increases/decreases for the Trust are arbitrarily channelled through the health authority.

2. The Trust has highlighted one material technical item in 1999–2000.

3. The question refers to moneys received. The term allocation is not appropriate in this context. The income flowing from the HA to the Trust each year is subject to annual discussion with a financial value being agreed as part of the Service and Financial Framework.

Mental Health (Prisoners)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if prisoners receive a mental health assessment upon arrival in prison. [24594]

Jacqui Smith: All prisoners' physical and mental health care needs are assessed when they are first received into prison custody. The Prison Service recognises that current reception screening arrangements can fail to identify prisoners who have serious mental health problems. A more effective health screening tool for identifying serious mental health problems on first reception into prison is being developed and implemented as part of the Prison Health Policy Unit/Task Force's current work programme.

Orthopaedic Consultants

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of orthopaedic consultants working within the NHS. [25849]

Mr. Hutton: As at 30 September 2000, there were 1,200 consultants working within the orthopaedic and trauma specialty in England.

Our projections show that by September 2004, there will be around 250 extra trained specialists available to take up consultant posts in this speciality.

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting time is for a first appointment to see an orthopaedic consultant at *(a)* St. George's Hospital, *(b)* Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, *(c)* Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital and *(d)* Epsom and St. Helier's Hospital NHS trusts. [25850]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital	*Number*[1]
St. George's	416
Chelsea and Westminster	126
Guys and St. Thomas'	1,229
Epsom and St. Helier	396

[1] Number of patients with a written referral from a general practitioner who had not yet attended for a first outpatient appointment in trauma and orthopaedics by end of September 2001 who had been waiting 13 weeks and over.

Adoption

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he received before publication of the Adoption and Children Bill from birth relatives who experienced distress at having their identifying details passed on to adopted persons. [24395]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Departmental officials have received expressions of concern from some interested stakeholder organisations about the possibility of birth relatives being caused distress as a result of identifying details being passed on to adopted persons. As acknowledged by officials when giving oral evidence to the Adoption and Children Bill Special Standing Committee on 20 November 2001, this is only likely to concern a small minority of cases.

Protection of Children Act List

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the individual checks made against the Protection of Children Act list since it came into force have identified listed individuals applying for work with children. [24892]

Jacqui Smith: Of the 972,000 checks made against the Protection of Children Act list since October 2000, some 36 have been made against individuals who are included on the list.

Overseas Treatment

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to establish which overseas healthcare providers can provide high standards of care and good value for money in treating NHS patients. [25347]

Mr. Hutton: The Department plans a competitive tendering process which will require overseas providers who wish to provide hospital services to the national health service to demonstrate that they can provide a high quality service at competitive prices. Decisions about the appropriate providers will take into account both paper evidence and visits by managers and clinicians: these service requirements will be underpinned by robust contractual arrangements.

The tender process will draw on the experience of the three test bed sites who are piloting processes for sending NHS patients abroad for treatment.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from private sector health organisations against *(a)* the Government sending patients abroad for NHS funded treatment and *(b)* allowing healthcare companies or staff from abroad to operate in NHS hospitals. [25519]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* We have not received any such representations from private sector health organisations.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the first NHS patients to go abroad for treatment, funded by the NHS. [25518]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The test bed sites in south-east England who are piloting processes for sending national health service patients overseas for treatment are in contractual negotiations with several overseas providers. Subject to satisfactory resolution of those negotiations we expect the first NHS-funded patients to travel abroad for treatment before the end of January.

Ward Housekeeper Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money his Department allocated for *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2002 and *(d)* 2003, to monitor the effectiveness and value for money of the ward housekeeper scheme. [25360]

Mr. Hutton: No additional funds have been allocated to national health service trusts specifically to monitor aspects of the ward housekeeping scheme.

Trusts that receive one-off funding to introduce and develop housekeeping services must place review and evaluation processes in place as part of their project management of housekeeping services.

Patient satisfaction with housekeeping services will be captured by the National Health Service Estates national questionnaire.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department will monitor the effectiveness and value for money of the ward housekeeper scheme. [25362]

Mr. Hutton: The housekeeping guide, "A first guide to new, modern and dependable ward housekeeping services in the NHS", includes a framework for the establishment of housekeeping services within trusts. The framework states that the trust should set up a review process that will evaluate the housekeeping service and establish a continuing quality improvement process.

A trial questionnaire devised to capture patients satisfaction with ward housekeeping services is to be piloted in six trusts within the new few months. The results and conclusions will be shared with relevant trust patient forums and committees. It is planned to include the resulting agreed questions in the National Health Service Estates national questionnaire for future years.

The NHS Estates national questionnaire gathers information from patients about their experience within the NHS. These results in turn will help to support the findings of clinical governance and clinical care outcomes.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money his Department has allocated to *(a)* implement and *(b)* run the ward housekeeper scheme in (i) 2000, and (ii) 2001; and what his projected expenditure is on the programme for the next three years. [25361]

Mr. Hutton: To support the introduction of ward housekeeping set out in the NHS Plan, national health service hospital trusts will each receive a one-off payment of £50,000 for project management costs to help them introduce and develop ward housekeeping. Trusts will decide at local level how best to fund housekeeping services in future years.

To date, over £10 million has been distributed to trusts:

(i) 72 trusts received payments in December 2000

(ii) 140 trusts received payments in October 2001.

Remaining trusts will be allocated funding as they develop robust action plans for the introduction of ward housekeepers.

Radiographers

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the number of radiographers working in the NHS. [25381]

Mr. Hutton: We are implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention of all staff, including radiographers. Examples include an increase in pay, encouraging the national health service to become a better employer through the "Improving Working Lives and Positively Diverse" programmes, increasing training commissions, reducing student attrition, running national and local recruitment and return to practice campaigns, and supporting international recruitment where appropriate. Further information on Improving Working Lives is available at www.doh.gov.uk/iwl.

The Department has been working very closely with the Society of Radiographers to implement these measures. Initiatives include a letter sent to former radiographers inviting them to consider returning to the NHS, radiography awareness weeks and conferences to share good practice.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the suspension from hospital waiting lists of patients who are prepared to consent to suspension in order to be treated by a named consultant. [25500]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Patients who consent to be treated by a named consultant other than by the consultant they were originally referred to should not be suspended from the waiting list.

Except where the change of consultant involves moving to a different trust, patients should continue to remain on the active list and should be treated within the maximum waiting time applicable at the time. Patients who move to a different trust would have their waiting time recalculated to the date they were put on the new consultant's list, although trusts are encouraged to take account of elapsed wait when prioritising them for treatment.

To reduce variations in waiting times, we are encouraging the pooling of referrals. Pooled referrals are being tested as part of the "Action On Programme". The programme is being run by the national health service Modernisation Agency and aims to tackle those specialties with typically the longest waiting times: ophthalmology; dermatology; ear, nose and throat; and orthopaedics.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made on the waiting time for a general practitioner appointment; and if he will make a statement. [24010]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Patient surveys identify ready access to primary care as a key issue and the NHS Plan sets targets that by 2004 all patients will be able to see a primary care professional within 24 hours and a general practitioner within 48 hours. Health authorities and primary care trusts have been working with GPs and others to secure delivery of these targets. In doing so they are supported by the work of the National Primary Care Development Team and by resources from the PCT primary care access fund. In-year monitoring indicates that the interim milestone for April 2002 of 60 per cent. compliance will be achieved. Further progress towards these targets will be supported in 2002–03 by an earmarked increase of £83.5 million in the PCT primary care access fund to £168 million.

Care Homes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information he collates on the number of elderly people in each local authority *(a)* resident in care houses and *(b)* receiving domiciliary care (i) paid for privately and (ii) paid for by the local authority; [24947]

(2) what information he collates on *(a)* the number of elderly people in each local authority in need of residential nursing and domiciliary care and *(b)* the number in receipt of such care. [24949]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Department collects information from each council with social services responsibility on the number of elderly people assessed by social services and on the numbers of elderly people receiving residential care, nursing care or community based services, including domiciliary care, as part of the annual Referrals, Assessments and Packages of Care (RAP) data collection. National figures were published on 6 December 2001 for the year to 31 March 2001 in "Community Care Statistics 2000–01, Referrals, Assessments and Packages of Care for Adults", a copy of which is in the Library. This information relates to services funded wholly or in part by councils with social services responsibilities. Information is not collected centrally on the number of elderly people who pay privately the full cost of their residential, nursing or community based care.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many registrations there were in England in each year from 1996 to 2001 of nursing and residential places for older people in *(a)* local authority residential, *(b)* independent residential, *(c)* national health services geriatric and psychogeriatric and *(d)* independent nursing; [26521]

(2) how many registrations of nursing and residential places for older people there were *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each local authority with responsibility for social services in each year from 1996 to 2001. [26520]

Jacqui Smith: Information on places for older people in residential care homes in England are available in the Statistical Bulletins "Community Care Statistics 2001: Residential Personal Social services for adults" and "Community Care Statistics 2000: Residential Personal Social services for adults". The publications show the number of residential places for older people in local authority staffed homes and independent residential homes for the years 1996 to 2001. Details of the number of registered beds for older people in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics in England, for the years 2000 and 2001 are also given in these publications. Copies of the publications are in the Library.

Details on the number of available beds in national health service facilities are collected on the departmental statistical return—KH03. Bed data can be found in the annual publication "Bed availability and occupancy—England: Each Financial Year to 1999–2000", copies of which are available in the Library.

Detailed tables showing the number of residential places/registered beds by local area will be placed in the Library shortly.

Free Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1037W, on free nursing care, if he will make a statement as to why, from Q1 2000–01, reasons for delay were only collected on the basis of patients of all ages and not by *(a)* age group and *(b)* reason for delay; and if he will publish the figures he has collated for this period. [25782]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The breakdown of reasons for delay is now collected for patients of all ages, rather than just for those over 75, to give a more comprehensive picture of the reasons for delayed discharges. The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Information from the Referrals, Assessments and Packages of Care data collection is not currently published for each council. Information on the numbers of elderly people in residential and nursing care at 31 March 2001 whose care is paid for in whole or in part by the local council (supported residents) is available and published in Table S4 of "Community Care Statistics 2001, Residential Personal Social Services for Adults", a copy of which is in the Library.

Residential and Home Care Charges

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent assessment he has made of changes in residential and home care charges for *(a)* Manchester city council and *(b)* in the UK; [25775]

(2) what plans he has to help local authority social services meet residential and home care charges in *(a)* Manchester and *(b)* the UK. [25776]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* We are providing an additional £680 million to councils next year for social services in England, which is an increase of 6.5 per cent. Manchester will receive its share of this extra money. Councils can decide on how to make best use of these extra resources, including how much to make available for extra residential and home care.

Building Care Capacity Initiative

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the funding available for the Building Capacity Government initiative in *(a)* Manchester and *(b)* the UK. [25777]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Of the £100 million available nationally for the Building Care Capacity in 2001–02, Manchester received

£784,534. On 8 January, we announced that Manchester would get £1.9 million of the £190 million available nationally for 2002–03.

Using this additional funding Manchester council has reduced delayed discharges locally since November. This is part of a national reduction in delayed discharges by 10 per cent. since September 2001.

Information for Social Care Scheme

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the financial impact on local authorities of the Information for Social Care scheme. [25779]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Plans recently submitted by councils with social services responsibilities to the Department indicate a financial requirement for taking forward Information for Social Care as part of the wider 'Modernising Government' agenda. In recognition of the need, and in addition to funding provided by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions under the wider agenda, the Department of Health is providing a capital grant over three years to help each council improve the quality of their welfare services through the better use of information and information technology.

Romanian Adoptions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adoptions from Romania have taken place in each of the last four years. [26493]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The table shows how many Romanian adoption applications the Department has processed in each of the last four years.

Romanian inter-country adoption applications processed by the Department of Health

	Number
2001	4
2000	23
1999	8
1998	17

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has altered its policies on inter-country adoptions from Romania since 1997. [26495]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* An informal Co-operation Agreement between the Department and the Romanian Committee for Adoptions was signed on 17 February 1998. A copy of the Co-operation Agreement has been placed in the Library for information. The agreement was drawn up in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, following the introduction of new adoption legislation in Romania in 1997. The co-operation agreement embodies the principles of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption 1993.

A one year moratorium on international adoptions from Romania was announced by the Romanian National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption, formerly the Romanian Committee for Adoptions, on 13 July, following a recommendation from the European Parliament.

Hospital Star Ratings

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken with regard to each of the chief executives of NHS hospital trusts awarded zero stars in his star rating exercise in 2001; and if he will list them. [26086]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The Department, in conjunction with the Modernisation Agency is assessing what progress has been made to improve performance in the 12 national health service trusts who were given a zero star rating in September 2001. These considerations are not yet complete.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the criteria were for the selection of NHS trusts announced on 25 May 2000 in the project to provide access to digital hearing aids; and what the criteria will be for the selection of those which were the subject of his press release on Christmas Eve 2001. [25995]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* National health service trusts were invited to be part of the project on the basis of geographical spread, preparedness to modernise, and the commitment of the local health community to the aims of the project. The criteria for selection for the next wave have yet to be determined.

Norwich and Norfolk Hospital

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when his Department received an application from the Norwich and Norfolk hospital for contingency funding, and when such a grant was approved; [27013]

(2) for what purpose and for what reasons he approved the grant to the Norwich and Norfolk hospital on 9 January. [27014]

Mr. Milburn: Officials within the Department have control over a small fund to deal with particular pressures on local health services. £75,000 was agreed for the Norfolk and Norwich Health Care National Health Service Trust on 21 December 2001 to cover significant staff sickness. The money was used to fund extra shifts and additional child care costs of staff with family responsibilities to extend their hours. £250,000 was agreed on 9 January 2002 to buy operations in the private sector to free up capacity for emergencies in the trust and to reduce waits for elective surgery, prior to the opening of an additional 144-bed unit later this year on the new hospital site. This is in line with well-established procedures for monitoring local health services. A number of other NHS trusts have already received support through this fund. Others will receive support throughout the year.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Hull, North on 26 October 2001 regarding MMR. [25949]

Yvette Cooper: I replied to my hon. Friend on 11 January.

Preserved Rights and Residential Allowances

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to compensate local authorities, following the latest RSG settlement, for the shift of responsibility from central to local government for people with preserved rights and residential allowances. [26356]

Jacqui Smith: Details of the money local authorities will receive in 2002–03 on account of their new responsibilities towards people with preserved rights and the phasing out of the residential allowance were announced on 4 December and published in Circular LASSL(2001)13, a copy of which is available on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk. I shall arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

TREASURY

Earnings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average weekly earnings were of the *(a)* lowest and *(b)* highest decile of all employees in each of the last five years. [26268]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 14 January 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the average weekly earnings of the lowest and highest decile. I am replying in his absence. (26268)

The requested information is in the attached table.

Gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates[1]
Great Britain; not seasonally adjusted

£

	Lowest decile	Highest decile
April 1996	166.9	571.8
April 1997	175.3	590.1
April 1998	182.3	618.5
April 1999	190.0	645.0
April 2000	197.9	662.2

[1] Whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence

Source:

New Earnings Survey

Euro

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much, since the introduction of the euro, interest rates have changed in *(a)* each country in the EU, *(b)* the US and *(c)* Japan. [26004]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The changes in interest rates in these countries since the start of 1999 are as follows:

Percentage

	1 January 1999	10 January 2002
Euro area[1]	3	3.25
UK[2]	6.25	4
Sweden[3]	3.40	3.75
Denmark[4]	3.5	3.25
USA[5]	4.75	1.75
Japan[6]	0.25	0.001

[1] Key financing rate

[2] Bank of England base rate

[3] Riksbank repo rate

[4] Discount rate

[5] Federal Funds rate

[6] Unsecured overnight call rate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the value of the euro against *(a)* the pound sterling, *(b)* the US dollar and *(c)* the Japanese yen has changed since its introduction. [26002]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The information is as follows:

Exchange rate comparisons	*1 January 1999*	*9 January 2002*
UK £ to euro	0.706	0.617
US dollar to euro	1.174	0.889
Japanese yen to euro	132.5	117.8

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he will take to ensure that measures taken to control bureaux de change and prevent money laundering are applied to retail outlets accepting euro-denominated notes and coins. [26008]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* All UK institutions and persons are obliged, by law, to report to the proper authorities any financial transactions linked to terrorism or drug trafficking which they become aware of in the course of their trade, business or profession. Retail outlets, along with the rest of the population, are covered by this obligation, irrespective of the currency in which the payment is made.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much *(a)* the retail prices index, *(b)* GDP, *(c)* unemployment, *(d)* employment and *(e)* taxation as a proportion of GDP or equivalent, has changed since the introduction of the euro in (i) each country in the EU, (ii) the US and (iii) Japan. [26003]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* International data on retail prices and gross domestic product are available in "Economic Outlook", OECD (eds.). Data on unemployment and employment can be found in "Employment Outlook", OECD (eds.). Information on taxation as a proportion of GDP can be found in "OECD Revenue Statistics 1965–2000". All of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much average incomes have changed, since the introduction of the euro, in *(a)* each country in the EU, *(b)* the US and *(c)* Japan. [26005]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* International comparisons of disposable income per capita are available in "Main Economic Indicators", OECD (eds.). Comparisons of wage levels across OECD

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countries are available in "Taxing Wages", OECD (eds.). These publications are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will calculate how much it would cost to supply every household in the United Kingdom with a free sterling to euro calculator. [24958]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's policy on membership of the single currency is unchanged. The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the amount of public money which has been spent on preparing British business for the arrival of the euro. [26946]

Ruth Kelly: Details of expenditure on business euro preparations were set out in the Treasury's Fifth Report on Euro Preparations, published on 4 November 2001. Copies of this were deposited in the Library of the House.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Torbay of 13 November 2001 regarding Mr. Fraser of Paignton and his confiscated vehicle. [25951]

Mr. Boateng: I have done so.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the current strength is of the import/export teams in HM Customs and Excise. [26427]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 444W.

Fostering

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the cross-cutting review of children at risk will be considering the resource requirements of the fostering service. [24564]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The children at risk cross-cutting review is focused on ways of improving and co-ordinating a range of services to provide early intervention for those children at risk of social exclusion. It is also looking at ways of providing help and support to those children at key transition points which may trigger problems.

The review is not looking specifically at the fostering service nor the associated funding issues. The Department is responsible for looking at the resource requirements of the fostering service, as part of the current spending review round.

Pay and Pensions Equalisation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made by the review into the equalisation of pay and pensions across Government Departments; and when a national agreement will be agreed. [26791]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for pay and grading outside the senior civil service is delegated to Departments and agencies. There are no plans to return to a centralised system, which would be incompatible with our policy of giving greater freedom and autonomy to front line managers in order to encourage innovation and improve delivery.

The Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme is the occupational pension scheme for civil servants and applies across all Departments.

Roques Report

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he expects to have completed drafting consolidated Customs and Excise legislation; [26514]

(2) what progress he has made in implementing a consolidation of Customs and Excise regulations as recommended by the Roques report. [26515]

Mr. Boateng: Customs introduced the Excise Duty Points (Duty Suspended Movement of Excise Goods) Regulations 2001 last September. These were supported by Mr. Roques in his recent report and strengthen the system for holding and moving excise goods without payment of duty. Further new regulations will be laid shortly.

Work will begin in 2002–03 on looking at the scope for consolidating related excise legislation. The size of the task has yet to be gauged.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much and over what period of time he expects carbon emissions to be reduced as a consequence of the climate change levy. [26510]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy package is forecast to deliver reductions in CO_2 emissions of 5 million tonnes of carbon a year by 2010.

Insurance Payouts

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will investigate the role of insurance companies in delays in payouts to victims when there is a clear allocation of responsibility to guilty parties. [27019]

Ruth Kelly: The financial ombudsman scheme and the courts provide means of redress for policyholders if they believe there are unjustifiable delays.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the working families tax credit on second and third jobs. [27012]

Dawn Primarolo: The impact of working families tax credit on the labour market will be assessed in due course as part of the evaluation programme.

Annuities

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the timetable is for the proposed review of annuities. [26790]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's policy on annuities and proposals for reform will be set out in a consultation document which will be published shortly. We will consider the consultation responses carefully before deciding how to proceed.

PRIME MINISTER

Exchange Rate Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the work of the Forward Strategy Unit on exchange rate policy and the overproduction of sterling. [25972]

The Prime Minister: No such work is being undertaken.

Government Units

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will *(a)* list the (i) senior staff and (ii) other ministerial personnel, *(b)* describe the role and *(c)* publish the e-mail address and the mission statement of (1) the Forward Strategy Unit, (2) the Performance and Innovation Unit, (3) the Social Exclusion Unit, (4) the Delivery Unit and (5) the Domestic Policy Directorate; and how often and on what basis each reports to him. [25975]

The Prime Minister: The purpose of all the units is to help achieve our commitment to the modernisation and reform in public services and report to me regularly.

The Forward Strategy Unit reports directly to me and is headed by Geoff Mulgan. The unit's role is to provide internal long-term strategic analysis and policy thinking for me and other Cabinet Ministers. The FSU's e-mail address is: forwardstrategyunit@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

The Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) reports to me through Sir Richard Wilson and is headed by Geoff Mulgan. Its role is to provide me and Government Departments with a capacity to analyse major cross-cutting policy issues and design strategic solutions. The PIU's mission statement is:

> To improve the effectiveness of Government policies, their implementation and service delivery mechanisms, working with Departments and others on cross-cutting and innovative projects.

A number of Ministers have been involved as sponsor Ministers for PIU projects. Full information is on the PIU website: www.piu.gov.uk.

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) reports to me through the Deputy Prime Minister and is headed by Moira Wallace. The Social Exclusion Unit's remit is to help improve Government action to reduce social exclusion by producing "joined up solutions to joined up problems". It works mainly on specific projects, chosen following consultation with other Ministers and suggestions from interested groups. In addition to its project-based work, the unit is involved in other cross-governmental policy relating to social exclusion. The SEU can be contacted through their website: www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk.

The Delivery Unit (DU) reports to me under the day to day supervision of the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Lord Macdonald, and is headed by Michael Barber. The unit is working closely with the Treasury and other Departments to ensure that the Government achieve their delivery priorities during this Parliament across the key areas of public service: health, education, crime, asylum and transport.

My Principal Private Secretary, Jeremy Heywood leads the Policy Directorate within No. 10 covering domestic policy.

Forward Strategy Unit

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will publish the conclusions drawn by Lord Birt on the NHS and on transport; [25976]

(2) if he will ensure that all reports to and conference discussions held by the Forward Strategy Unit are published. [25974]

The Prime Minister: It is not our policy to publish Forward Strategy Unit reports which will provide me and other Cabinet Ministers with long-term internal strategic analysis and policy thinking. Internal policy advice to Ministers remains confidential.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the dates of foreign visits he has made since 11 September; which countries he visited; whom he met; what was discussed; what the size of his entourage was; which Foreign Office Ministers accompanied him; and what the total cost of the visit was in each case. [26757]

The Prime Minister: Since 11 September, I have made the following overseas visits and met the following leaders:

19 September

Germany—Chancellor Schröder

20 September

France—President Chirac

USA—President Bush

21 September

European Council meeting—Brussels

4 October

Russia—President Putin

5 October

Pakistan—President Musharraf

6 October

India—Prime Minister Vajpayee

9 October

Switzerland—Shaikh Zayed, Ruler of Abu Dhabi

10 October

Oman—His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said

11 October

Egypt—President Mubarak

19 October

Belgium—Informal meeting of EU Heads of Government (Ghent)

31 October

Syria—President al-Assad

Saudi Arabia—King Fahd of Saudi Arabia

1 November

Jordan—King Abdullah II of Jordan

Palestinian Authority—President Arafat

Israel—Prime Minister Sharon

Italy—Prime Minister Berlusconi

7 November

USA—President Bush

27 November

Germany—Chancellor Schröder

30 November

Ireland—Meeting of the British Irish Council

13–15 December

Belgium—European Council meeting (Laeken)

3–8 January 2002

Bangladesh—Prime Minister Khaleda Zia

India—Prime Minister Vajpayee

Pakistan—President Musharraf

Afghanistan—Hamid Karzai, Chairman of Afghanistan Interim Authority.

A range of issues were discussed during these visits, including the international coalition against terrorism, the middle east peace process, EU affairs, bilateral relations and regional issues.

The Foreign Secretary attended the European Council meetings on 21 September and 13–15 December. The Minister for Europe also attended the European Council meeting in December.

A detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers on travel overseas for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

Ms Walley: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the results of his visit to Pakistan in relation to Kashmir. [26935]

The Prime Minister: I discussed Kashmir with President Musharraf during my visit to Pakistan on 7 January, along with other bilateral and regional issues. I made clear our view that the issue of Kashmir can only be resolved through bilateral dialogue between Pakistan and India.

Energy Review

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on how he plans to implement the recommendations in the report of the Performance and Innovation Unit on United Kingdom energy objectives; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [26845]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 816W.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Prime Minister when the Energy Review is expected to report. [26785]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 816W.

International Criminal Court

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, how often the issue of the proposed introduction of legal measures on ratification of the statute of the International Criminal Court has been discussed with Secretary of State Powell. [27009]

The Prime Minister: The then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), discussed this issue with Secretary of State Powell early last year. Together with our EU partners we have since sent two written demarches about this to Secretary of State Powell.

Matthew Elson

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister what involvement he and his officials had in the appointment of Matthew Elson as transport adviser within the No. 10 Policy Unit. [26853]

The Prime Minister: Matthew Elson has joined No. 10 as a special adviser. He was appointed by me under the terms and conditions set out in the Model Contract for Special Advisers, and in line with the requirements of paragraph 50 of the Ministerial Code.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held on 6 and 7 December 2001; what the Government's position was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [27434]

Angela Eagle: I represented the United Kingdom at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Brussels on 6 and 7 December 2001.

A points:

The A points were approved as in document 14899/01 (a copy of which has been placed in the Library).

Framework Decision on a European Arrest Warrant:

Fourteen member states and the Commission could agree to a revised Presidency compromise package, the principal elements of which were a three-year penalty threshold for the offences on the existing list of crimes for which dual criminality would be abolished, a time-limited opt out for one member state in relation to extradition of own nationals and a territoriality clause allowing a member state to refuse extradition where the offence was committed on its own territory. A council statement would broadly define the offences of racism and xenophobia, swindling, sabotage, racketeering and extortion. One member state was unable to accept the final compromise package and argued that the warrant should apply only to cases of terrorism and the most serious crimes on the list.

Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism:

Agreement was reached subject to parliamentary scrutiny reserves from three member states.

Council Decision Establishing Eurojust:

The Council decision establishing Eurojust was agreed subject to parliamentary scrutiny reserves from four member states. National members were to be appointed within two months of the publication of the Council decision in the Official Journal.

Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography:

Fourteen member states could agree to the definitions of offences of children and child pornography contained in the framework decision; one member state disagreed, arguing that the exemptions from criminal liability for offences in relation in return to virtual pornography should be deleted. With the support of several other member states, I said the United Kingdom would wish to make a declaration stating that the United Kingdom would continue to take tough action against both real and virtual pornographic images of children.

Harmonisation of Penalties:

There was general agreement to pursue the Presidency's proposal for the future approximation of criminal law penalties. This would comprise a range of penalties defined by the periods of maximum imprisonment for each category of offence. Level one would require penalties which would permit extradition, level two would require a penalty attracting not less than a maximum period of one to five years' imprisonment, level three would attract five to 10 years' and level four would be 10 years' imprisonment and above.

Parental Responsibility:

Discussion of this item was postponed.

The Fight Against Terrorism:

The Director of Europol reported on increased counter-terrorist activity at Europol since 11 September. He noted member states' increased willingness to share information with Europol.

Terrorism Roadmap:

The Presidency reported that important progress had been made in the follow-up to the action agreed at the JHA Council on 20 September. One member state proposed a number of additional measures for inclusion in the roadmap; these would be discussed further in the appropriate working group.

Asylum Procedures Directive: Draft Council Conclusions:

The council held a debate on the Presidency text, which focused on appeal rights. I argued for swift agreement on the package of asylum directives currently under negotiation and added that asylum procedures should be rapid and fair but should not allow multiple opportunities for appeal. The Presidency noted a broad consensus on the way forward, and agreed to amend its text in the light of member states' comments.

European Management Concept on Border control:

There was broad support for a Presidency proposal to strengthen the EU's external frontier and for an ongoing feasibility study for a European Border Guard. Several delegations saw no need for a supranational force but there was consensus on improved training and co-operation. The Commission said that it would be issuing a communication on external frontiers early in 2002.

Provisions for Applying Eurodac:

One member state still had difficulties with the technical specifications in the draft implementing rules. The Presidency urged a swift resolution to this problem.

Common Visa List (CVL)—Romania:

The council regulation placing Romania on the CVL exempt list from 1 January 2002 was agreed, with a declaration on continued monitoring of all the candidate countries.

Address by United States (US) Secretary of State:

The council was addressed by Colin Powell, US Secretary of State. He praised the EU's solidarity with the US since 11 September and welcomed the progress made on law enforcement co-operation. He urged a swift resolution to the issue of exchange of data for law enforcement purposes. The US/Europol agreement was signed. The Presidency and the Commission summarised EU achievements on counter-terrorism since 11 September and welcomed the enhanced co-operation with the US.

Mixed Committee with Iceland and Norway

SIS 11—new functions:

Iceland, chairing the Mixed Committee session at Ministerial level, introduced the Presidency's paper on future Schengen Information System (SIS) requirements and noted that the council's discussion would serve as political guidance for the development of SIS 11. The Commission emphasised the importance of early agreement, as any new features would need to be included in its feasibility study, to be launched in February 2002. There was general agreement to the principle of using SIS data for a wider range of purposes and to a study on the possibility of exchanging information on persons precluded from leaving the Schengen area.

Other Visa and Consular Issues:

There was agreement in principle to the draft regulations on a uniform visa format and form for affixing vias, subject to necessary procedures being completed in the European and national Parliaments. The council decision on Schengen visa fees also received general endorsement. The Presidency introduced its report on improving local consular co-operation, through measures such as a shared database of visa applications and joint visa offices.

Metropolitan Police Recruitment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police officers have been recruited from *(a)* Surrey police and *(b)* service at Epsom police station in each of the last three years. [24118]

Mr. Denham: The information is as follows:

Surrey police—transfers to the Metropolitan police

Year	*Number of officers transferring in total from Surrey police*	*Number of Epsom based officers who transferred to the Metropolitan police*[1]
1998–99	2	—
1999–2000	1	—
2000–01	9	1
2001–02[2]	29	2

[1] Before 1 April 2000 Epsom police station was part of the

Metropolitan police service. It is therefore only possible to show the number of Surrey police officers who were based at Epsom and transferred to the Metropolitan police service from 1 April 2000.

[2] To 18 December 2001.

These figures do not include Metropolitan police service (MPS) officers who were seconded to Surrey police following the boundary changes of 1 April 2000 and have since returned to the MPS.

Following the boundary changes on 1 April 2000, 249 MPS officers were seconded to the Surrey police of whom 63 were posted to Epsom police station. Since then 209 officers have returned to the MPS of whom 56 were based at Epsom.

Police Awards

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what awards will be given to police officers on the front line; and how an officer will qualify for an award. [22867]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* Awards to police officers in Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Executive. All police officers in England and Wales are eligible to receive awards, whether in recognition of distinguished or long service or of a particular act of bravery. The criteria for awards are the same for Scotland as for England and Wales.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced on 4 December 2001 that eligibility for the Golden Jubilee Medal is to be extended to all members of the emergency services, using five years' service criterion applying to the defence services. Police officers and special constables who have served a minimum of five years reckonable service at the time of the 50th Anniversary of the Queen's Accession (6 February 2002) will be eligible for the award.

Police Stations

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new police stations opened in each of the last five years in the Metropolitan police area. [22487]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is in the table, provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Financial year	*New police station*	*Closed and reopened after refurbishment*
1997–98	Colindale, Isle of Dogs	West End Central
1998–99	None	Hounslow
1999–2000	Staines	Southwark, Paddington
2000–01	None	North Woolwich
2001–02	None	Romford, Holborn[1]

[1] Planned February 2002

Air Weapons

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers the police have to remove air weapons from individuals. [22502]

Mr. Denham: Under section 47(1) of the Firearms Act 1968, a constable may require any person whom he has reasonable cause to suspect of having a firearm in a public place or to be committing or about to commit an offence elsewhere than in a public place to hand over the firearm for examination. Any air weapon which is capable of inflicting a lethal injury is regarded as a firearm. The police also have powers under the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to seize and retain offensive weapons and anything which is evidence of an offence.

Police Funding

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list funding per head of population for policing by force area. [23072]

Mr. Denham: Grant funding per head of population for 2001–02 and provisional grant funding for 2002–03 are given in the table. Grant allocation includes Home Office Police Grant, Revenue Support Grant (from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions), National Non Domestic Rates, Crime Fighting Fund allocations and, where applicable, rural policing fund grants.

Resident population is one of a number of indicators used in the calculation of the police funding formula. Details of the indicators and their relative value in determining the allocation for individual forces are set out in "The Provision Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2002–03", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

£

Police force	*Grant funding per head*	
	2001–02	*2002–03*
Avon and Somerset	100.55	105.03
Bedfordshire	101.29	106.24
Cambridgeshire	93.75	97.33
Cheshire	99.69	104.23
City of London	n/a	n/a
Cleveland	141.32	147.03
Cumbria	114.95	119.21
Derbyshire	96.27	101.56
Devon and Cornwall	100.17	105.32
Dorset	85.83	89.48
Durham	127.10	131.96
Dyfed Powys	102.47	107.16
Essex	92.13	96.54
GLA all functions	261.31	275.43
Gloucestershire	98.94	103.29
Greater Manchester	139.38	145.77
Gwent	116.74	121.90
Hampshire	98.50	103.75
Hertfordshire	92.30	97.04
Humberside	120.67	124.28
Kent	107.87	112.09
Lancashire	116.96	121.86
Leicestershire	100.51	105.13
Lincolnshire	92.50	96.21
Merseyside	162.87	168.27
Norfolk	96.95	102.25
North Yorkshire	91.81	95.88
Northamptonshire	96.02	99.68
Northumbria	143.05	147.73
North Wales	106.86	111.02
Nottinghamshire	114.20	117.92
South Wales	122.54	128.64
South Yorkshire	125.13	129.17
Staffordshire	96.58	100.12
Suffolk	92.72	96.47
Surrey	77.04	79.63
Sussex	96.94	101.43

£

Police force	Grant funding per head 2001–02	2002–03
Thames Valley	93.91	98.48
Warwickshire	92.21	95.42
West Mercia	90.12	93.65
West Midlands	139.62	144.64
West Yorkshire	128.84	133.40
Wiltshire	93.84	97.36

Note:

The Corporation of the City of London have grants calculated as a local authority with wider functions than police. The principal police grant is given in the provisional police grant report.

Mentally Ill Prisoners

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mentally ill people there are in prison. [26010]

Beverley Hughes: A survey of mental ill health in the prison population of England and Wales, undertaken in 1997 by the Office for National Statistics, showed that some 10 per cent. of remanded men, 7 per cent. of sentenced men and 14 per cent. of all women prisoners had suffered from a functional psychosis in the past year. Some 59 per cent. of remanded men, 76 per cent. of remanded women, 40 per cent. of sentenced men and 63 per cent. of sentenced women had a neurotic disorder.

Applying these rates to the current population would indicate that around 5,300 prisoners would be suffering from a functional psychosis and around 30,000 from a neurotic disorder. Some prisoners will have both conditions.

Ashfield Prison

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on staff recruitment and retentions at HMP Ashfield; and if he will list the numbers and types of staff vacancies at HMP Ashfield. [26483]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Staff turnover at Ashfield prison and young offender institution has been similar to that experienced at Premier Custodial Group's other contracts at the same stage of development and is broadly in line with their expectations. The contractor has found that as contracts move out of the start-up and initial development phase, turnover reduces. It is expected Ashfield will follow a similar pattern.

As at 10 January 2002, there were 31 vacancies at Ashfield, of which 17 were for prisoner custody officers (PCOs). On 18 January 2002, 20 PCOs will have completed their training and take up post. Interviews are in hand to recruit the remainder.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the director of HMP Ashfield is on a permanent contract; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the departure of his predecessor; [26482]

(2) if he will list the directors of HMP Ashfield since it was opened and the dates between which each was employed. [26481]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The directors at Ashfield prison and young offender institution since it opened on 1 November 1999 have been Mr. Nicholas Pascoe who was director from 21 September 1999 to 12 November 2000 and Mr. David Bramley who was director from 16 November 2000 and resigned on 24 December 2001. A new director is currently being sought. Mr. Joseph Mullens, the Director of Operations at Premier Custodial Group, is acting director for the time being and has previously worked for the Prison Service as a governing governor.

Detective Inspector John Redgrave

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 230W, on Detective Inspector John Redgrave, when the letter of 25 April was received by the solicitor in the Metropolitan Police's Directorate of Legal Services. [24094]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that a copy of the letter, dated 25 April 2001, was received by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Directorate of Legal Services on or about 27 April 2001 and they gave preliminary advice to the Directorate of Professional Standards (DPS) in May. However, before a detailed reply to the letter could be provided, it was necessary for the DPS to consider other issues and to seek further legal advice.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether employees of local authorities who carry out duties within Dungavel Detention Centre have had *(a)* fingerprints and *(b)* photographs of them taken. [26684]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 10 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 709W.

Police Numbers

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers serve with the Staffordshire force; how many officers this represents per 100,000 head of population; and how the number of officers for Staffordshire compares with other shire counties in England. [18390]

Mr. Denham: The number of police officers per 100,000 head of population in Staffordshire is 200. The average number of officers per 100,000 of population in the shire counties is 203.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers were in post in the Hertfordshire constabulary in each year since 1983. [25244]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Hertfordshire constabulary

	Police strength as at 31 March
1983	1,554
1984	1,562
1985	1,562
1986	1,565

Hertfordshire constabulary

	Police strength as at 31 March
1987	1,579
1988	1,603
1989	1,638
1990	1,657
1991	1,666
1992	1,695
1993	1,700
1994	1,682
1995	1,703
1996	1,712
1997	1,759
1998	1,740
1999	1,724
2000	1,767
2001[1]	1,922
2001 (30 September)	1,843

[1] Affected by boundary changes on 1 April 2000 with the Metropolitan police

The reduction in police numbers since 1 April 2001 can be attributed to Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) offices seconded following the boundary changes on 1 April 2000 returning to the MPS. All such secondees are due to return to the MPS by 31 March 2002.

Assisted Prisoner Visits Unit

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 239W, on the budget of the assisted prisoner visits unit, how much of the budget for 2001–02 is expected to be paid to assist *(a)* foreign nationals and *(b)* UK nationals to visit those held in prisons in England and Wales. [25620]

Beverley Hughes: Applicants for assistance under the Assisted Prison Visits scheme are required to show that they meet the eligibility criteria. They are not asked to state their nationality as this is not one of the criteria for assistance. It is therefore not possible to distinguish between foreign and United Kingdom nationals who receive assistance.

Asylum Seekers

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers were held in detention under immigration regulations at the most recent available date; and of these how many were appealing against removal. [25825]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 September 2001. As at that date, 1,330 persons (to the nearest five) who are recorded as having claimed asylum at some stage were being detained, which includes 145 persons detained under dual Immigration Act and other powers but excludes persons detained in police cells.

I regret that information on the stage of application of detained asylum seekers is not available except by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost, so it is not possible to determine how many detained asylum seekers were appealing against removal as at 30 September.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 29 December 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

The temporary use of local prison establishments to hold immigration detainees is scheduled to end by the end of January.

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans for the detention of asylum seekers in prisons. [27384]

Mr. Blunkett: By the end of January immigration detainees held in local prisons will, if their detention is to continue, be transferred to immigration removal centres. This has been made possible by the opening of three new removal centres at Harmondsworth, near Heathrow, Dungavel in Lanarkshire, and at Yarlswood in Bedfordshire.

Additionally immigration detainees are held in two dedicated prison establishments: a unit in Her Majesty's Prison Lindholme, near Doncaster; and Her Majesty's Prison Haslar. I am taking steps to establish these as immigration removal centres under the control of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office as from February. Detainees in these establishments will be subject to Detention Centre Rules, rather than the Prison Rules as at present. It may take some time before the facilities in the new centres match those of other removal centres, but that is our intention.

Asylum seekers are also detained in two wings of Her Majesty's Prison Rochester. These detainees will be transferred to other immigration removal centres by the end of January. A new removal centre will be established at Her Majesty's Prison Dover in the spring.

It will always remain necessary to hold small numbers of immigration detainees including asylum seekers in prisons for reasons of security, or who are awaiting deportation on conclusion of a prison sentence. Any asylum seeker who is held on suspicion of having committed a criminal offence, or is serving a custodial sentence will also be held in prison.

Prisons (Health and Safety)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to monitor health and safety in prisons. [25438]

Beverley Hughes: At present health and safety in the prisons is monitored by health and safety advisers, employed by the Home Office, who carry out a health and safety audit in each prison once every two years.

As a result of reorganisation, this work will be transferred to the Prison Service later this year. The service will continue to carry out health and safety audits in prisons, auditing each prison once every two years.

Styal Women's Prison

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suicides have taken place at Styal Women's Prison in each of the last 10 years. [25493]

Beverley Hughes: There have been three self-inflicted deaths at Styal prison during the last 10 years (up to and including 2 January 2002), as set out in the table.

Year	*Number of deaths*
1992	1
2000	1
2001	1
Total	3

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates at Styal Women's Prison are receiving treatment for drug addiction. [25492]

Beverley Hughes: Treatment provision at Styal can be divided into three components. On average, about 50 prisoners each month receive detoxification treatment and, on average, about 40 CARAT (counselling, assessment, advice, referral and throughcare services) assessments are undertaken each month. Prisoners requiring intensive treatment for moderate to severe drug misuse are transferred to another prison where such programmes are available.

Internet

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the protection of children from exploitation through the internet. [25398]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Representations have been received from a variety of interested parties including children's charities, businesses involved in the development and provision of internet services and internet security technologies, and individuals. These have been followed up by officials both in writing and meetings to explore and encourage activity in support of the aims and objectives of the Task Force on Child Protection on the internet which the Home Secretary created last year.

Paedophiles

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to introduce legislation which enables community leaders to be informed if registered paedophiles move into their area. [24918]

Beverley Hughes: The police already have and use the power to disclose information to individuals or groups in the community where they believe that doing so is necessary to prevent an offence from being committed. They assess to whom to disclose the information and how to do so on the basis of the circumstances of the individual case.

We have made it clear that local people who are properly trained will be enabled to take part in the local public protection panels we have required the police and probation services to set up to manage dangerous offenders in the community. This is an important way of ensuring that the local community feels it has a voice and a representative in the process.

Hunting (Policing Costs)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average annual costs incurred policing *(a)* fox hunting, *(b)* deer hunting and *(c)* hare coursing events were in each of the last five years. [23370]

Mr. Denham: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Vandalism and Graffiti

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were prosecuted for criminal damage in the UK in 2000–01; and what proportion of these relate to acts of vandalism; [23415]

(2) how many people were prosecuted for committing acts of graffiti in 2000–01; [23555]

(3) what proportion of people convicted for *(a)* acts of vandalism or *(b)* graffiti in 2000–01 received conditional discharges. [23414]

Mr. Denham: The information held centrally on the Home Office's Court Proceedings Database giving the number of people prosecuted for all criminal damage offences, the number convicted and the proportion convicted given a conditional discharge in England and Wales during 2000 is given in the table. Data for 2001 are not yet available.

The statistics collected centrally do not include the circumstances of the offence so that offences of vandalism, or offences of committing acts of graffiti, cannot be distinguished from other offences of criminal damage.

Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Number of persons proceeded against in the magistrates court, convicted at all courts and sentenced to a conditional discharge at all courts, for criminal damage[1] offences, England and Wales, 2000[2]

	Number
Total proceeded against	57,833
Total convicted	38,226
Total sentenced	38,067
of which:	
Total sentenced to a conditional discharge	12,585

[1] Includes both indictable and summary offences of criminal damage, including arson, criminal damage endangering life and threat etc. to commit criminal damage.

[2] Estimates made for Staffordshire police force, who were only able to submit 2000 data for a sample of weeks, have been included in the totals shown in this table.

Note:

All data are given on a principal offence basis.

Polygamous Marriages

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many polygamous marriages there are in the UK. [24428]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* We do not collect information on the number of households where there is more than one wife. However, bigamy is a criminal offence under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. This legislation covers all marriages which take place in England, Wales or Northern Ireland or by United

Kingdom citizens abroad. The number of defendants proceeded against in England and Wales in 2000 for bigamy is given in the table.

	Number proceeded against	*Number found guilty*
Male	14	10
Female	3	2
Total	17	12

Moreover, even if a couple has the legal capacity to enter into a polygamous marriage overseas and the marriage is valid in the country where it is celebrated, the Immigration Act 1988 prevents a person from bringing more than one spouse to settle with him or her in the United Kingdom.

Immigration (South Africans)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* white and *(b)* black South African citizens have emigrated to Britain in each year since 1988. [25120]

Angela Eagle: The table provides statistics on the total number of South Africans granted settlement in the United Kingdom in each year from 1988 to 2000. I regret that an ethnic breakdown of these statistics is not available.

Nationals of South Africa accepted for settlement, 1988 to 2000

	Number of persons
1988	870
1989	730
1990	850
1991	1,050
1992	890
1993	1,100
1994	1,260
1995	1,300
1996	1,040
1997	1,290
1998	2,260
1999	2,950
2000	4,300

Note:

Data rounded to the nearest 10

Speeding (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fines were levied for speeding in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997; and what was the total sum raised. [22655]

Mr. Denham: Available information on the number of fixed penalties issued and fines imposed at court is shown in the table.

Fixed penalty and court proceeding data for offences of speeding for the Thames Valley police force area and central Buckinghamshire PSA[1], 1997–99

	Fixed penalties		*Court proceedings*		
	Number of tickets	*Estimated revenue (£)*[2]	*Number of fines*	*Total amount of fine (£)*	*Average fine (£)*
Thames Valley police force area					
1997	53,285	2,131,400	3,353	471,950	141
1998	62,827	2,513,080	6,353	1,174,322	185
1999	46,034	1,841,360	4,165	697,594	167
Central Buckinghamshire PSA[1]					
1997	[3]—	[3]—	916	137,088	150
1998	[3]—	[3]—	1,559	264,510	170
1999	[3]—	[3]—	927	158,038	170

[1] PSA—Petty Sessional Area

[2] 'Estimate' based on £40 fixed penalty charge from 1995 to 1999

[3] Not applicable

Special Constables

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to pay special constables; and if such payment will be tax free. [24568]

Mr. Denham: The Government have made it clear in the White Paper "Policing a New Century—A Blueprint for Reform" that we are considering a number of options to improve both the recruitment and retention of special constables.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions for animal cruelty there were in each year since 1990. [24904]

Angela Eagle: The numbers of scientific procedures on living animals started in each year from 1990 to 2000 inclusive, broken down by species of animal and the various purposes or types of procedures are given in tables contained within the annual publication "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain", copies of which are in the Library. Figures for 2001 will be published in 2002.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Census Website

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to review the e-strategy of the Public Record Office following experience with the 1901 Census website. [26524]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Record Office is currently reviewing its e-business strategy as part of the annual corporate planning process. The draft corporate plans are submitted to the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost to public funds was of setting-up and providing systems to support the 1901 Census website. [26503]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The cost to the Public Record Office since 1998 of the 1901 Census Online Project has been £1.2 million. The bulk of the project is funded by the PRO's business partner QinetiQ Ltd., using independent finance, and is intended to be self-financing.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which contractors were responsible for the construction and operation of the 1901 Census website. [26505]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The contractor responsible for the construction and operation of the 1901 Census website is QinetiQ Ltd., supported by its sub-contractors Amey IT Services and Sopheon UK Ltd. Amey IT Services sub-contracted Internet Service Provision to BTIgnite.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what was the planned capacity of the 1901 Census website; what has been the actual level of demand from the public; and if she will make a statement. [26525]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The planned capacity was calculated by benchmarking with other existing family history sites and then raised. The site was then constructed to allow for 1 million users, with provision to cope with peak demand of 1.2 million users, in any 24-hour period. Prior to the site being closed on 7 January 2002 to enable enhancements to be carried out, it is estimated that the maximum demand it experienced was approximately 1.2 million users per hour.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will make a statement on the reasons for the closure of the 1901 Census website; and when she expects it to re-open. [26502]

Ms Rosie Winterton: From its launch on 2 January 2002 the site was subject to levels of demands that were unprecedented in volume and intensity. Many users were prevented from accessing the service. So that enhancements could be introduced, the site was, therefore, temporarily closed to general internet access on 7 January 2002 with the exception of access at the Family Records Centre, at the Kew site of the PRO and at a number of local public libraries and archive services. General internet access will be re-introduced gradually as these enhancements are achieved.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if the 1901 Census is accessible on-line *(a)* from the Family Records Centre and *(b)* from other specific locations. [26504]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The 1901 Census is at present available online at the Family Records Centre in Islington, at the Kew site of the PRO, and at a number of local public library and archive services. This access, although limited, is feasible while enhancements are made to the site.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when contracts for the construction, support and operation of the 1901 Census website were *(a)* offered for tender and *(b)* awarded. [26506]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The PRO placed a notice in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities (OJEC), seeking expressions of interest on 6 November 1998. Following the tender process, the contract was awarded and signed by the PRO and QinetiQ Ltd. (formerly the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency) on 19 January 2000.

Court Orders

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what recent discussions he has had with the courts administration on the time taken to process orders from the Scottish courts through the English court system; and if he will make a statement. [25471]

Mr. Wills: No recent discussions have taken place on this issue. Orders from all courts outside England and Wales, including Scottish orders, are registered at the Royal Courts of Justice within 48 hours of receipt. It is then a matter for the solicitors in the case to choose the method of enforcement. The speed at which this is done is in the hands of the solicitors. As all warrants from courts outside England and Wales are registered together, a special exercise would need to be conducted to calculate the time taken to process orders from Scottish courts. This could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Fault Free Divorce

Chris Ruane: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average *(a)* time to process and *(b)* cost to public funds of a fault free divorce in each of the last 10 years. [24968]

Mr. Wills: There are five categories under which a decree for divorce can be obtained, only two of which could be deemed fault free (two years' separation where the respondent consents and five years' separation without consent). The table shows the number of divorce petitions issued in each of the last 10 years, for which figures are available. The speed at which an individual divorce is processed is in the hands of the parties and/or their legal representatives. There is no system currently in place to measure either the average time to process or the cost to public funds of a fault free divorce.

Divorce petitions issued per year

Year	*Divorce petitions issued*
1991	182,310
1992	192,391
1993	187,357
1994	180,690
1995	178,007
1996	181,502
1997	165,350
1998	167,265
1999	164,951
2000	160,097

Special Advisers

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints have been reported in her Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25340]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The procedures for making complaints under the Civil Service Code are set out in the Department's staff handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code with their line manager. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to a

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nominated official (or officials). It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this Department under paragraph 11 of the Code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints made under the Civil Service Code which are resolved within the management line.

Urban Regeneration

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by her Department; how much each scheme has available to invest; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough councils and, *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25480]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Community Legal Service provides a framework for local networks of legal and advice services through which £792 million of core legal aid is delivered in England and Wales. This funding is allocated via contracts granted by the Legal Services Commission on behalf of the Lord Chancellor's Department.

The Partnership Innovation Budget (PIB) is a key element of the Community Legal Service. The PIB, approved in September 2000, provides "seedcorn" funding for new initiatives to improve people's access to legal information and advice, particularly in the most deprived areas. Through competitive bidding it will distribute £15 million over three years. Sixty-four successful PIB bids were announced in September 2001. Proposals covered a wide range of ideas including for example: a virtual law centre; projects to work with health care professionals to bring legal advice to hard to reach groups such as people with mental health difficulties, young and older people, the vulnerable and those less mobile; and a scheme for increasing the availability of trained lawyers in shortage categories of social welfare law.

Successful bids for Teesside were valued £814,775. Bids for Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland were valued at £631,975. Successful bids included: Redcar and Cleveland Citizens Advice Bureau for a developmental education project about management money, basic rights and entitlements; Redcar and Cleveland Citizens Advice Bureau/MIND for delivering advice to people with mental health difficulties; Tees Valley Connexions for a help service for young people; Middlesbrough CAB for delivering advice to people with mental health difficulties; Middlesbrough BC Welfare Rights Unit for benefit advice to older people, Benefits Agency (Tees district) for a one stop advice circle; and Hartlepool CAB for a preventative education programme in Hartlepool.

No separate figure is available specifically for *(d)* the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency, but my hon. Friend's constituents are provided for under the schemes as detailed.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column 688W, on warm front grants, if she will publish for each quarter since 1 June 2000 by region *(a)* the modal, *(b)* the median and *(c)* the mean cost of HEES and HEES plus grants; and why the average cost of grant for England in 2000–01 for HEES was 26 per cent. and for HEES plus 17 per cent. of the total grant available. [21788]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Eaga Partnership Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd. manage the home energy efficiency scheme, marketed as the warm front team, under contract. The table shows the modal, median and mean cost for HEES and HEES Plus in the period from June 2000 to November 2001. The data are shown in terms of grouped regions as it is not possible to provide individual region areas without incurring disproportionate cost.

The difference between the average grant paid under HEES and the grant maximum is due to the nature of the scheme. The package of measures provided is tailored to the requirements of each property. For example if a home already has a central heating system then a package of insulation measures is provided. This approach ensures that the scheme provides the greatest assistance to those householders most in need, and less to those whose homes are already energy efficient.

£

	Mean	*Median*	*Mode*
HEES			
North West and North East			
June 2000 to September 2001	270	250	90
October 2000 to December 2000	260	240	100
January 2001 to March 2001	270	240	110
April 2001 to June 2001	290	270	110
June 2001 to September 2001	260	230	110
October 2001 to November 2001	240	160	110
Eastern, East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber			
June 2000 to September 2001	260	240	240
October 2000 to December 2000	260	220	250
January 2001 to March 2001	270	230	170
April 2001 to June 2001	280	240	120
June 2001 to September 2001	280	240	260
October 2001 to November 2001	280	230	260
South West and West Midlands			
June 2000 to September 2001	260	240	80
October 2000 to December 2000	280	250	100
January 2001 to March 2001	300	270	100
April 2001 to June 2001	310	280	100
June 2001 to September 2001	290	270	100
October 2001 to November 2001	270	260	100
North West and North East			
June 2000 to September 2001	280	250	90
October 2000 to December 2000	290	260	90
January 2001 to March 2001	310	270	270
April 2001 to June 2001	310	280	100
June 2001 to September 2001	300	280	100
October 2001 to November 2001	280	260	110
HEES PLUS			
North West and North East			
June 2000 to September 2001	520	260	90
October 2000 to December 2000	600	270	100
January 2001 to March 2001	570	280	110
April 2001 to June 2001	510	270	110
June 2001 to September 2001	410	220	110
October 2001 to November 2001	390	210	110
Eastern, East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber			
June 2000 to September 2001	360	230	240
October 2000 to December 2000	270	210	240
January 2001 to March 2001	490	270	1,000
April 2001 to June 2001	540	320	1,000
June 2001 to September 2001	540	330	950
October 2001 to November 2001	520	310	950
South West and West Midlands			
June 2000 to September 2001	720	290	220
October 2000 to December 2000	700	290	220
January 2001 to March 2001	730	320	100
April 2001 to June 2001	830	400	100
June 2001 to September 2001	740	320	100
October 2001 to November 2001	620	290	100
North West and North East			
June 2000 to September 2001	620	280	280
October 2000 to December 2000	620	280	280
January 2001 to March 2001	710	320	2,000
April 2001 to June 2001	700	340	100
June 2001 to September 2001	550	280	100
October 2001 to November 2001	380	250	110

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many households have benefited from better heating systems through the home energy efficiency scheme. [23095]

Mr. Meacher: The home energy efficiency scheme was launched on 1 June 2000 and is administered by two scheme managers in England, Eaga Partnership Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd.

For the period June 2000 to November 2001, 62,000 householders have benefited from better heating systems through the scheme. This figure includes replacements, new heating systems and repairs.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what percentage of those households which have had work done under the home energy efficiency scheme did so after the properties' landlords entered into a no rent rise agreement with the scheme manager in the area concerned, [23096]

(2) how many tenants who are eligible for improved heating systems under the home energy efficiency scheme have been unable to have work implemented free of cost because the landlords have refused to enter into a no rent rise agreement with the scheme manager in the area; and what representations she has received on their behalf; [23097]

(3) what assessment she has made of the position of a tenant who is eligible for an improved heating system under the home energy efficiency scheme but is unable to have work implemented free of cost because the landlords have refused to enter into a no rent rise agreement with the scheme manager in the area. [23098]

Mr. Meacher: The home energy efficiency scheme is administered in England by Eaga Partnership Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd.

Work in private sector landlords' properties is undertaken only once a no rent rise agreement is in place. This requirement was introduced following consultation on the proposed scheme in 1999. Many groups representing tenants and older people expressed concern that some private sector landlords would use the grant-funded improvements to justify an increase in rent. Agreements are time-limited to either one year for insulation measures only or two years where heating measures are installed.

In the period June 2000 to November 2001 some 27,000 private sector landlords agreed to the no rent rise agreement. This represents about 5 per cent. of all applications accepted under the scheme.

In the same period, 8,300 tenants had their applications turned down by the landlord. The precise reasons in each case are not known, but we are now investigating these.

While there has been very little concern expressed on this issue, we do continue to keep it under review.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average time is *(a)* for processing Eaga Partnership home efficiency contracts and *(b)* between the initial application and the completion of a contract in the (i) north-west and (ii) UK. [22897]

Mr. Meacher: The home energy efficiency scheme for England was launched on 1 June 2000 and is administered by Eaga Partnership Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd. TXU is responsible for administering the scheme in the eastern, east midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber regions while Eaga is responsible for the remainder of England.

The scheme managers appoint contractors to work on the scheme. Contractually they are required to make appointments following the UK's Public Procurement Rules and Regulations. Part of the process involves placing the invitation to tender in the Official Journal of the European Union.

The table identifies the average time taken from the time of application to completion of contract for both scheme managers.

Days

	North-west	*Rest of England*
Eaga Partnership	74	72
TXU Warm Front	—	79

As fuel poverty is a devolved matter, it is the responsibility of the respective Parliament and Assemblies to comment on the situation in Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's target is for the number of households with energy efficiency measures in place. [25627]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's target for improving energy efficiency in households is set out in the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, published on 21 November 2001. The goal of the Government and the devolved Administrations is to seek an end to the problem of fuel poverty. In particular we will seek an end to the blight of fuel poverty for vulnerable households—older people, families with children, the disabled or those with long-term illness—by 2010. This involves improving the energy efficiency of 2 million private sector homes between 2000–10, and also bringing all social housing properties up to the decent standard.

Fuel poverty is a devolved matter and it is the responsibility of the devolved Administrations to comment on the respective targets in their countries.

Incineration

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she has had with local authorities on the exclusion of incineration from local waste plans; and if she will make a statement; [5470]

(2) if she will change her policy to allow county councils to specifically exclude incineration in their waste plans. [5469]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 July 2001]:* The Government have had no such discussions with local authorities. Although Government policy seeks to encourage waste minimisation and to maximise the scope for recycling wherever possible, in those cases where options further up the waste hierarchy do not provide the Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO), some incineration capacity may be needed in order to achieve the landfill diversion targets under the Landfill Directive.

Waste Management Strategy

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress of the waste management strategy. [18011]

Mr. Meacher: Since launching the national waste strategy in May last year the Government have set demanding statutory targets for the recycling and composting of household waste for each local authority, increased the landfill tax and consulted on a system of tradeable landfill permits in order to achieve the diversion from landfill required. It has also set up the Waste and Resources Action Programme to help create stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products, with funding from the Government and the devolved Administrations of around £40 million over three years.

Extra funding has been made available to enable waste authorities to meet the Statutory Performance Standards for recycling and composting that are now in place. Spending Review 2000 included an increase of £1.1 billion by 2003–04 over 2000–01 provision as well as the provision of other sources of funding including the ring-fenced fund of £140 million specifically for recycling and £220 million of PFI funding for waste projects.

The Government are currently in consultation with local authorities on the best way to distribute the £140 million fund. copies of the consultation paper are available on the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consult/wastefund/index.htm.

Annual Ewe Premium

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on recent changes to the level of the annual ewe premium. [23057]

Mr. Morley: The European Commission made estimates of the likely amount of the ewe premium during the course of 2001 to enable advances of the premium to be paid. However, as the premium for 2001 is calculated as a deficiency payment, the final rate of the premium cannot be set until after the end of the year when the average community market price for sheepmeat will be known. The Commission is expected to determine the final rate for 2001 at a meeting of the Sheepmeat Management Committee on 18 January.

From 2002 the ewe premium will be paid on a flat rate basis, set at 21 euros.

Refrigerator Recycling

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate her Department has made of the full-year cost to local authorities of the new regulations on the recycling of fridges. [22072]

Mr. Meacher: The costs to local authorities will vary depending on the length of time fridges and freezers must be stored. The Department has recently announced a payment of £6 million to local authorities to cover their costs until March 2002. We are also urgently considering what action needs to be taken to encourage the reinstatement of take-back schemes previously operating, which would reduce the burden on local authorities.

Green Ministers

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish a table showing *(a)* the attendance by Ministers at Green Ministers' meetings held since December 2000 and *(b)* the percentage energy savings achieved by each Department across its respective estate over the same period. [19884]

Mr. Meacher: Between December 2000 and June 2001, Green Ministers met once and details of ministerial attendance are set out in Table 1. Following the general election in June 2001, the previously informal Committee was upgraded to a Cabinet Sub-Committee of ENV and it is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

Percentage energy savings achieved by Departments from December 2000 to date are not yet available. The latest figures we have available are for the period April 1999 to March 2000 and these are given in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 1: Ministerial attendance at Green Ministers meeting on 19 March 2001

Minister	*Department*
Michael Meacher (Chair)	DETR
Patricia Hewitt	DTI
Jacqui Smith	DfEE
Beverley Hughes	DETR
Chris Mullin	DFID
Hugh Bayley	DSS
Elliott Morley	MAFF
Yvette Cooper	DH
George Howarth	NIO
Ross Cranston	LOD
The Lord Bach	LCD

Table 2: Percentage energy efficiency improvement April 1999 to March 2000 for Civil Departments (recent performance measured by a range of efficiency indicators (ie per m^2); also by total CO_2[1])

Civil Departments, including agencies	*Performance against energy and cost indicators relevant to 1990–91*[2] *Total cost 1999–2000 (%)*
MAFF-Main Estate	24
MAFF-Laboratories	21
Cabinet Office	15
Culture, Media and Sport	28
Customs and Excise	–8
Education and Employment	–11
Employment Service	–10
Environment, Transport and Regions	11
DETR-HSE[3]	22
DETR-QEII CC[3]	–10
FCO	–26
Health[4]	–77
Home Office	0
Home Office-Prisons	2
Inland Revenue	17
International Development	38
Lord Chancellor's Department	15
Northern Ireland	4
Scottish Court Service	30
Scottish Prison Service	2
Social Security	10
Trade and Industry	47
Treasury	–23
Welsh Office[5]	–24
Total	8.3

[1] Progress is expressed as a percentage relative to the 1990–91 base year value of the performance indicator in question. Positive figures represent improvement. The standard indicator, against which the target to improve energy efficiency by 20 per cent. by 31 March 2000 is measured, is obtained by weather-correcting energy consumption and converting to costs using 'standard prices' for fuel (6p/kWh for electricity and 1.25p/kWh for all fossil fuels) then dividing by floor area. Conversion to money both reflects the relative costs of electricity and fossil fuel and their environmental impact, and the use of fixed prices eliminates the effects of tariff changes which distort the comparison of fuel bills.

[2] Adjusted for estate and weather changes, positive figures represent percentage progress.

[3] HSE was removed from the DfEE estate on the formation of that Department. QEII Conference Centre is reported separately because of its business led demands. The initial sharp rise in consumption following the 1990–91 base year was directly attributable to increased revenue earning activity, which has continued throughout the reporting period.

[4] Rationalisation of the estate since the base year has led to staff moving from several naturally ventilated buildings to more densely occupied air-conditioned buildings, all equipped extensively with information technology equipment. Staff numbers have increased by over 25 per cent. since 1997–98 which has led to a commensurate increase in energy consumption.

[5] The transition from the former Welsh Office to the National Assembly for Wales resulted in staff numbers increasing by some 24 per cent. between 1998–99 and 1999–2000. This has significantly added to substantial increasing energy demands through the use of

information technology. The transition to devolution also involved the acquisition of a large air-conditioned headquarters-type building and assimilation into the Assembly of various other building stock.

Table 3: Percentage energy efficiency improvement April 1999 to March 2000 for MOD and total Government Estate[1,2] *(recent performance measured by a range of efficiency indicators (ie per m^2); also by total CO_2*[3]*)*

Ministry of Defence	*Percentage reduction relative to 1990–91*[4] *Total cost 1999–2000*
Navy	33
Army	20
RAF	22
Procurement Executive[5]	–7
DERA	–4
MOD total	21.1
Civil Departments total	8.3
Grant total	17.1

[1] The Ministry of Defence (MOD) estate is different from the rest of the Government estate, and has been undergoing more radical changes. It is therefore treated in a slightly different way. In common with the civil estate, it has greatly increased its use of information technology.

[2] In civil Departments, the effect of estate changes is allowed for by dividing consumption by floor area. In MOD, floor area is sometimes not meaningful (eg in relation to security or runway lighting) and also not often available. Estate changes are allowed for by being explicitly excluded from the calculations, ie the energy consumption of new facilities is removed, and for facilities no longer part of the estate, the consumption for the last full year of operation is added back. In most cases, such changes are small compared to the total and can often approximately cancel each other out.

[3] Progress is expressed as a percentage relative to the 1990–91 base year value of the performance indicator in question. Positive figures represent improvement. The standard indicator, against which the target to improve energy efficiency by 20 per cent. by 31 March 2000 is measured, is obtained by weather-correcting energy consumption and converting to costs using 'standard prices' for fuel (6p/kWh for electricity and 1.25p/kWh for all fossil fuels) then dividing by floor area. Conversion to money both reflects the relative costs of electricity and fossil fuel and their environmental impact, and the use of fixed prices eliminates the effects of tariff changes which distort the comparison of fuel bills.

[4] Adjusted for estate changes and weather correction positive figures represent percentage improvement.

[5] It is almost impossible to produce any meaningful results to date for MOD's Procurement Executive (PE) since it has suffered major estate gains and losses over the past 10 years and now consists largely of one recently built large office. The standard MOD methodology produces a meaningless 'no change' result (since the present estate is almost entirely different from the original). Consequently, we have taken 1997–98 as the base year and applied the civil Departments' methodology to this office.

Edmonton Incinerator

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* the Environment Agency figures released by her Department on the levels of dioxins in ash from the Edmonton incinerator and *(b)* the levels as measured by an independent body. [20763]

Mr. Meacher: Mixed processed ash from the Edmonton incinerator was stockpiled at a site in Dagenham.

The sampling and analysis commissioned by the Environment Agency were done by non-agency staff. The results accord with those of the tests commissioned by Collease Ltd. (the trailer hire company operating near the site).

The analyses show considerable variation of dioxin levels in the ash. Collease sampled the stockpile from an unknown place and in an unknown manner using their own containers; analysis of these samples showed a range of around 70 to 1,170 ng/Kg I-TEQ. Sampling and testing commissioned by the agency showed a range of 17 to 1,100 ng/Kg I-TEQ.

Pollution (South Ockendon)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment has been made of the contamination caused to allotments and home garden food produce in the vicinity of the Cleanaway site at South Ockendon from the fly ash deposited there over the past 20 years, and if she will make a statement; [4861]

(2) what assessment the Environment Agency has made in respect of the fly ash tipped at the Cleanaway site in South Ockendon during the past 20 years of the options of *(a)* continued burial in its existing deposit and *(b)* relocation and disposal and if she will make a statement; [4860]

(3) what information the *(a)* Environment Agency and *(b)* Health and Safety Executive have collated on the impact and likelihood of fly ash dumped at the Cleanaway South Ockendon site over the past 20 years escaping air borne, from this vicinity to nearby residential areas; and if she will make a statement [4862]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 July 2001]:* Waste disposal sites operate under the terms of waste management licences and are subject to the controls set out in Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. The purpose of licences is to ensure that waste is disposed of in ways which protect the environment and human health. Failure to comply with a licence condition, or the disposal of waste in a manner likely to cause environmental pollution or harm to human health is a criminal offence.

I understand that the original licence for the South Ockendon landfill site, issued by Essex county council in 1984 allowed consignments of mixed fly ash and bottom ash from the Edmonton municipal waste incinerator to be consigned to the South Ockendon site. The county council deemed the ash to be suitable for such disposal. These licences were completed in 1997.

The Environment Agency, which assumed responsibility for waste management licensing in 1996, advises that the deposit of this mixed ash at the site, in compliance with the licence at that time, ceased in December 1997 as a result of the new licence. The area of the site where ash was deposited takes no further waste and is now capped, and the agency considers that the mixed ash does not represent a significant risk to the environment.

The Environment Agency has a legal duty to inspect all licensed sites and section 42 of the 1990 Act requires the agency to take the steps needed to ensure that (a) the activities authorised by a licence do not cause environmental pollution, harm to human health or serious detriment to local amenities; and (b) the conditions of a licence are complied with. With these requirements in mind, I have now asked the Environment Agency to apply these requirements to deposits of mixed ash deposited at Ockendon prior to 1996.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has examined its records relating to the South Ockendon site for the last 20 years. These do not show any relevant information relating to the impact and likelihood of ash deposited at the site escaping airborne.

Water Tables

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence the Government have *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* assessed regarding reduced water tables in (i) Britain and (ii) internationally. [23689]

Mr. Meacher: The Natural Environment Research Council's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology produces monthly summaries of hydrological conditions across the UK, which include groundwater levels. The latest summary indicates that UK groundwater resources are generally very healthy. Internationally, an increasing demand for water is causing a serious decline in water tables in a number of developing countries. The UK Government, through DFID, supports a number of initiatives to encourage the sustainable use, and equitable allocation, of surface and groundwater resources and programmes for enhancing groundwater recharge.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures exist to inform land managers that their property may be affected by new access arrangements under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [25310]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Access to the Countryside (Maps in Draft Form) (England) Regulations 2001 require the Countryside Agency to send reduced scale maps (derived from the draft map) to prescribed consultees (including land manager and user representative organisations, as well as local and National Park authorities and parish councils), and to deposit maps with local authorities and certain libraries for public inspection. Maps must also be displayed on the internet.

The regulations do not require notification of individual land managers: much land in rural areas remains unregistered, and there is no complete list of people with an interest in the land. In particular, while the owners of most farm holdings are known to DEFRA, the ownership of—let alone other interests in—uncultivated open country and common land is often doubtful or unknown. However, the agency has written to those on the agricultural holdings database in the affected areas with information about the consultation.

The agency's extensive programme of publicity for draft maps, underwritten by the requirements in the regulations for public notices, internet mapping, and consultation with representative organisations, will ensure that the overwhelming majority of land managers will be made aware of their opportunity to comment on the maps, while addressing all those interested in the maps impartially.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the expected cost of the mapping exercise being carried out under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; and if she will make a statement. [25289]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Countryside Agency expects to spend £2,670,000 and £2,800,000 on mapping open country and registered common land in the financial years 2001–02 and 2002–03 respectively. Estimates of the costs for the years 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be made in the light of experience of the first stages of the mapping exercise.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which agencies and subcontractors are employed to carry out mapping exercises under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [25290]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Countryside Agency's lead contractor for the mapping exercise is Binnie Black and Veatch Ltd. which has subcontracted work to: GeoData Institute (University of Southampton—providing habitat expertise and data collection, and mapping registered common land), Quentin Bell Organisation Ltd. (advising on media, publicity and other issues), and City and West End Solutions Ltd. (printing of maps).

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the arrangements are for providing copies of maps drawn up under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to *(a)* land managers whose property may be affected and *(b)* the public. [25309]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Regulation 7 of the Access to the Countryside (Maps in Draft Form) (England) Regulations 2001 requires the Countryside Agency to supply a reduced scale map (derived from the draft map) to any person (including land managers) who requests such a map and pays a reasonable fee. The agency is charging a fee of £15 per map sheet plus a postage and packing charge of £4.99 per order.

Hatfield Moors

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) which rules prevent sites being nominated individually for candidate special area of conservation status; and if she will make a statement; [25288]

(2) what advice she has received from English Nature in respect of whether the information they have received from the Peat Producers Association concerning Hatfield Moors can be regarded as new scientific information; [25287]

(3) what the timetable is for the consultation relating to Hatfield Moors; what the original closing date for

submissions was; on what dates supplementary evidence or scientific information was submitted by *(a)* the Peat Producers Association and *(b)* Scotts (UK) Ltd.; and on what dates meetings have been held between English Nature and the Peat Producers Association in relation to this consultation; [25285]

(4) what steps she will take to bring the consultation over Hatfield Moors proposed candidate special area conservation status to a conclusion. [25286]

Mr. Meacher: Candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are selected using the criteria set out in the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC). There are no rules to prevent sites being nominated individually for candidate SAC status. The selection principles are set out in JNCC report 270, a copy of which is in the House Library. Site selection principles are set out at section 1.10 of that report, with clarification of the justification principles for individual or cluster sites at section 1.11.

English Nature, on behalf of the Department, are undertaking consultation on the proposed SAC for Hatfield Moors. Consultation began on 18 August with a request for comments by 11 October 2000. In the light of request for further information, and subsequent objections received on 5 April 2001, English Nature have continued discussions with the intention of resolving areas of disagreement. Two meetings have been held between English Nature and the Peat Producers Association, on 6 October 2000 and on 12 November 2001. Subsequent to the scientific views submitted on 5 April no supplementary scientific information specifically relating to Hatfield Moors has been provided to English Nature in the course of these discussions. However, various issues concerning the interpretation of the habitat type and the process of selecting sites including the application of the criteria in the directive have been raised during the discussion.

It is anticipated that English Nature's report on the consultation concerning Hatfield Moors together with any further scientific advice will be submitted in the near future.

Agenda 21

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what collation of Local Agenda 21 plans is undertaken by her Department; and what monitoring of their progress is made. [25823]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Prime Minister set a target for all local authorities to have a Local Agenda 21 strategy in place by end 2000. A Government office survey showed that 93 per cent. of local authorities met this target. Local authorities now have a statutory duty, under the Local Government Act 2000, to prepare community strategies for promoting the social, environmental and economic well-being of their area. Guidance makes clear that these should continue the work done on LA21 strategies. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has responsibility for community strategies. Progress is reported through a best value performance indicator.

River Tees

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps have been taken to improve the cleanliness of the Tees in the last five years; and what improvements there have been in the life of the river resulting from such action. [25445]

Mr. Meacher: The Tees Barrage, which became operational in 1996, protects the river Tees from pollution discharged to the estuary and the river upstream of the barrage is now generally of good or very good quality. In 2001, 1,260 salmon and sea trout were counted in the fish trap at the Tees Barrage compared with 241 sea trout and salmon five years earlier. However, numbers of fish trapped in the barrage fish trap represent only a fraction of those running through the estuary and it is estimated that up to 20,000 salmon and sea trout migrated through the Tees during 2001. There is now also a healthy colony of breeding seals at Teesmouth.

The Environment Agency, working with industry, Northumbrian Water, local authorities and English Nature has also overseen dramatic improvements in water quality in the Tees estuary. In 2000, Northumbrian Water completed and commissioned the Bran Sands Treatment Complex at a cost of £270 million. Domestic sewage and industrial effluents are now biologically treated to a very high standard before being discharged to the estuary.

Whereas 10 years ago there was no oxygen present in the estuary during the warm summer months, the main estuary is now classed as good or fair quality.

Biological oxygen demand (BOD) which measures the amount of oxygen consumed in water, usually by organic pollution, has been reduced from a daily load of 150 tonnes in 1990 to 35 tonnes in 2000. The daily load of ammonia, which is toxic to fish, has been reduced from 59 tonnes in 1990 to 14 tonnes in 2000. Inputs of other toxins such as organic chemicals and metals have also been reduced as a result of improved processes and treatment systems, better environmental management, recycling and reuse. Two major ammonia reduction investments in 2001 should bring environmental benefits in 2002. Programmes to further reduce ammonia and biological oxygen demand are programmed for 2002.

Sustainable Development Commission Review

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of *(a)* printing, *(b)* publishing and *(c)* distributing the Sustainable Development Commission Review. [25283]

Mr. Meacher: I understand from the Sustainable Development Commission that the approximate printing, publishing and distribution costs of their review were as follows:

(a) £8,500 for printing;

(b) £10,200 for publishing (including editing, design and production); and

(c) 2,000 for postage (this figure does not include copies distributed using the Inter-Departmental Despatch Service).

All of these figures exclude VAT.

Fly-tipping

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to reduce fly-tipping. [25356]

Mr. Meacher: The unlawful deposit of waste without a waste management licence or registered exemption (commonly known as fly-tipping) is a criminal offence. In the event of a conviction, severe penalties are available to the courts, including an unlimited fine or imprisonment of up to five years.

Section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, provides a local authority or the Environment Agency with the power to effect the removal of fly-tipped waste and to recover costs from those responsible.

The Environment Agency continues to give the need to combat fly-tipping a high priority. The agency is currently working to establish a central unit to co-ordinate its approach to environmental crime. This unit will work with other key enforcement bodies, such as local authorities, the police and HM Customs and Excise, and will target particular environmental and economic threats such as fly-tipping.

In addition the Fly-Tipping Stakeholder's Forum, which comprises local authorities, business and landowners representatives and is chaired by the Environment Agency, meets regularly to develop practical solutions and to develop co-ordinated action to combat the problem of fly-tipping.

Dairy Farming

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the EU's policy of cutting export refunds for whole milk and skimmed milk production on *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the Northern Ireland dairy sector. [26127]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Export refunds for dairy products may be set to compensate for the difference between world and EU prices. When this gap narrows, as was the case earlier last year, the refunds are reduced. When it widens, as is the case at present, the refunds may be increased. But in setting export refunds for dairy products the Commission and the Management Committee for Milk and Milk Products are required to consider a number of factors. These include the objectives of the Common Organisation of the Market, the supply of dairy products on EU markets (required, for example, for food manufacture), as well as the difference between world and EU prices. In the last quarter of 2001 weak world markets made it difficult for EU traders to export, including the Northern Irish dairy sector which relies particularly heavily on exports of milk powders. The UK therefore supported proposals for higher export refunds for these products which were agreed in November and December 2001. The market situation is being kept under review.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to assist the dairy farming industry in the United Kingdom. [25947]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The report of the Milk Task Force has now been received and passed on to the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food for it to take account of the recommendations in forming its own views. In advance of receiving the report of the policy commission, it would be premature to speculate on any future actions.

IACS Payments

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government received their payment from the European Commission for IACS payments. [26089]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Reimbursement from the Commission is sought after expenditure to which it relates has been incurred and is received approximately two months after payments are made.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will pay interest to farmers who do not receive IACS payments by 31 January. [26088]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The EC regulations do not provide for the payment of interest. The extent to which any claimants might be entitled to compensation for delays in their payments will be considered in the light of the circumstances at the time.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many samples tested for foot and mouth disease of *(a)* cattle, *(b)* sheep, *(c)* pigs and *(d)* other species proved (i) positive and (ii) negative. [24089]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* Details of individual samples taken are not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, 2,359 premises which were affected by foot and mouth disease had samples taken for laboratory testing, of which 1,328 returned positive results and 1,026 returned negative results. I should point out in this context that a negative result does not necessarily mean that there is no virus present. Five results are currently unknown.

Source:

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 17:00 18 December 2001.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farm animals were slaughtered *(a)* on non-contiguous premises, *(b)* on infected premises and *(c)* as dangerous contacts on contiguous premises in (i) November and (ii) December 2001. [26355]

Mr. Morley: In November and December 2001, there were no cases of foot and mouth disease and therefore no animals were slaughtered on infected premises and no animals were slaughtered as dangerous contacts on contiguous premises.

However, during November 2001, 71 farm animals were slaughtered on non-contiguous premises. 70 of these animals were slaughtered as dangerous contacts, one was slaughtered on suspicion. In December 2001, one farm animal was slaughtered as a dangerous contact on a non-contiguous premises.

Source:

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 7 January 2002.

Flood Prevention

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the model on flooding on the River Severn being prepared by the Environment Agency. [27005]

Mr. Morley: Operational responsibility for flood management measures rests with the local operating authorities, normally the Environment Agency (EA) and local councils, who decide which projects to promote and their timing.

I understand that the EA's model for the Tidal River Severn downstream of Gloucester has been completed recently. It will be used to develop the Tidal Severn Strategy which the EA plan to publish in summer 2003. The Fluvial River Severn model is being used to develop the Fluvial Severn Strategy which the EA plan to publish in spring 2003.

Biosecurity

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what biosecurity recommendations apply to the whole of the United Kingdom. [23629]

Mr. Morley: In respect of biosecurity precautions necessary to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease, factsheets have been sent to all livestock farmers and advice was also placed on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/. The importance of good biosecurity was emphasised by the production of a video on biosecurity in July. This was also sent to all livestock farmers and could also be seen on the DEFRA website.

Similar guidance was issued to livestock farmers in Scotland by the Scottish Executive. Parallel arrangements consistent with the epidemiology were also made in Northern Ireland by the local executive.

More general advice on animal health is contained in the DEFRA publications "Golden Rules for a healthy flock" and "Golden Rules for a healthy herd".

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 15 January 2002

DEFENCE

HMS Invincible

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the refit of HMS Invincible will be completed; when she will be ready for service; and if he will make a statement. [26711]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 342W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Police

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the results from the review of the MOD police and the Atomic Energy Police will be announced. [27414]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 176–77W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer). Stage 1 of the Ministry of Defence Police Quinquennial Review was completed last year and a copy of the Stage 1 report was placed in the Library of the House. Stage 2 has now commenced and will be completed as soon as possible. Issues relating to the UK Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MOD police officers and staff there were in January *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002. [26640]

Dr. Moonie: The staff figures for the Ministry of Defence Police Agency for the years 1999 to 2002 were as follows:

	Police	*Civilian*
1 January 1999	3,625	240
1 January 2000	3,568	271
1 January 2001	3,449	273
1 January 2002	3,328	263

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Defence Police Federation on the size of the MOD police establishment since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [26636]

Dr. Moonie: No discussions have taken place between Ministry of Defence Ministers and the Defence Police Federation regarding the size of the MOD police establishment since the events of 11 September. MOD police strength, however, is kept under constant review in the light of calls on the resources of the force.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what vehicle the Chief Constable of the MOD police uses. [27413]

Dr. Moonie: The Chief Constable Ministry of Defence Police currently has the use of a Ford Scorpio. The vehicle is a force asset and can be utilised for other requirements.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many training operations have taken place in Gibraltar in the last three years. [27496]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 740W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Wind Turbines

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what resources have been made available to his Department for the fulfilment of its obligations under PPG 22 in advising district councils during the process of the issue of planning consent for an onshore wind turbine. [27333]

Dr. Moonie: No specific additional resources have been made available to the Ministry of Defence to enable them to assess onshore or offshore wind turbine proposals.

The consultation procedure mentioned in PPG 22 is known as Safeguarding. This is a statutorily based system whereby local planning authorities are required to consult the Defence Estates Safeguarding (DE Safeguarding) team on planning applications for development near to certain sites such as aerodromes, explosives storage areas or communications facilities. Safeguarding ensures that no development occurs that would interfere with the safety or effectiveness of military operations. There is no statutory obligation for the local planning authorities to consult DE Safeguarding on developments outside Safeguarded areas. However, as it is now widely recognised that wind turbines may interfere with radar, communication aids and low flying anywhere in the UK, the Safeguarding team is routinely included in consultations.

Defence Estates Safeguarding section acts as a focal point to co-ordinate the MOD response to both informal proposals from the wind energy industry and formal planning applications from local planning authorities. There are 10 technical advisers within the MOD who are consulted by Defence Estates on wind turbines proposals, all of whom undertake the assessment of the impact of the proposals in addition to their operational duties.

EU-NATO Co-ordination

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the co-ordination required between the Helsinki Initiative in the European Union and the Defence Capabilities Initiative in NATO countries; and if he will make a statement. [26855]

Mr. Hoon: Coherence and transparency between the two initiatives is very good and improvements achieved under either will be mutually beneficial. NATO experts have been closely involved with EU colleagues in work to elaborate, identify and address the capabilities required for the Headline Goal. A large proportion of the capability requirements identified under European Security and Defence Policy, including those where shortfalls remain, are also being addressed by the Defence Capabilities Initiative.

Petersberg Tasks

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action will be taken to improve the level of enabling forces and weapons which are required to meet the Petersberg Tasks prior to 2008; and if he will make a statement. [26707]

Mr. Hoon: Under the Helsinki Headline Goal, EU member states are to be able, by 2003, to deploy and sustain for at least a year up to 60,000 personnel, with air and naval support as necessary, capable of conducting the full spectrum of Petersberg Tasks.

At a Capabilities Commitment Conference in November 2000 and the further Capabilities Improvement Conference in November 2001, member states contributed a wide range of forces and capabilities to this target. Member states have also agreed to put in place a European Capabilities Action Plan to address remaining shortfalls based on voluntary efforts and building on existing national and multinational initiatives. This work is now being pursued under the Spanish Presidency.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the upper range of possible Petersberg Tasks; what consultation there has been with other EU countries on Petersberg Tasks since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [26856]

Mr. Hoon: The Petersberg Tasks, as defined at the Western European Council of Ministers in Bonn in June 1992 and subsequently adopted by the EU in the treaty of Amsterdam are: humanitarian and rescue tasks; peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking. It is impractical to define precisely the upper range of such operations, as this will change depending on the circumstances at the time. The work carried out since Helsinki to elaborate the requirements of the Headline Goal has included as a working assumption a potential use of EU-led forces to separate warring factions.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the three aircraft carriers. [27499]

Mr. Ingram: Both HMS Ark Royal and Illustrious will continue in service into the next decade until the two new aircraft carriers enter service. HMS Invincible, the oldest ship of the class, will retire from service towards the end of this decade.

Battle of Trafalgar

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Government are making to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. [26528]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is working closely with a number of organisations to develop the Royal Navy's plans for the commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar in 2005. Led by the Official Nelson Celebrations Committee, which brings together the interests of a wide range of maritime museums and associations connected with the Nelson heritage, a national and international programme of cultural and commemorative events is being discussed, among which a number of events involving the RN are being considered but, at this stage, it is too early to be precise.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27295]

Dr. Moonie: The reported estimated cost to the Department of fraud since 1 April 1997 is £4,666,853.

No abatement is made for subsequent recoveries. The figure relates to a combination of suspected and proven frauds and thefts with estimated values refined from time to time as investigations, sometimes lasting a year or more, reach a conclusion. A significant element of estimated cost or value in any given year relates to initial "at risk" estimates applied to suspected procurement fraud. The majority of these are resolved as "no crime" or have a proven value significantly lower than original estimates.

West Freugh Airfield

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the development opportunities that would be made possible by commercial development of West Freugh airfield in Wigtownshire. [27030]

Dr. Moonie: The opportunities for commercial development of West Freugh airfield in Wigtownshire have been assessed several times in recent years. In each case, it has been concluded that there are few commercial opportunities for development of the airfield.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence contracts are out to tender; and what the estimated value of each contract is. [27500]

Dr. Moonie: The tender process is continuous and the Ministry of Defence awards a total of about 40,000 contracts worth about £8 billion per annum. Information on tenders outstanding at any given time is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tungsten Armour Piercing Round

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what effect the decision to purchase a tungsten armour piercing round will have on existing use of depleted uranium rounds; and if he will make a statement; [27495]

(2) what factors contributed to his decision to procure a tungsten armour piercing round; and if he will make a statement. [27494]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence already has tungsten armour piercing rounds which are used by Challenger 2 tanks. The further purchase of tungsten ammunition has been proposed for the test and calibration firing of Challenger 2 tanks. Such a buy would have no effect on the use of depleted uranium rounds, since the rounds are used in different roles. The Charm 3 round, which incorporates a depleted uranium penetrator, is a war fighting round, while the tungsten rounds are used in the calibration of the Challenger 2 weapons system.

QinetiQ

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to float QinetiQ. [27416]

Dr. Moonie: There has been no change from the policy described in the DERA PPP consultation document published in April 2000. Our preference is to seek a flotation on the stockmarket as soon as QinetiQ's potential is suitably developed and as soon as we can ensure best value for the taxpayer. As identified in the consultation document, and subsequent statements on the way forward, we have kept open the option of seeking a strategic partner for the business as an intermediate step.

We have emphasised throughout this process that the precise timing and nature of the transaction will be dependent on value for money considerations and this continues to be the case.

Gurkhas

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many special arrangements are in place to pay pensions to retired Gurkhas who are sick or disabled; [27497]

(2) if he will review the tri-partite agreement between the UK, India and Nepal to increase the pension paid to retired Gurkhas. [27498]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the then Minister for the Armed Forces completed a thorough review of Gurkha pensions and gratuities only two years ago. The outcome was a significant improvement in the payments made as a result of a death in service, which brought death in service gratuities for Gurkhas to the level of comparable British Army service personnel, and increases to pension payments of at least 100 per cent.

Gurkha pensions are not paid at the same rates as British service men as the context in which they are paid is very different. Discharge in Nepal, and the link to Indian Army rates is the basis on which the Gurkhas serve. The levels of pension paid to our Gurkhas reflect the cost of living in Nepal, where they are discharged. Gurkha pensions now compare favourably to professional salaries there. They are also paid earlier than that of a British soldier. Gurkhas receive their pension at the end of their 15 years of service rather than the 22 years required of their British counterparts. In addition, up to 100 per cent of the Gurkha pension can be passed on as a family pension to a soldier's widow until her death or remarriage and then to unmarried children up to the age of 25 years.

Sick or disabled Gurkha pensioners are able to nominate an individual, usually a family member or friend, to collect their pensions in cash from one of the three pension paying offices in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Itahari, or from one of the 24 Area Welfare Centres situated throughout Nepal. A significant number of sick and disabled Gurkha pensioners choose to receive their pension this way, but it is impossible to identify the precise number without making manual checks to over 25,000 pension records. The information could, therefore, be provided only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23802]

Mr. Bradshaw: The numbers of staff in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are shown in table C of Civil Service Statistics 2000, published on 31 August 2001. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Scottish Executive Officers

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Scottish Executive Officers who work internationally under arrangements reached between the Scotland Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office report to the Scotland Office; and how many of them are accorded diplomatic status. [23603]

Mr. Straw: Scottish Executive Officers work internationally under the arrangements agreed in the Concordat on International Relations. The Framework for co-operation is between the devolved Administrations and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Accordingly, Scottish Executive Officers report to both. The FCO has assisted the Scottish Executive to set up an office in Brussels and has given five staff in Scottish Executive EU Office diplomatic status. The Scottish Executive Officer in the British Embassy in Washington also has diplomatic status.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Zimbabwe authorities regarding the treatment of members of the foreign and domestic press. [23884]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary issued a strong statement on 24 November expressing his concern at the comments of the Zimbabwean Government spokesman which implied that foreign and local journalists were assisting terrorists. The British High Commissioner in Zimbabwe made formal representations to the Foreign Ministry in Harare on 26 November, and wrote to the Zimbabwean Foreign Minister the same day, expressing the British Government's deep concern at threats to the independent media in Zimbabwe.

We have since taken every opportunity to reiterate this concern. Others share our concerns. The European Union has made the issue central to its formal consultations with the Zimbabwe Government under the Cotonou Agreement. Freedom of the media is a key element of recently-passed United States Congressional legislation on Zimbabwe. And Commonwealth Ministers issued a strong statement of concern about the situation in Zimbabwe at their meeting in London on 20 December, including the pressures on the independent media in that country.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department had with the Home Office concerning the deportation of Gerald Mutekiwa *(a)* before his deportation and *(b)* after his deportation. [26621]

Mr. Straw: The Foreign Office provides the Home Office with regular political reporting on Zimbabwe. The Home Office leads on asylum policy. The Home Office did not discuss Mr. Mutekiwa's case with the Foreign Office before his deportation. Following allegations that Mr. Mutekiwa had been mistreated on his return to Zimbabwe, the Home Office asked the British High Commission in Harare to investigate the allegations. It is doing so.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received on the treatment of Gerald Mutekiwa by Zimbabwean security police after being deported from the United Kingdom. [26622]

Mr. Straw: I have received reports yet to be substantiated that Mr. Mutekiwa was mistreated on his return to Zimbabwe. The British High Commission is currently investigating.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions his Department is taking to ensure the security of persons deported from Britain to Zimbabwe. [26617]

Mr. Straw: The Home Office are responsible for asylum policy. The Foreign Office, the British High Commission in Harare and the Home Office are in regular contact about the overall security situation in Zimbabwe.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with British representatives in Zimbabwe concerning the security of persons deported to Zimbabwe from the United Kingdom. [26616]

Mr. Straw: We are in on-going contact with the British High Commission in Harare about the overall security situation in Zimbabwe and, as appropriate, about how this might relate to individuals.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last spoke to the President of Malawi concerning the situation in Zimbabwe. [26618]

Mr. Straw: I discussed the situation in Zimbabwe with President Muluzi on 9 January.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Zimbabwe about the medical condition of Mr. Fletcher Dulini-Neube MP. [26880]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

Nepal

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the importance of the United Kingdom helping to maintain stability in Nepal. [24745]

Mr. Bradshaw: We believe that a stable Nepal is not only important to the United Kingdom, but also to the region and the greater international community. The UK will therefore look carefully at requests from Nepal to help maintain stability.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is in respect of supporting the Government of Nepal against Maoist terrorism. [24743]

Mr. Bradshaw: We believe that the Nepalese Government have a duty to protect their citizens. The UK, which has a long history as a friend of Nepal, will look carefully at any requests for assistance from the Nepalese Government.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his assessment of the political situation in Nepal. [24744]

Mr. Bradshaw: Nepal is currently under a state of emergency, which was declared by King Gyanendra on 26 November. Certain constitutional freedoms have been suspended.

We supported Prime Minister Deuba's attempts to negotiate a peaceful solution to the Maoist insurgency, and we have condemned the Maoists' return to violence. The current situation is serious, and we are monitoring events carefully.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the effect on neighbouring states of political instability in Nepal. [24749]

Mr. Bradshaw: Although serious, we do not believe the current situation in Nepal will have a significant destabilising impact on her neighbours, India and China.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of possible links between Maoist terrorists in Nepal and other terrorist organisations. [24746]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are aware that, through its membership of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) and the newly formed Co-ordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPASA), the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has links with other Maoist organisations in the region and further afield. We do not have any indication that they have links other, non-Maoist, terrorist organisations.

India-Pakistan Relations

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with members of the *(a)* Indian and *(b)* Pakistan Governments concerning the recent terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament. [25678]

Mr. Straw: I have been in regular contact with my Indian and Pakistani counterparts since the appalling attack against the Indian Parliament on 13 December. I continue to urge both sides to work to resolve the issues between them through dialogue.

Special Advisers

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many complaints have been reported in his Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999, and how many of them related to special advisers. [25337]

Mr. Bradshaw: *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The procedures for making complaints under the Civil Service Code or the Diplomatic Service Code are set out in Departmental Regulations. Staff are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code with their line manager. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, individuals may take their complaint to a member of a Selection Board. It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this Department under paragraph 11 of the code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints made under the Civil Service Code or Diplomatic Service Code which are resolved within the management line.

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the number of individuals in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26316]

Mr. Straw: *(a)* The estimated number of individuals in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office whose annual remuneration is in excess of £100,000 is as follows:

As at 1 April 1998: 9
As at 1 April 1999: 11
As at 1 April 2000: 12
As at 1 April 2001: 15.

(b) The estimated number of individuals in related agencies whose annual remuneration is in excess of £100,000 is as follows:

As at 1 April 1998: 0
As at 1 April 1999: 0
As at 1 April 2000: 0
As at 1 April 2001: 0.

(c) The estimated number of individuals in related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration is in excess of £100,000 is as follows:

As at 1 April 1998: 0
As at 1 April 1999: 0
As at 1 April 2000: 0
As at 1 April 2001: 1.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, related agencies and related non-departmental public bodies have no individuals whose annual remuneration exceeded £200,000 in each of the last four years.

Annual remuneration includes basic salary and London allowances. It does not include pension benefits.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will be sent a reply to his letter of 3 September 2001 on his constituent Mrs. J. Chukwrah of Chelmsford. [26358]

Mr. Bradshaw: I am extremely sorry that the hon. Member did not receive a reply to his letter of 3 September. This was the result of an administrative error. The case he raised is now under consideration and I will write to him about it as soon as possible.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Spelthorne will receive replies to his letters to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate about his constituent Mrs. E. Couser dated 10 June, 2 July, 23 July, 8 August, 21 November and 21 December. [25929]

Mr. Bradshaw: The correspondence to which the hon. Member refers was not forwarded to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Joint Entry Clearance Unit by the Home Office. Officials from JECU have contacted the hon. Member and I will reply to his letter as soon as possible.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26971]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for 2000 will be published shortly. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is committed to reducing sickness absence, as set out in our service delivery agreement.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what obstacles exist to the International Committee of the Red Cross having access to all prisoners being held within Afghanistan. [26876]

Peter Hain: Very few. As at 11 January 2002, ICRC delegates were visiting some 4,800 detainees in approximately 40 places of detention throughout Afghanistan. In recent days, the ICRC has had problems gaining access to detainees held at Bagram airport and difficulty in gaining access to a place of detention in Kabul. However, contacts are continuing between the ICRC and the authorities in an effort to resolve these outstanding concerns.

Iraq

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what obstacles there are to supplying humanitarian aid to Iraq under the United Nations oil-for-food programme. [26878]

Mr. Bradshaw: As well as failing to spend around $3.5 billion set aside by the UN for humanitarian purchases under "oil for food", the Iraqi Central bank consistently holds up delivery of $1 billion worth of goods already approved by the UN. The UN Secretary General has repeatedly drawn attention to Iraq's refusal to implement crucial UN proposals, such as the introduction of a local cash component, which would play a critical role in the rehabilitation of vital sectors, including water and sanitation and health. In his latest report on "oil for food" (November 2001), the Secretary General criticised the Government of Iraq for also obstructing the implementation of the programme in northern Iraq, by refusing to grant visas for UN personnel and clearance for essential supplies, including demining equipment, for the Iraqi people.

Colombia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he received from the Colombian Government to his representations about the situation in Barrancabermeja and Magdalena Medio. [27163]

Mr. MacShane: During my visit to Barrancabermeja in October last year, I learned that Government security forces had greatly enhanced their presence, including, for a brief period, putting members of the special forces on the streets to restore order. They have also enhanced their intelligence-gathering capability in the town. These measures resulted in the capture of an alleged senior paramilitary commander, Fremio Sanchez Carreno. The security forces have captured other prominent paramilitaries in recent months.

I remain concerned about the violence still being perpetrated by the illegal armed groups in Magdalena Medio and elsewhere. We shall continue to raise our concern about human rights, and urge the Colombian Government to take additional appropriate measures to protect vulnerable groups, in particular trade unionists and human rights defenders.

Cambodia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Cambodian Government about the expulsion of Senator Chhang Song, Senator Phay Siphan and Senator Pou Savath, from the Cambodian Senate. [26879]

Mr. Bradshaw: We understand that the decision to expel the senators from the Cambodian Senate resulted from an internal dispute in the Cambodian People's Party. It was therefore not appropriate to make representations to the Cambodian Government. However, our ambassador in Phnom Penh regularly raises with the Cambodian authorities the need for reform of the Cambodian legislature and legal system.

St. Helena

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to make an announcement concerning the granting of British Citizenship to residents of St. Helena; and if he will make a statement. [26768]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British Overseas Territories Bill granting British citizenship to the residents of St. Helena and the other Overseas Territories is currently going through the parliamentary process. Following Royal Assent a Commencement Order will be made by the Secretary of State when he is satisfied that practical arrangements for implementation of the Bill are in place.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 855W, on agendas for meeting of the EU Council of Ministers, for how many *(a)* council meetings and *(b)* Justice and Home Affairs Council meetings in the last three months the provisional agenda was received by his Department 14 days or more before the beginning of the meeting; for how many of those meetings in each case there were subsequent changes to the agenda involving (i) items for discussion and (ii) A points; and how long before each of the last two Justice and Home Affairs Council meetings a final, definitive list of A points was received by his Department. [27150]

Peter Hain: The Council's rules of procedure require provisional agendas to be drawn up by the Presidency and sent to other members of the Council and the Commission at least 14 days before the beginning of each meeting of the Council of Ministers. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is responsible for the General Affairs Council; we do not keep records of the number of days before each meeting that agendas have been received or amended; nor of how many Council's agendas have subsequently been changed.

There were Justice and Home Affairs Councils on 16 October, 16 November and 6–7 December, and a joint JHA/ECOFIN Council on 16 October. For three of these four Councils the B part of the agenda was issued 14 days or more before the Council, the exception being the JHA Council on 16 October. In each case where part B of the agenda was issued more than 14 days before a JHA Council or the JHA/ECOFIN Council, it was subsequently amended. For the three Councils concerned, the final agenda was available four days before the Council in one case and the day before the Council in the other two. On two occasions, the agenda was amended four times.

In no case was an A point list issued 14 days in advance of a JHA Council. There were no A points at the JHA and JHA/ECOFIN Councils on 16 October. For the 16 November JHA Council, the first A point list was received the day before the Council and for the 6–7 December JHA Council the first A point list was received on 4 December.

For the last two JHA Councils, the final definitive list of A points was issued by the Presidency the day before the Council in question.

Surjit Kaur Athwal

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 504W what actions he has taken during 2001, and plans to take during 2002, in response to the disappearance of Surjit Kaur Athwal, a British citizen, in India in December 1998. [27185]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to offer Surjit Athwal's family any assistance they may require in the search for Surjit. We have expressed our concerns about Mrs. Athwal's disappearance to the Indian authorities on numerous occasions at a high level. It is for the Indian authorities to investigate Mrs. Athwal's disappearance. We will continue to press the authorities to pursue their search.

Pacific Islands

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department's Ministers last officially visited Pacific Islands; and which ones. [R] [27154]

Mr. MacShane: My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), visited the Pacific twice in 2000. He visited Papua New Guinea in June, and attended the annual Post-Forum Dialogue Meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum in Kiribati in October that year. While at the forum he had meetings with the Prime Ministers of Australia, New Zealand and Tonga, the President of Kiribati, the Foreign Ministers of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and with the Heads of the European Commission and French delegations. I plan to visit Pacific Islands later this year.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Government facilities will be made available in the course of visits by Her Majesty the Queen during her Golden Jubilee year to Commonwealth countries and overseas territories. [R] [26860]

Mr. Straw: During her Golden Jubilee year, Her Majesty the Queen plans to visit Jamaica from 18–20 February, New Zealand from 22–27 February, Australia from 27 February to 3 March, and Canada from 4–15 October. She will also attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Coolum from 2–3 March.

The facilities made available to, and the associated costs of, these Realm visits are primarily the responsibility of the countries concerned. The UK Government will provide some logistical and financial support in London and the countries visited.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support he has given to the celebrations of Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee in Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [R] [26899]

Mr. Straw: The Governor, in consultation with the Government of Gibraltar, is looking at a number of ways in which Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee might suitably be marked in Gibraltar. These include a Birthday Parade and Trooping of the Colour, a gun salute and a tree planting ceremony.

Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 468W, what assessment he has made of the analysis of the risks posed to Sellafield from terrorist intervention as set out by the authors of the European Parliament's scientific and technological options assessment programme study to which he refers. [23215]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

None. In my reply of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 666W, I made it clear that the chairman of the STOA panel took note of the Wise-Paris study and decided to publish it as a first contribution to the scientific debate on the possible toxic effects from the nuclear processing plants in Sellafield and Cap de la Hague. The study did not look into possible risks that may be posed from terrorists. Stringent security and safety precautions are taken at all UK civil nuclear sites and are kept under regular review.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Debt Cancellation

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she will list the developing country debts which have been cancelled since May 1997, broken down by country and by year of cancellation; and if she will make a statement. [26691]

Clare Short: Since 1978, the UK has cancelled its aid loans to all the poorest countries worth some £1.2 billion. Table 1 lists, by country and year, all scheduled aid payments that have been waived since April 1997. Payments are written off as they become due. The position of the loan with Belize is under annual review. They have failed to qualify for debt relief under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative and are being asked to recommence payments. The Antigua and Barbuda loans were waived for a specified period only to help with the resettlement of Montserrat citizens following the volcanic eruptions.

The remaining debts are owed to the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD). For some developing countries, payments are being written off through the Paris Club for Official Bilateral Creditors. For countries qualifying for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, much of their Paris Club debt is written off. In December 1999, the UK Government announced that we would provide 100 per cent. debt relief on all ECGD debt for qualifying HIPC countries to free up more resources for poverty reduction. Table 2 sets out, by country and year, all developing countries debts to ECGD that have been written off since May 1997.

Table 1: Development debts cancelled since 1 April 1997 (by financial year)

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
	Principal	*Interest*	*Principal*	*Interest*	*Principal*	*Interest*	*Principal*	*Interest*
Botswana	739,634	—	326,503	—	118,403	—	23,578	—
Egypt	962,400	12,547	617,868	2,097	406,400	—	406,400	—
Ethiopia	153,210	—	85,132	—	—	—	—	—

Table 1: Development debts cancelled since 1 April 1997 (by financial year)

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
	Principal	*Interest*	*Principal*	*Interest*	*Principal*	*Interest*	*Principal*	*Interest*
Gambia	112,000	—	54,700	—	—	—	—	—
Ghana	2,364,462	11,243	2,364,462	7,782	2,364,461	4,320	1,736,551	—
Ivory Coast	216,999	55,490	216,861	52,224	215,705	45,030	215,705	39,872
Kenya	204,617	2,502	—	—	—	—	—	—
Liberia	—	—	—	—	81,558	696	—	—
Malawi	671,400	—	435,800	—	168,000	—	132,000	—
Mauritius	191,850	—	383,700	22,803	174,091	22,308	45,600	14,214
Mozambique	1,250,600	—	1,250,600	—	1,250,600	—	1,250,600	—
Senegal	56,000	7,406	56,000	6,287	56,000	4,166	56,000	4,046
Sierra Leone	73,200	—	16,558	—	—	—	—	—
Sudan	342,000	—	289,972	—	—	—	—	—
Zambia	2,605,500	369,240	2,577,565	318,253	2,549,200	267,269	2,549,200	216,285
Antigua and Barbuda	535,710	—	357,140	—	357,140	—	—	—
Barbados	38,700	—	38,700	9,906	38,700	7,584	38,700	5,262
Belize	—	—	1,145,924	—	1,458,448	—	—	—
Bolivia	81,556	—	—	—	—	[illegible]	—	—
Dominica	270,500	—	541,000	—	541,000	—	541,000	—
Grenada	1,257,200	—	625,200	—	625,200	—	371,796	—
Guyana	826,200	1,669,480	1,765,943	1,643,234	3,011,990	1,525,021	3,452,642	1,364,724
Honduras	280,000	—	280,000	—	373,333	—	373,333	—
Jamaica	—	—	5,372,077	1,923,011	3,862,234	1,653,682	3,060,712	1,452,483
Nicaragua	36,200	—	5,506	—	—	—	—	—
Peru	204,600	136,049	194,149	150,873	168,439	145,552	146,630	140,780
St. Kitts and Nevis	—	—	—	—	287,900	—	—	—
St. Lucia	—	—	333,400	—	333,400	—	333,400	—
TCI	82,564	18,565	165,128	32,923	165,128	27,890	165,128	22,857
Afghanistan	33,340	—	33,340	—	29,170	—	25,000	—
Bangladesh	559,285	—	433,400	—	292,451	—	—	—
India	11,416,827	—	7,747,819	—	2,432,000	—	—	—
Indonesia	871,024	—	620,224	—	—	—	—	—
Jordan	3,725,173	386,614	2,263,434	333,785	1,515,700	280,957	1,451,200	228,129
Laos	2,670	—	2,670	—	1,275	—	—	—
Pakistan	1,593,312	—	1,425,012	—	750,665	—	—	—
Solomon Islands	—	—	2,544,120	—	277,800	—	277,800	—
Sri Lanka	259,915	—	167,000	—	76,200	—	—	—
Tonga	65,600	—	131,300	—	82,400	—	82,400	—
Western Somao	9,400	—	6,591	—	—	—	—	—
	32,093,648	2,669,136	34,874,798	4,503,178	24,064,991	3,984,475	16,735,375	3,488,652

Table 2: Developing country debts to ECGD written off since 1 May 1997

£ million

	Amounts written off				
Country	*1997*[1]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Bolivia	0.000	6.492	0.000	0.000	12.305
Bosnia	0.000	3.221	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cameroon	4.741	2.706	3.151	5.056	9.168
Central African Republic	0.000	0.156	0.044	0.028	0.013
Cote D'Ivoire	1.142	2.817	1.166	0.000	0.000
Egypt	2.350	0.980	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ethiopia	0.000	0.000	0.288	0.518	0.228
Guinea Republic	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.115	0.519
Guyana	0.000	0.000	12.502	0.000	0.000
Madagascar	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.187	1.297
Malawi	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.096
Mauritania	0.109	0.054	0.661	0.526	0.531
Mozambique	3.627	5.386	12.447	0.000	78.541
Niger	0.213	0.313	0.338	0.715	1.229
Senegal	0.000	1.529	0.000	0.015	0.051
Tanzania	1.977	4.617	5.570	18.144	15.121
Togo	0.484	0.288	0.000	0.000	0.000
Uganda	0.000	8.684	0.000	5.958	0.000
Zambia	0.000	0.000	20.740	16.871	15.938
Total	14.643	37.243	56.907	48.133	135.037

[1] From 1 May 1997

Note:

This table includes 100 per cent. debt relief for those countries which have reached completion point under the HIPC Debt initiative.

Development Assistance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of overseas aid expenditure per capita in developing countries in each year since 1990; and if she will make a statement. [26694]

Clare Sho[illegible] Official development assistance (ODA) per capita for all donors combined is given in the table. This shows a decline from US$14.1 in 1990 to a low of US$10.4 per capita in 1997, followed by a rise to US$11.0 per capita in 1999, the latest year for which figures are available.

US$

	Per capita ODA
1990	14.1
1991	14.8
1992	14.4
1993	13.0
1994	13.6
1995	13.1
1996	12.3
1997	10.4
1998	10.8
1999	11.0

Source:

OECD-Development Assistance Committee statistics

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The table shows figures in current prices for each year shown. The drop in per capita ODA is steeper if expressed in constant price terms.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether it is her policy to raise overseas aid expenditure as a share of gross national product to the United Kingdom target of 0.7 to gross national product; by what date she expects to meet this target; and if she will make a statement. [26689]

Clare Short: The Government are committed to the target of raising official development assistance to 0.7 per cent. of Gross National Income. Between 1974 and 1979 the proportion increased from 0.40 per cent. to 0.51 per cent. From 1980 to 1996 the figure fell to 0.27 per cent. Since 1996 we have raised official development assistance as a share of Gross National Income to 0.32 per cent. and are committed to reaching 0.33 per cent. by 2003–04. Progress after that will be decided in the current and subsequent spending rounds.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the expenditure of her Department on overseas development as a percentage of United Kingdom gross national product in each year from 1996–97 to 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [26688]

Clare Short: Official development assistance (ODA) is measured in calendar years. The UK ODA/GNI ratio for the calendar years from 1996 to 2000, the most recent for which data are available, is shown below.

	UK ODA/GNI ratio
1996	0.27
1997	0.26
1998	0.27
1999	0.24
2000	0.32

We remain fully committed to the UN 0.7 per cent. ODA/GNI target. We have set out our plans for the years to 2003–04 and, as these show, official development assistance as a proportion of GNI will rise to 0.33 per cent. in 2003–04. Initial estimates of DFID expenditure for 2001 indicate that the ratio will remain around 0.32.

GNI (Gross National Income) is the new name for GNP. The name has been changed to better reflect the information included within the figure.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the expenditure of her Department on overseas development assistance in each of the poorest 20 countries in the world for each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement. [26690]

Clare Short: Total DFID bilateral expenditure in the poorest 20 countries in the world over the last five financial years is as follows:

£000

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Benin	30	0	88	82	37
Burkina Faso	204	156	305	267	234
Burundi	1,560	1,602	324	912	1,547
Chad	142	153	—	—	270
Congo, Rep	107	6,911	552	1,322	3,096
Eritrea	1,210	1,200	868	438	2,385
Ethiopia	7,931	7,357	8,733	6,969	16,194
Guinea-Bissau	6	76	8	—	120
Kenya	26,428	29,434	33,143	27,051	51,923
Madagascar	399	487	410	943	561
Malawi	33,554	25,693	47,251	46,687	56,941
Mali	523	697	331	205	411
Mozambique	22,198	21,943	26,281	43,893	41,281
Niger	112	151	162	177	150
Nigeria	7,866	9,345	11,215	14,596	17,123
Rwanda	9,704	6,198	13,642	14,394	32,878
Sierra Leone	10,619	3,133	8,948	29,914	35,022
Tanzania	48,191	42,196	50,105	64,323	68,687
Yemen, Rep.	1,975	1,049	1,048	1,488	2,647
Zambia	17,399	16,183	14,807	14,293	55,934
Total	190,158	173,864	218,231	267,954	387,441

Source:
Statistics on International Development 1996–97 to 2000–01

This increase in the amount of UK aid spent on the poorest countries is in line with the Government's policy, set out in the 1997 White Paper on International Development, to refocus our efforts on the elimination of poverty. Poorest countries are defined as having the lowest GNI/capita in the most recent year for which data are available (1999).

Outstanding Debts

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the outstanding debts owed to the United Kingdom Government by developing countries, broken down by each country; how the total figure has changed since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [26692]

Clare Short: The UK has written off all its aid loans to the poorest countries. At 1 April 1997, outstanding aid loans of £389,796,841 (principal £341,629,947; interest £48,166,894) owed by developing countries were included in DFID's accounts. By 31 March 2001, this figure had been reduced significantly to £201,835,945 (principal £192,833,981; interest £9,001,964). Table 1 shows, by country, the balance of outstanding aid loans at 1 April 1997 and at 31 March 2001. Bilateral agreements have been reached with all the countries shown in italic on waiving scheduled payments as they become due.

Table 2 sets out, by country, the amount of principal Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) debt outstanding at 31 May 1997 and at 31 December 2001. The figures show a reduction in the residual balance from £1.746 billion to £1.355 billion respectively. Included in these figures are the debts owed by the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), as shown in ECGD's accounts. However, under the Government's 100 per cent. bilateral debt relief policy, no further payments are required from these countries once they qualify for HIPC debt relief, and any amounts received are held in trust and, once they reach their HIPC Decision Point, are returned to the countries for poverty reduction.

Table 1: Aid debt outstanding at 1 April 1997 and at 31 March 2001

£

	Principal	*Interest*
Balance at 1 April 1997		
Afghanistan	*132,700*	—
Antigua and Barbuda	2,758,448	—

Table 1: Aid debt outstanding at 1 April 1997 and at 31 March 2001

£

	Principal	*Interest*
Bangladesh	*1,285,136*	—
Barbados	*213,470*	*38,534*
Belize	14,875,130	—
Bolivia	11,658	—
Botswana	*1,219,906*	—
Brazil	2,329,338	572,259
Cameroon	66,776	—
Cayman Islands	303,158	—
Columbia	439,985	5,012
Costa Rica	1,891,912	215,713
Cote d'Ivoire	*2,549,746*	*324,005*
Cyprus	181,774	—
Dominica	*7,002,332*	—
Ecuador	9,643,482	4,205,444
Egypt	*4,943,629*	*10,644*
Ethiopia	*238,341*	—
Falkland Islands	16,226	—
Gambia	*166,700*	—
Ghana	*15,179,211*	*128,503*
Gibraltar	238,685	555
Grenada	*2,679,508*	—
Guyana	*32,747,578*	*10,923,653*
Honduras	*2,471,143*	—
India	*21,596,646*	—
Indonesia	*1,491,259*	—
Jamaica	*44,391,246*	*15,996,191*
Jordan	*28,491,054*	*1,565,752*
Kenya	*216,226*	*11,261*
Laos	*6,615*	—
Liberia	*77,749*	*696*
Malawi	*1,503,200*	—
Malaysia	3,911,559	525,755
Mauritius	*1,225,959*	*126,605*
Mozambique	*5,910,104*	—
Nicaragua	*439,906*	—
Nigeria	4,905,084	24,425
Pakistan	*3,616,377*	—
Paraguay	2,228,693	—
Peru	*5,533,790*	*1,635,351*
Philippines	3,696,288	243,078
Senegal	*412,330*	*32,450*
Seychelles	7,885,674	794,690
Sierra Leone	*89,438*	—
Sri Lanka	*503,116*	—
Solomon Islands	*2,400,300*	—
St. Kitts	*3,022,870*	—
St. Lucia	*3,166,300*	—
St. Vincent	3,684,000	—
Sudan	*631,972*	—
Swaziland	2,721,933	—
Tonga	*502,703*	—
Tunisia	26,661	394
Turkey	29,462,755	7,987,136
TCI	*1,751,517*	296,566
Western Samoa	*15,991*	—
Zambia	*38,749,686*	*1,678,732*
Zimbabwe	13,605,329	823,490
	341,629,947	48,166,894
Balance at 31 March 2001		
Afghanistan	*12,500*	—
Antigua and Barbuda	1,687,028	—
Bangladesh	—	—
Barbados	*58,670*	*3,555*
Belize	10,499,785	—
Bolivia	—	—
Botswana	*11,788*	—
Brazil	1,286,002	215,658
Cameroon	—	—
Cayman Islands	59,855	—
Columbia	119,469	—
Costa Rica	283,628	29,910
Cote d'Ivoire	*1,684,482*	*149,142*
Cyprus	100,174	—
Dominica	*4,706,732*	—
Ecuador	7,418,148	—
Egypt	*2,550,561*	—
Ethiopia	—	—
Falkland Islands	—	—
Gambia	—	—
Ghana	*6,071,474*	—
Gibraltar	—	—
Grenada	*432,113*	—
Guyana	*23,690,803*	*4,721,195*
Honduras	*1,164,476*	—
India	—	—
Indonesia	—	—
Jamaica	*26,071,930*	—
Jordan	*17,052,754*	—
Kenya	—	*7,975*
Laos	—	—
Liberia	—	—
Malawi	*96,000*	—
Malaysia	1,846,759	114,004
Mauritius	*202,712*	*28,076*
Mozambique	*907,703*	—
Nicaragua	*398,200*	—
Nigeria	4,905,084	24,425
Pakistan	—	—
Paraguay	1,290,293	—
Peru	*4,851,901*	—
Philippines	1,375,335	122,570
Senegal	*160,329*	—
Seychelles	7,885,673	794,690
Sierra Leone	—	—
Sri Lanka	—	—
Solomon Islands	*1,289,100*	—
St. Kitts	*2,734,970*	—
St. Lucia	*1,832,700*	—
St. Vincent	3,026,000	—
Sudan	—	—
Swaziland	371,600	—
Tonga	*75,403*	—
Tunisia	—	—
Turkey	16,089,505	2,420,778
TCI	*1,091,005*	*109,745*
Western Samoa	—	—
Zambia	*28,210,917*	—
Zimbabwe	9,229,420	260,241
	192,833,981	9,001,964

Table 2: ECGD debt outstanding at 31 May 1997 and at 31 December 2001

£ million

	Residual balance	
Country	*31 May 1997*	*31 December 2001*
Angola	56.432	56.432
Benin	2.968	2.968
Bolivia	18.810	0.000
Bosnia	4.935	1.711
Burkina Faso	1.031	1.031
Cameroon	94.161	66.696
Central African Republic	0.615	0.371
Congo	159.111	159.111
Cote d'Ivoire	35.795	30.445
Croatia	93.830	74.894

Table 2: ECGD debt outstanding at 31 May 1997 and at 31 December 2001

£ million

Country	*Residual balance* *31 May 1997*	 *31 December 2001*
Democratic Republic of Congo	97.728	90.051
Egypt	166.082	145.390
Ethiopia	17.932	12.031
Guinea Republic	4.643	3.609
Guyana	47.192	34.348
Kenya	54.853	21.369
Liberia	7.276	7.276
Macedonia	5.948	4.628
Madagascar	29.774	27.662
Malawi	0.767	0.497
Mali	4.617	4.617
Mauritania	8.611	6.163
Mozambique	116.960	16.731
Nicaragua	1.086	1.086
Niger	12.073	9.265
Senegal	3.302	1.697
Sierra Leone	3.889	3.889
Somalia	17.603	17.603
Sudan	173.745	173.745
Tanzania	161.431	112.959
Togo	15.123	14.264
Uganda	14.827	0.000
Vietnam	10.421	10.359
Yemen	9.624	3.071
Zambia	293.565	240.016
Totals	1,746.760	1,355.985

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the value of debt and interest repaid on UK Government development aid loans to heavily indebted poor countries each year since 1983. [25237]

Clare Short: The value of debt and interest repaid on aid loans to the UK by the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) since 1983 is £5.292 million. Details of the amounts repaid by these countries, by year, from 1 April 1983, are shown in the table.

In July 1978, bilateral agreements to write off all outstanding balances on loans were reached with Kenya, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Tanzania. Since then, we have written off all UK aid loans to Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guyana, Honduras, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia. In addition, my Department has taken the unilateral decision to forgive outstanding aid loans to Liberia and Laos. These loans are being written off as they become due.

Amounts repaid by HIPC countries

£000

	Principal	*Interest*
1983–84	1,896	424
1984–85	1,784	387
1985–86	487	163
1986–87	56	20
1987–88	56	19
1988–89	—	—
1989–90	—	—
1990–91	—	—
1991–92	—	—
1992–93	—	—
1993–94	—	—
1994–95	—	—
1995–96	—	—
1996–97	—	—
1997–98	—	—
1998–99	—	—
1999–2000	—	—
2000–01	4,279	1,013

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much UK Government development aid in the form of loans to Heavily Indebted Poor Countries was *(a)* forgiven and *(b)* converted to gift in each year since 1983. [25242]

Clare Short: Since 1978, the Government have cancelled aid loans to all the poorest countries, not just the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). Since 1983, £142.714 million worth of aid loans, including interest accrued, has been forgiven for HIPC countries; details are set out, by year, in the table. In all cases, loans were converted to grants or "gifts".

In July 1978, bilateral agreements to write off all outstanding balances on loans were reached with Kenya, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Tanzania. Since then, we have written off all UK aid loans to Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guyana, Honduras, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia. In addition, my Department has taken the unilateral decision to forgive outstanding aid loans to Liberia and Laos. These loans are being written off as they become due.

Debt of HIPC countries forgiven

£000

	Principal	*Interest*	*Total*
1983–84	—	—	—
1984–85	142	—	142
1985–96	1,881	330	2,211
1986–87	3,217	412	3,629
1987–88	3,021	265	3,286
1988–89	3,604	235	3,839
1989–90	3,504	196	3,700
1990–91	30,609	534	31,143
1991–92	10,205	569	10,774
1992–93	8,065	393	8,458
1993–94	7,879	437	8,316
1994–95	7,298	434	7,732
1995–96	7,366	460	7,826
1996–97	7,055	417	7,472
1997–98	9,598	748	10,346
1998–99	8,964	1,975	10,939
1999–2000	8,505	3,211	11,716
2000–01	8,061	3,124	11,185
	128,974	13,740	142,714

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the value of UK development loans to Heavily Indebted Poor Countries outstanding *(a)* at 31 March 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [25236]

Clare Short: The UK has written off all its aid loans to all the poorest countries. At 31 March 1997, outstanding development loans of £112,868,216 (principal £99,745,306; interest £13,122,910) to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) were included in DFID's accounts. By 31 March 2001, this figure had been reduced to £68,224,071 (principal £62,852,664; interest £5,371,407). Payments are written off as they become due.

Primary Education

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the percentage of children in primary schools in the largest 30 recipient countries for United Kingdom overseas aid in the latest year for which information is available; and if she will make a statement. [26685]

Clare Short: Net primary school enrolment ratios indicate the number of children of official primary school age (as defined by the national education system) who are enrolled in primary school as a percentage of the population of official primary school age. Male and female ratios for the top 30 recipient countries of UK bilateral aid in financial year 2000–01 are shown. Data are taken from UNICEF's "The State of the World's Children, 2001" and refer to the most recent year available during the period 1995–99.

Net primary school enrolment ratios

Percentage

Recipient country	*Male*	*Female*
India	78	64
Uganda	92	83
Ghana	[1]82	[1]72
Bangladesh	80	83
Tanzania	56	57
Malawi	[2]100	[2]100
Zambia	85	86
Kenya	[2]92	[2]89
Mozambique	47	40
Sierra Leone	[1,2]59	[1,2]41
Rwanda	67	68
South Africa	88	86
China	99	99
Russian Federation	[2]93	[2]93
States of Ex-Yugoslavia	[3]100	[3]100
Montserrat	[4]100	[4]100
Indonesia	97	93
Nepal	79	60
Nigeria	38	33
Ethiopia	43	28
Serbia and Montenegro	[2]69	[2]70
Pakistan	84	60
Guyana	89	84
Zimbabwe	87	87
St. Helena	[4]100	[4]100
Iraq	98	88
Ukraine	[1,2]87	[1,2]86
West Bank Gaza	n/a	n/a
Jamaica	89	87
Bolivia	[2]95	[2]87

[1] Gross primary school enrolment ratio (The number of children enrolled in primary school, regardless of age, as a percentage of the population of official primary school age).

[2] Data refer to years other than those specified, differ from the standard definition or refers to only part of a country.

[3] Bosnia and Herzegovina only.

[4] Source: DFID.

Sleeping Sickness

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what specific assistance she gives to help combat the disease known as sleeping sickness; and if she will make a statement. [27155]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary gave the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 838W.

Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Project (West Africa)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution her Department has made to the sustainable fisheries livelihood project in West Africa. [27597]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) agreed in 1998 to provide funds for a programme to address poverty in artisanal fisheries communities in 25 countries in West Africa. The programme is being implemented by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in partnership with the countries of the region and DFID.

The agreed financial contribution from my Department is £21.5 million to be disbursed over five years. To date, £5.5 million has been disbursed.

DFID's contribution to the project is not restricted to funds. The project is one of the first to incorporate an explicit focus on the livelihoods of fisheries-dependent communities. DFID have provided a lead to the FAO and planners in the countries of the region in the development of more effective methods and strategies for enhancing the livelihoods of poor people. DFID-led thinking and practice are having a wide influence on the policies and practices of FAO and others, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development, who are being assisted by the project to apply the livelihoods approach to other national fisheries programmes in the region.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many meetings have taken place to discuss the sustainable fisheries livelihood project; and how much money has been spent on each meeting. [27595]

Clare Short: The sustainable livelihoods fisheries project is one of the first to adopt an explicit people-centred, livelihoods approach to fisheries-dependent communities. These communities are among the poorest in West Africa. As part of the project DFID is also seeking to influence FAO's own ways of working.

Livelihoods approaches are participatory and communities are involved in decisions affecting their livelihoods. It is not possible to give an exact figure of the number of meetings held. They occur as part of the processes of design, appraisal, management, monitoring and review. They take place at local, national, regional and international levels. They vary in financial cost to the project from zero (when, for example, a local community meets to discuss its priorities and plans) to several thousands of pounds (when, for example, managers and national representatives come together each year to take strategic decisions). The meetings are held to address the objective of the project, which is the improvement of livelihoods in poor fisheries communities.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what activities have taken place as a result of the sustainable fisheries livelihood project in West Africa; and how they have benefited local communities. [27596]

Clare Short: A wide range of activities have taken place as a result of the project. At the level of policy, the project has prepared national strategies for poverty reduction in fisheries communities for Mali, Guinea and Guinea Bissau; has conducted analyses of the policies, institutions and processes which create and reinforce poverty in fisheries communities in Ghana and Senegal; and is developing general guidelines for reducing poverty in fisheries communities.

In addition, the project is providing support to enhance livelihoods in fishing communities through numerous small projects. A table listing these projects has been placed in the Library of the House.

Population Growth

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimates she has made of population growth in *(a)* developing countries and *(b)* low-income developing countries in each year since 1995; and if she will make a statement. [26687]

Clare Short: My Department does not make estimates of world population growth. We take careful account of the population statistics provided by the United Nations which indicate that world population grew from 5.7 billion in 1995 to 6.1 billion in 2001, and is estimated to grow to over 9 billion by 2050. It is also estimated that all of the projected growth will take place in developing countries, which by 2050 will account for over 85 per cent. of world population.

The Government believe that people should be able to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children. One of the priorities of my Department therefore is to help ensure that contraception is available to all men and women in the developing world who want it. 57 per cent. of the world's couples are now using contraception compared with 9 per cent. 30 years ago. Another of our major priorities therefore is to try to ensure that the millennium development goals of universal primary education by 2015, and gender equality in primary and secondary education by 2005 are achieved. Where this choice exists girls are more likely to receive an education, and go on to have fewer, healthier children.

Low Income Countries

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of bilateral country programme expenditure is directed to low income developing countries in the latest year for which information is available; if she will list the countries so defined as low income; and if she will make a statement. [26686]

Clare Short: In 2000–01, 76 per cent. of DFID's bilateral country programmes went to low income countries, compared to 65 per cent. in 1997–98. Excluding humanitarian assistance these figures were 78 per cent. and 67 per cent. Under internationally agreed definitions, low income countries are those with a GNP/GNI per capita in 1998 of below $760. There are currently 63 countries defined as low income and these are listed in "Statistics on International Development" (SID), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

We are committed to increasing further the concentration on low income countries. Our current public service agreement includes a target of 80 per cent. in 2002–03 for the share of the bilateral country programme, excluding humanitarian assistance, going to low income countries.

PRIME MINISTER

Council of Europe/Western European Union

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the full composition of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of Western European Union. [28176]

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Western European Union is as follows:

Tony Lloyd Esq. MP (Leader)

Full Representatives

David Atkinson Esq. MP
Malcolm Bruce Esq. MP
Sir Sydney Chapman MP
Tom Cox Esq. MP
James Cran Esq. MP
Terry Davis Esq. MP
Bill Etherington Esq. MP
Paul Flynn Esq. MP
Lord Judd
Baroness Knight of Collingtree DBE
Jim Marshall Esq. MP
Chris McCafferty MP
Kevin McNamara Esq. MP
Eddie O'Hara Esq. MP
Lord Russell-Johnston
John Wilkinson Esq. MP
Jimmy Wray Esq. MP

Substitute Members

Janet Anderson MP
Tony Banks Esq. MP
Baroness Billingham
Lord Burlison
Ann Cryer MP
Michael Hancock Esq. CBE MP
Baroness Hooper
Right hon. Lord Kilclooney
Khalid Mahmood Esq. MP
David Marshall Esq. MP
Alan Meale Esq. MP
Gordon Prentice Esq. MP
Geraldine Smith MP
Lord Tomlinson
Dr. Rudi Vis MP
Robert Walter Esq. MP.

Honours

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 815W, whether a finding by the House of Lords Judicial Committee against an individual formerly awarded an honour, that the individual concerned was guilty of political corruption in the conduct of local government sufficient to lead to a substantial surcharge and disqualification from holding office, can amount to an offence which brings the honours system into disrepute sufficient to consider forfeiture of that honour; and if he will make a statement. [27655]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

Policy Unit

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many applicants there were for the post of transport adviser in the No. 10 Policy Unit; [27330]

(2) if he will set out the procedure used in the appointment of Matthew Elson as transport adviser in the No. 10 Policy Unit. [27328]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to her on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 90W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the remit of the No. 10 Policy Unit on transport policy. [27329]

The Prime Minister: The Policy Directorate within No. 10 covers domestic policy, including transport.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Women's Football

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the Football Association and *(b)* Sport England on the funding and promotion of women's football. [27285]

Mr. Caborn: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I, have specifically discussed the funding and promotion of women's football with the Football Association (FA) or Sport England. However, DCMS officials are working closely with the FA and the FA Women's Professional League Project Team to raise the profile of women's football in this country.

National Stadium

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received from those backing the bid for a national stadium located in Coventry; and if she will make a statement. [26891]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have received many written representations for and against potential locations for the national stadium, including Coventry, in recent months. The statement made by my right hon. Friend to the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–93, set out the Government's position on the national stadium.

Football Supporters Trusts

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many football clubs have set up supporters trusts since July 2000; how many are planned; and how many supporters directors have been appointed. [27316]

Mr. Caborn: To date 43 supporters trusts have been set up, 14 are under active consideration and 16 supporters directors have been appointed.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

National Minimum Wage (Greenock and Inverclyde)

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the national minimum wage on the income levels of people in the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency. [25425]

Alan Johnson: The national minimum wage has contributed to a significant increase in the wages of people on low pay. According to the New Earnings Survey (NES) 10 per cent. of employees in Inverclyde earned less than £195 per week in 2000 compared with less than £165 in 1998—an increase of around 18 per cent. By comparison, average gross weekly earnings in Great Britain increased by 9 per cent. over the same period from £384.50 to £419.70.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the changes in the export price of renewable energy generators *(a)* since the implementation of NETA and *(b)* in each year since 1997. [25890]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem's Report to DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators issued on 31 August 2001 indicated that export prices had reduced since the start of NETA as follows:

for power from smaller generators generally, by 17 per cent.;

for power from Hydro, by 14 per cent.;

for power from wind, by 13 per cent.;

for power from other renewables, by 7 per cent.

The Department does not have information on changes in export prices of renewable energy generators for each year since 1997. In terms of prices for renewable energy exports the Department does not keep these figures which are usually a matter of commercial confidentiality. The Department does however provide guaranteed export prices to renewable exports which have received Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation contracts and the exact price paid to each export will be defined by the relevant contract. Average prices received by current projects for each NFFO Order are as follows.

NFFO order	Total capacity (MW)	Average cost (p/kWh)
3	627	4.35
4	843	3.46
5	1,177	2.71

Mixed Oxide Fuel

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list *(a)* the number of industrial contracts secured by BNFL for the Sellafield MOX plant, together with their country of origin, *(b)* the value of these contracts and *(c)* the percentage of the Sellafield MOX plant reference case represented by these contracts. [25413]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Contracts for the supply of MOX fuel are a commercial matter for BNFL and its customers.

BNFL's MOX supply prospects were considered in detail by the independent consultants, AD Little, in their review of BNFL's economic case for operation of Sellafield MOX Plant (SMP). A public domain version of AD Little's report (from which commercially confidential information was excluded) was published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Health in July 2001 and is attached to the decision document on MOX justification published on 3 October 2001.

It can be noted that in a press release of 3 October 2001 BNFL stated that,

> "SMP already has contracted/reserved business for the 40 per cent. "break even" sales and ADL [AD Little] stated that they have evidence of customer commitment for 99 per cent. of the SMP reference business case".

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the production of mixed oxide fuel began at the Sellafield MOX plant. [25407]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* BNFL began the first stage of active plutonium commissioning of the Sellafield MOX plant on 21 December 2001.

Miners' Compensation

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the number of Miners' Health Compensation Scheme claims for respiratory diseases settled in full in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom. [26869]

Mr. Wilson: IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered 33,661 claims in respect of respiratory disease in Wales. Taken together with Scotland and England, the total number of claims for respiratory disease is 173,824.

Progress in Wales comparatively has been good. To date, the Department has settled 2,358 claims and paid 11,272 interim payments in Wales worth £63.6 million. In total across the UK, 14,780 claims have been settled in full and 43,904 interim payments have been made, totalling £241 million.

Nationally, during November, nearly 7,000 offers worth £47.7 million were made, under both schemes, with a further 5,385 offers worth £42 million in December.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if extra staff and resources will be appointed to accelerate the processing of Miners' Health Compensation Scheme claims in Wales. [26873]

Mr. Wilson: The Department and its contractors continuously monitor the level of resources spread geographically across the Scheme as a whole. In Wales, it was decided between the Department and the Claimants' Solicitors that an office would be opened to process Welsh claims. The office was up and running in a very short time frame and opened on 2 April 2001. The number of staff at this office has increased from 11 to 70 by the end of 2001 and will be increased by a further 20 staff by March this year.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average duration was between assessment and a full and final settlement for former miners with regard to *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* respiratory diseases in (i) Wales, (ii) the rest of the United Kingdom and (iii) the Cynon Valley in the last 12 months. [26875]

Mr. Wilson: In respect of vibration white finger (VWF) the average duration between medical assessment and date of offer is as follows:

Duration between medical assessment and offer date

Region	Duration
(i) Wales	5 months, 4 days
(ii) United Kingdom	6 months, 5 days
(iii) Cynon Valley	6 months, 15 days

With regards to respiratory disease, the average time between medical assessment and date of offer is as follows:

Duration between medical assessment and offer date

Region	Duration
(i) Wales	6 months
(ii) United Kingdom	5 months, 14 days
(iii) Cynon Valley	6 months, 16 days

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being taken to speed up the processing of miners' compensation claims in the Cynon Valley. [26874]

Mr. Wilson: With regards to vibration white finger, there are 1,847 claims registered in the constituency of Cynon Valley. To date, 809 individual payments have been made, totalling £5.0 million.

In relation to respiratory disease, 3,238 claims have been initiated in the above constituency. 1,140 individual payments have been made worth £5.4 million.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave her to question No. 26873, above, regarding measures to speed up the process in Wales.

Contracts (Tanzania)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* defence and *(b)* non-defence contracts have been placed by UK companies with the Tanzanian Government since 1997. [25954]

Mr. Wilson: No records are kept of non-defence contracts placed by UK companies with the Tanzanian Government. Defence contracts are a matter for the Ministry of Defence.

Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the public-private partnerships that have started in Greater London in the last five years. [25903]

Alan Johnson: My Department has one PPP project that has started in the last five years in the Greater London area—the redevelopment of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington. Details of projects sponsored by other Departments, public bodies and local authorities are not held by my Department.

BNFL

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the proposed relationship between BNFL and the Liabilities Management Authority. [26787]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The proposed relationship between BNFL and the Liabilities Management Authority was outlined in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement to the House on 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 990. The White Paper next spring will contain further details.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she was first informed that BNFL was insolvent. [25943]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL first informed my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 28 November 2001 that it had a deficit of net assets for accounting purposes.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 302W, what was the net increase in BNFL's liabilities resulting from the acquisition of Magnox Electric. [25925]

Mr. Wilson: The report and accounts of BNFL for the year ended 31 March 1998 stated that the group's nuclear liabilities increased by £7,956 million due to the acquisition of Magnox Electric plc.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what profit figures have been published by BNFL Inc. in the US since 1990. [25946]

Mr. Wilson: None. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 20 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 163–64W.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial penalties have been imposed by the US Department of Energy on BNFL Inc. owing to its failure to meet contractual commitments at the Hanford River Protection project. [25945]

Mr. Wilson: None.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Liabilities Management Authority will permit foreign companies to bid and run operations at the Sellafield site once BNFL's initial contract has expired. [25941]

Mr. Wilson: The Liabilities Management Authority will place contracts in accordance with national, EU and international requirements relating to public procurement and with a view to ensuring that public sector civil nuclear liabilities are managed as safely, efficiently and cost effectively as possible. Any contractor responsible for operating Sellafield will have to satisfy security and other regulatory requirements relevant to the site.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the security implications of an overseas company operating the Sellafield site. [25940]

Mr. Wilson: Any company responsible for operating the Sellafield or other licensed nuclear site would have to satisfy relevant security and other regulatory requirements. An assessment of the suitability of any company would be made at the time.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans there are for Sellafield employees to receive severance payments from BNFL if the company loses the contract to manage the site and employees transfer to a different contractor company. [25935]

Mr. Wilson: Any transfer of BNFL employees to another employer would be carried out in accordance with TUPE requirements.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 655W, on BNFL, what was the cost of the advice on BNFL's liabilities provided by *(a)* CSFB, *(b)* HSBC, *(c)* Slaughter and May, *(d)* Arthur Andersen, *(e)* Deloitte and Touche, *(f)* Lane, Clarke and Peacock and *(g)* Mercers. [25923]

Mr. Wilson: Since the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 13 July 1999, payments made to this Department's external advisers are as follows:

£

Adviser	*Amount*
CSFB	6,041,000
HSBC	777,000
Slaughter and May	869,000
Arthur Andersen	[1]8,641,000
Deloitte and Touche	1,620,500
Lane, Clark and Peacock	138,500
Mercers	170,000
Total	18,257,000

[1] These costs shared approximately 50/50 with BNFL

These amounts cover a wide range of advice, eg strategy and shareholder issues, acquisitions and disposals and the valuation and handling of nuclear liabilities.

It is not practicable to identify separately the costs of the above work in relation to liabilities alone.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements will be made for employees at Sellafield to maintain their pension plans if the Liabilities Management Authority does not renew BNFL's contract to manage the site and its employees transfer to a different contractor company. [25936]

Mr. Wilson: Any transfer of BNFL employees to another employer would be carried out in accordance with TUPE requirements and on the basis that pension arrangements would be no less favourable.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of *(a)* the total cost at present day prices and *(b)* the cost, on the same basis, to each taxpayer of dismantling all nuclear power installations and making safe all nuclear material that are currently the responsibility of British Nuclear Fuels. [26435]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL's annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2001 estimated the group's total discounted gross nuclear liabilities to be £16.1 billion (of which £5.4 billion was recoverable from customers under commercial agreements). In her statement of 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 993, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that, in the light of a new strategy for processing its intermediate level waste, which its board had endorsed, BNFL estimated it needed an additional £1.9 billion to provide for its share of the discounted liabilities.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement regarding the safety record and future plans for privatisation of British Nuclear Fuels . [25252]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL publishes annually an Environment, Health and Safety Report, which sets out the company's performance in these areas for the year. A copy is in the Library of the House.

There are no plans for the privatisation of BNFL. However, in her statement to the House on 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 990, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made clear that HMG will reconsider the scope for the introduction of a PPP into BNFL in 2004–05, in the light of the overall performance of BNFL's businesses, advice from the Liabilities Management Authority, and the views of the industry regulators.

Nuclear Licence

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will review the procedures for the issue of a nuclear licence by the Regulator, with particular reference to defining the area within the site licence. [26788]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The procedures by which HSE defines the area in which it enforces the licensing provisions of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 (as amended) are a matter for the HSE and the Health and Safety Commission. There are no plans to change those procedures.

Insolvency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of the insolvency laws with particular reference to the enhanced protection of creditors from directors. [26793]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The Insolvency Act 1986 contains provisions providing effective protection for creditors against misconduct on the part of company directors. The Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 also enables us to provide effective protection from the activities of irresponsible, incompetent or rogue directors of companies that have become insolvent. Since April 2001 it has been possible to achieve disqualification by accepting undertakings as well as by court proceedings, and in the last two years over 3,000 directors have been disqualified for period of between two and 15 years on account of unfitted conduct.

Liabilities Management Authority

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the timetable for the setting up of the Liabilities Management Authority. [26786]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry explained in her statement to the House on 28 November 2001, a Bill to set up the Liabilities Management Authority (LMA) will be brought forward at the earliest opportunity. This means that the LMA will not be established before the second half of 2003 at the earliest.

Special Advisers

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints have been reported in her Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25333]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Three complaints have been reported in the Department of Trade and Industry under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; none relate to special advisers.

Trade Union Recognition (SMEs)

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government are doing to ensure trade union negotiation rights are given to employees in small and medium-sized enterprises. [27184]

Alan Johnson: Unions have been awarded recognition under the statutory recognition procedure at a number of small and medium-sized businesses. Later this year, we will review the statutory recognition scheme, including its application to small employers, as part of our broader review of the Employment Relations Act 1999.

Coal

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to subsidise the UK coal industry beyond July 2002. [10377]

Mr. Wilson: The Government currently have no plans to extend the current coal subsidy scheme, or to introduce a new scheme, beyond July 2002. However we are working to ensure that the new EU coal state aid regime from July this year gives us the flexibility to devise suitable schemes to aid the industry if that is ever appropriate. Once the new EU regime is in place, we will of course consider on its own merits any proposals for Government support that complies with the new rules.

We will also ensure that the new regime retains provisions to prevent subsidised coal from undercutting international prices, so that the UK coal industry cannot be disadvantaged with respect to its competitors in member states which may decide to pay continued aid.

Parental Leave

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the costs to small businesses of women taking statutory maternity leave. [26051]

Alan Johnson: For most small firms, the probability of an employee taking maternity leave in any given year is low. For example, survey evidence suggests that only about a tenth of workplaces with 10 or fewer employees have anyone going on maternity leave in any given year.

Small businesses can recover 100 per cent. of the statutory maternity pay they pay out plus an additional amount to compensate for any associated employers' national insurance contributions they may have paid. Some small businesses, however, may choose to offer higher levels of maternity pay and longer periods of leave as a matter of good practice. Small businesses will also face costs in covering for the absent employee. The cost to any particular business will depend on the wage paid to the pregnant employee and how the business decides to cover for the absent employee.

The Government have published a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) on the simplification of maternity leave which examines the likely costs of the changes to maternity leave which will be introduced in 2003. The RIA estimates that the total annual costs to small businesses of the increase in length of ordinary and additional maternity leave will be £23 million–£43.5 million.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received relating to the impact of the new maternity and paternity arrangements on women employed within small businesses. [26053]

Alan Johnson: The Government's proposals to improve maternity leave and pay and introduce paid paternity leave have been the subject of extensive public consultation. These measures were put forward in the Green Paper "Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice" (published December 2000) to which we received over 600 formal responses. Further responses were received following the publication of framework documents in May 2001 outlining the operation of the schemes. During the public consultation period we received responses from individual employers of all sizes, employer representative groups including those specifically representing small employers, parents, and employee representative groups.

There was strong support from employers and employees for the proposals to simplify maternity rights and introduce paid paternity leave. The Government Response on simplification of maternity leave, paternity leave and adoption leave which was published on 8 November 2001, sets out the decisions the Government—informed by the consultation process—has taken. Copies of all responses are available for consultation on request in the DTI Library.

Employment Tribunals

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her definition is of a weak employment tribunal case; and what evidence she has considered on *(a)* the incidence of such cases in the system and *(b)* the incidence of cases being settled very close to a hearing. [26437]

Alan Johnson: The information is as follows:

(a) It is not possible to collect statistical data on the strength of individual cases. Any assessment of the merits of an individual case is necessarily subjective.

A working definition was used for the Regulatory Impact Assessment accompanying the Employment Bill based on the advice given to applicants, namely that a weak case was one where applicants had been advised by a solicitor or non-legal adviser that they would lose the case if it went to a hearing.

Data on the advice given to applicants are available from the 1998 Survey of Employment Tribunal Applications. This suggests that there were between 2 and 4 per cent. of applications where the case either went to a hearing, was withdrawn within two weeks of the hearing date, or dismissed or disposed of in some other way and where the applicant was advised that they would lose the case at hearing (either by a solicitor or by a non-legal organisation such as a Citizens Advice Bureaus or a trade union). A range is given because not all applicants sought advice and, in some cases, conflicting advice was given by different sources. Applying these percentages to the 2000–01 level of applications would imply between 2,600 and 5,200 such cases.

This measure is based on cases where the applicant was advised they would lose the case at a hearing. In some of these cases, the tribunal may have upheld the application. On the other hand, these estimates do not include cases where there was a weak defence.

(b) Information on settlements does not identify cases which settle "close to the hearing date". Three quarters of cases settle or withdraw before the hearing, and ACAS conciliation leads to settlement in 38 per cent. of cases.

Sub-sea Cable

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish the consultancy report on the feasibility of a sub-sea cable on the western seaboard of the British mainland. [26009]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The report is expected shortly and we propose to publish it soon after it has been received. Decisions about further action will be taken in the light of the report's conclusions.

Primate Research Centre

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the support her Department is giving to the creation of a new primate research centre in Cambridgeshire. [25439]

Ms Hewitt: The new Centre for Behavioural Neuroscience will use primates to study behavioural neuroscience, with potential benefits for understanding and treating human disease such as Parkinson's, stroke, and vCJD. However, it is not a centre for primate research as such. All research using animals must satisfy the strict regulations administered by the Home Office.

The construction of the new centre will be funded principally by the Wellcome Trust as part of the Joint Infrastructure Fund, with a smaller contribution from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. My Department is not giving any financial support to its creation. The Minister for Science and Innovation wrote to confirm the national importance the DTI attached to the project, making clear that decisions on the centre's site were for the University of Cambridge and planning authorities. I am placing a copy of his letter in the Libraries of the House.

Renewables Obligation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from businesses concerning the administration costs of the Renewables Obligation; and if she will make a statement. [25629]

Mr. Wilson: We have not received any representations specifically on the administration costs of the Renewables Obligation. We have however received views on the cost to the consumers, domestic and industrial. We are expecting that the additional cost to the consumer will on average be, 4.4 per cent. in 2010–11 over 1999 actual levels. The economic impact of the Renewables Obligation has been looked at in depth and we are proposing to phase it in gradually. The gradual implementation of this initiative has been planned to avoid major price hikes and to set an upper limit to the cost to both the industrial and the domestic consumer.

Electricity Supply

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the impact of NETA on the stability and continuity of electricity supply in the UK. [26602]

Mr. Wilson: In general, UK capacity margins in electricity are currently healthy and in recent years there has been a significant amount of new build, mainly with Combined Cycle Gas Turbines. The new electricity trading arrangements (NETA) has encouraged the development of electricity trading markets. They will provide signals to the market in the future as to when new capacity is required and ensure a stable and continuous supply of electricity.

Generators

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she will take to support environmentally friendly small generators following the introduction of NETA; and if she plans to take this action before the next Budget. [26614]

Mr. Wilson: The new Renewables Obligation, to come into effect this year, together with exemption of renewables from the climate change Levy and continuing support under the non-fossil fuel obligation, will create a long-term market incentive for renewables expected to be worth over £1 billion per year by 2010.

This will be underpinned by direct Government funding for renewables worth over £260 million between 2001 and 2004 including an extensive capital grants programme for the early development of offshore wind and energy crops, the initial stage of a major photovoltaics demonstration programme and a boost for research and development.

In addition, on 1 November 2001 we published a consultation document in response to Ofgem's reports on NETA and its impact on smaller generators, including renewables and combined heat and power (CHP). Consultation closed on 1 December and follow-up work to analyse responses and take appropriate action is now under way. On 20 December I announced the formation of a working group to look at obstacles to consolidation under NETA, and to report to DTI by 31 January 2002. The Government will be publishing a response to their consultation shortly.

In addition, DEFRA are planning to issue their CHP Strategy shortly and that this will seek views on the measures needed to support the development of CHP. The Government also announced in their pre-Budget report that they will consider the environmental case for providing more favourable treatment for CHP within the climate change levy.

British Coal Producers

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she plans to extend the present financial arrangements to British coal producers beyond July; and if she will make a statement; [27262]

(2) if she will provide coal subsidies up to December to allow British coal producers to respond constructively to the forthcoming energy review; and if she will make a statement. [27261]

Mr. Wilson: The Government currently have no plans to extend the current coal subsidy scheme, or to introduce a new scheme, beyond July 2002. The existing scheme has achieved what it set out to do, as eligible pits have been helped significantly to survive the very difficult price and structural threats they faced in 1999–2001.

We are working to ensure that the new EU coal state aid regime from July this year gives us the flexibility to devise suitable schemes to aid the industry if that is ever appropriate. Once the new EU regime is in place, we will of course consider on its own merits any proposal for Government support that complies with the new rules.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 396W, if she will place a copy of the interim report by the working group looking at consolidation services in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [26627]

Mr. Wilson: The interim report of the Consolidation Working Group was published on Ofgem's website on 10 January 2002, at www.ofgem.gov.uk. I will also be placing copies in the Libraries of the House.

Mail Deliveries

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of first class mail was delivered the next day in the last three month period for which figures are available. [26569]

Mr. Alexander: This is an operational matter for the company subject to the regulatory powers and duties of the Postal Services Commission in respect of service standards.

I am advised by the company that 90.7 per cent. of first class mail was delivered the next day in the period July to September 2001.

Oldbury Power Station

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library a copy of the evidence submitted to the 1998 Periodic Safety Review of Oldbury Power Station. [25318]

Mr. Wilson: No. The DTI does not hold the evidence submitted to HSE by the operator for the Review. This is subject to S 28 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and can be released only for the purpose of HSE's functions (to secure the health, safety and welfare of persons from risks arising out of work activities) or with BNFL's specific consent.

Acquired Rights Directive

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 669W, on the acquired rights directive, by what means individuals who have lost out can claim redress. [27011]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Anyone who believes that they have suffered loss due to the previous Government's partial non-implementation of the Acquired Rights Directive must show that they were in an undertaking affected by a relevant transfer which, but for the deficiencies in implementation, would have been within the scope of the TUPE Regulations, and that they suffered loss as a result. At present, a number of claims have been brought in the courts, but without the cause and amount of the claimed losses having been established. If anyone believes that they have a claim, then legal advice should be sought either directly or through the person's trade union.

Fireworks

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to break down the figures for injuries caused by fireworks by type of firework. [26667]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The annual data analysis currently details the types of fireworks involved in accidents as reported by patients who attend Accident and Emergency Departments.

Corus

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the regeneration aid for English areas affected by redundancies in the steel industry announced in May 2001 has been spent; and if she will make a statement. [25960]

Ms Hewitt: The majority of the £48 million package of regeneration measures for areas affected by the closures announced by Corus in May 2001 consisted of major infrastructure projects funded by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Projects of this kind are necessarily slow-moving, and little money is spent in the early stages. Progress on the projects is as follows:

Durham University Stockton Campus (budget £19.4 million)—discussions are continuing with Environment Agency and Highways Agency on the impact of the development. Site reclamation work will commence once this is concluded. No significant expenditure to date.

Phase 2 of the Middlehaven project (budget £16 million)—Detailed design work is now underway. A new junction with the A66 will be built during March 2002, with work on the site following this in spring 2002. No significant expenditure to date.

New Tees crossing feasibility study (budget £250,000)—£118,520 committed to be spent in financial year 2001–02, the remainder in early 2002–03.

Light Rapid Transit system feasibility study (budget £250,000)—£93,525 committed to be spent in financial year 2001–02, the remainder in early 2002–03.

A66 Longnewton Junction improvements (budget £4.7 million)—the project is included in the Highways Agency budget and work programme. The Agency expects to have identified a detailed work programme in the next two months.

Broadband communications in Teesside and North Lincolnshire (budget £500,000 in each)—proposals from Regional Development Agencies are under consideration by DTI as part of the £30 million fund for the roll-out of broadband communications across the UK. Programme approval is expected in the next month.

Enterprise Grants in Scunthorpe (budget of up to £500,000)—expenditure is dependent on applications from companies wishing to expand. No expenditure has yet been made.

The remainder of the package announced on 3 May consisted of an extension of the Job Transition Service to the areas affected by the closures, and is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of those eligible for compensation payments as a result of the redundancies declared by Corus in May 2001 have now received them. [25961]

Ms Hewitt: Between 23 October 2001 when payments began and 22 January 2002, a total of 5,528 single lump sum payments of £2,480 will have been made to individuals who lost their jobs with Corus as the result of the company's announcement of 1 February 2001.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list payments of regeneration aid that have been made to areas affected by Corus steel closures since January 2001. [25959]

Ms Hewitt: Payments of regeneration aid are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. For details of expenditure on the package of measures announced as a result of the Corus closures on 5 May 2001, I refer the hon. Member to my reply today to question No. 25960.

North Sea Oil

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on North Sea oil and how long it is estimated the reserves will last; what percentage of the UK's oil requirement comes from the North Sea; and how many jobs in Scotland depend on the North Sea oil industry. [26610]

Mr. Wilson: North Sea oil has been a success story for the UK and the Government are determined, in partnership with industry through PILOT, to ensure its continued success. Detailed estimates of oil reserves on the UK Continental Shelf are given in the Brown Book (Development of UK Oil and Gas Resources 2001). The extent to which these reserves might be produced depends on a number of factors, including prices and costs relative to other oil producing areas. It is therefore difficult to make accurate predictions, but if all the discovered oil reserves given in the Brown Book were to be developed they represent some 11 years of production at rates in 2000. If in addition, estimates of as yet undiscovered reserves are also considered, UK oil reserves represent between 13 and 29 years production, although the upper estimate is unlikely. In practice, production levels will fall and reserves will last longer. Indeed, a PILOT target is to produce 3 Mboed (million barrels of oil equivalent per day) in 2010 against about 4.5 Mboed in 2000.

About 70 per cent. of UK oil production is exported and different grades of oil imported, so that UK crude accounted for some 46 per cent. of refinery throughput in 2000.

UKOOA, the offshore operators association, have estimated that some 118,800 jobs in Scotland depend directly and indirectly on the oil industry.

Economic Regeneration

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many organisations in the SEEDA region dealt with economic regeneration in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; and what was the annual cost to public funds of each organisation. [26290]

Alan Johnson: Many organisations, both in the public and the private sector, contribute to economic regeneration. These bodies do not always specify what part of their budget is intended for regeneration, and where they do so there is no common definition of what is covered. Other previously existing organisations such as English Partnership and the Commission for New Towns covered a much wider area than the SEEDA boundaries, making it difficult at this late stage to disaggregate figures for the SEEDA area. For all these reasons it is not possible to provide figures in the form requested.

While numerous partnership and organisations are currently involved in economic regeneration at a local level within the region, SEEDA is the main region-wide organisation which actively promotes economic regeneration in the south-east.

Its budget for 1999–2000 was £63,586,000 and for 2000–01 was £74,901,000. Strictly speaking not all of this expenditure would be classed as "economic regeneration" as SEEDA's work among other things also involves skills, rural and community regeneration and social inclusion, however, all SEEDA's activities underpin economic regeneration within the south-east region.

Manufacturing Industry

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes have occurred in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* the numbers employed in the manufacturing industry and *(b)* the percentage of British GDP represented by manufacturing industry. [26034]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Paul Flynn, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the (a) the numbers employed in the manufacturing industry and (b) the percentage of British GDP represented by manufacturing industry in the past ten years. I am replying in his absence. (26034).

The table below shows the number of employee jobs in manufacturing for 1992 to 2001.

UK employee jobs in manufacturing (seasonally adjusted)

Thousand

June	*Employee jobs*
1992	4,146
1993	3,960
1994	3,975
1995	4,076
1996	4,121
1997	4,185
1998	4,204
1999	4,068
2000	3,965
2001	3,837

These estimates are based on the results of regular sample surveys of employers which count the number of employee jobs. The data are published in Statbase on the National Statistics website under series identifier YEJL.

The contribution of manufacturing industry to the United Kingdom whole economy gross value added over the most recent 10 years for which data are available is shown below. The difference between GVA at basic prices and GDP is the addition of taxes on products and the deduction of subsidies on products.

Current price gross value added at basic prices (current prices)

	Manufacturing (£ million)	*Whole economy (£ million)*	*Manufacturing as percentage of whole economy*
1991	111,337	523,137	21.3
1992	115,891	546,434	21 2
1993	120,989	575,461	21.0
1994	130,767	608,740	21.5
1995	139,789	639,908	21.8

Current price gross value added at basic prices (current prices)

	Manufacturing (£ million)	*Whole economy (£ million)*	*Manufacturing as percentage of whole economy*
1996	146,079	679,620	21.5
1997	152,305	720,692	21.1
1998	153,272	761,318	20.1
1999	152,653	795,025	19.2
2000	155,531	831,053	18.7

SCOTLAND

Energy Review

6. **Anne Picking:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on Scotland Office involvement in the performance and innovation unit energy review. [25075]

Mr. Foulkes: I represent the Scotland Office on the PIU Energy Review Advisory Group. Over the past months, I have met with a wide variety of individuals and organisations with an interest in energy issues in Scotland to discuss their views on the matters covered by the review.

National Minimum Wage

7. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland are benefiting from the recent uprating of the national minimum wage. [25076]

Mr. Foulkes: Some 135,000 people across Scotland have benefited from increased rates of pay as a result of the uprating on 1 October 2001.

24. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are being taken to ensure the enforcement of the national minimum wage in Scotland. [25094]

Mr. Foulkes: The Inland Revenue has two specialist teams, one based in Aberdeen, the other in East Kilbride, who are responsible for enforcing the national minimum wage in Scotland. Since April 1999 the two teams have completed nearly 1,500 investigations in Scotland, recovering over £500,000 in wage arrears. The Government have also run national publicity campaigns to raise awareness and the Inland Revenue recently held information seminars on its work for Scottish MPs.

Working Families Tax Credit

10. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland are benefiting from the working families tax credit. [25079]

Mr. Foulkes: At August 2001, 119,063 families in Scotland were receiving the working families tax credit. This includes 1,893 families in the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency.

Disability Rights Commission

11. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she is taking to make the work of the Disability Rights Commission more widely known in Scotland. [25080]

Mr. Foulkes: Last June I launched the DRC's survey on awareness of disability in Scotland and more recently took part in the Commission's countrywide roadshow to help promote their work. I assisted also in the launch of the DRC Scotland's first Annual Review, and held a seminar for MPs on the work of the DRC. Next month I am planning to host a reception to celebrate and publicise the work of the Commission.

MSP Numbers

12. **Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent progress she has made with her consultation on MSP numbers. [25081]

Mrs. Liddell: The consultation paper on the size of the Scottish Parliament was issued on 18 December 2001. Responses are required by 29 March 2002. The issue affects everyone in Scotland and all concerned have a full opportunity to have their say.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to encourage participation by the general public in Scotland in the review of MSP numbers. [27141]

Mrs. Liddell: Copies of the consultation document have been issued to a wide range of organisations and individuals representing civic Scotland. The document is also available on the Scotland Office website. The issue is one which affects everyone in Scotland, and I would welcome their views.

European Football Championships

13. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with Scottish Ministers concerning Scotland's application to hold the European Football Championships in 2008. [25082]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with Scottish Ministers about a wide range of issues. A decision about whether formally to support a bid for the European Football Championships in 2008 is a matter in the first instance for the Scottish Executive.

Drugs

14. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent successes have been achieved through efforts in Scotland to confiscate drugs and the proceeds of drug sales. [25083]

Mr. Foulkes: Since its establishment in June 2000, the Scottish Drugs Enforcement Agency, in partnership with other enforcement bodies, has seized controlled drugs worth over £25 million.

Since 1 April 2001, 24 confiscation orders relating to the proceeds of drug trafficking have been secured in Scottish courts. The value of these orders totalled £370,000.

European Union (Participation)

15. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with Scottish Ministers regarding Scottish participation in EU institutions. [25084]

Mrs. Liddell: Both the Minister of State and I have regular meetings with Scottish Ministers to discuss those reserved policy areas that affect Scotland.

Government policy on these matters is set out in the Memorandum of Understanding, and the concordats on International Relations and Co-ordination of European Policy Issues, agreed between the Government and the devolved Administrations.

Child Poverty

16. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the number of children living in poverty in Scotland in each year since 1997. [25085]

Mr. Foulkes: We are making good progress on child poverty but much remains to be done. Detailed information can be found in "Opportunity for All", and in the Scottish Executive's annual Social Justice Report, "A Scotland where everyone Matters".

Trade Unions

17. **David Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she next plans to meet representatives from the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss trade union legislation. [25086]

23. **Jim Sheridan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she next plans to meet representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss legislation affecting trade unions; and what will be discussed. [25093]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular contact with representatives of the STUC to discuss a wide range of issues. The next such occasion is on 30 January when the STUC is meeting Scottish Members and others in Dover House to discuss a wide range of issues including trade union legislation. I hope my hon. Friends will attend.

Rural Economy

18. **Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs concerning the rural economy in Scotland. [25087]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend and I discuss with a wide range of colleagues, including the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, matters concerning rural Scotland.

National Air Traffic Services

19. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met representatives of NATS; and what issues were discussed. [25088]

Mrs. Liddell: I will be meeting senior management from NATS tomorrow.

It is my intention to discuss matters relating to the development of the new Scottish centre at Prestwick.

Laeken Convention

20. **Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Prime Minister about the convention established at the Laeken EU Council; and if there will be participants from the Scottish Parliament in the UK delegation to the convention. [25089]

Mrs. Liddell: The Convention on the Future of Europe will begin its work in March. Consultations will, of course, be held in the usual way on who the parliamentary representatives will be.

Rural Enterprises

21. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to encourage rural enterprises; and if she will make a statement. [25091]

Mr. Foulkes: There has been close and effective collaboration between the UK Government and the Scottish Executive to deal with the foot and mouth outbreak and its aftermath. Support for rural enterprises in Scotland is primarily the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

Pensions

22. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received concerning pensions payable in Scotland. [25092]

Mr. Foulkes: We receive a wide range of representations on a number of issues. I met with the GMB Retired Members Group on Friday 7 December 2001.

Employment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on employment trends in Scotland since September 2001. [25078]

Mrs. Liddell: Latest figures show that employment in Scotland stands at 2.382 million, at around its highest level since 1960. The number of people in work from August to October 2001 fell by 9,000 over the quarter but was up by 3,000 on the same period a year earlier.

Dover House

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of staff based at Dover House are not directly employed by the Scotland Office; and by whom they are employed. [27424]

Mrs. Liddell: There are currently 35 Scotland Office staff in Dover House. Thirty-one staff are on loan to the Scotland Office from the Scottish Executive; one member of staff is on secondment from the House of Lords and there are three temporary staff. There are also 10 staff employed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, who are currently located in Dover House on a temporary basis; and five staff employed by Scottish Development International.

West Coast Mainline

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she has met representatives of Railtrack since 5 October to discuss the upgrading of the West Coast mainline. [27031]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 92W.

Friends of Scotland

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Friends of Scotland she plans to recruit; and how many individuals have expressed interest in the scheme. [27423]

Mrs. Liddell: Many individuals in Scotland and abroad have expressed an interest in promoting a message of a modern and dynamic Scotland. My aim is to enable the largest possible number of Scotland's friends around the world to promote this message to Scotland's benefit.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

27. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Advocate-General, pursuant to her answer of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 153, on the then Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, if she has passed on the concerns of the hon. Member for Linlithgow to her right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. [25041]

The Advocate-General: Following my answer of 4 December, I received from my hon. Friend the letter from Douglas Connell dated 30 November. Mr. Connell's letter was forwarded to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary who has now replied directly to my hon Friend, on 13 December.

Human Reproductive Cloning Act

28. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Advocate-General what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive concerning the passage of the Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001. [25042]

The Advocate-General: The Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001 is the responsibility of the Department of Health. There was appropriate consultation between UK Government officials, including lawyers in my Office, and the Scottish Executive before it was enacted.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Standing Committees

48. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to the Modernisation Committee to improve the effectiveness of Standing Committees in scrutinising Bills. [25064]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend has already put forward an extensive programme of reform. Proposals for better pre-legislative scrutiny should provide more material for Standing Committees to use. However, I am sure the Modernisation Committee would be interested in any proposals to improve the effectiveness of Standing Committees.

Euro

49. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the President of the Council to ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what provision has been made in the accounting procedures of the House for the use of the euro; and if he will make a statement. [25065]

Mr. Kirkwood: The accounting procedures used by the House follow those generally used in central Government Departments, and are based upon Treasury guidance. The accounting systems of the House (in common with most modern systems) have multi-currency capabilities. The House accounts for all transactions in sterling.

Pre-Legislative Scrutiny

50. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his plans for pre-legislative scrutiny of bills. [25066]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 165W.

Oath of Allegiance

51. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to reform the Parliamentary Oath. [25067]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton).

Electronic Voting

52. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons about the future use of electronic methods of voting. [25068]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Used appropriately, electronic voting could have advantages for Members by reducing the time spent on divisions rather than debate. The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons may wish to consider my right hon. Friend's proposals.

Question Time

53. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his proposals to reform question time. [25069]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Procedure Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into parliamentary questions. We look forward to their recommendations.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Commission agreed to pay the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards for four days a week; when the Commission first understood the average days worked was five days a week; and when, why and how it decided to offer the next term at three days a week. [25148]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Commissioner for Standards was initially offered the post on the basis of three days a week. The Commission agreed to increase the salary to one based on employment for four days, but this was done in response to representations made by Mrs. Filkin and was not based on any re-assessment of her likely workload. The Commission was told by the Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges on 10 December 2001 that the Commissioner for Standards was in fact working for about five days a week. As for the decision to advertise the next term as likely to be for three days a week, I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 484W, and 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 871W.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what policy the Commission has adopted in relation to the correction of information concerning the recent letter from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [25533]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* If the hon. Member is able to be more precise about the events he has in mind, I will endeavour to reply to his question.

House Facilities

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the President of the Council what proposals he plans to make to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons for improving the facilities for families in the House. [25060]

Mr. Robin Cook: Responsibility for improving facilities for Members in the House rests with the Accommodation Committee.

However, I understand that some work has already been carried out in improving the facilities in the Families Room and the Refreshment Department. An experimental play scheme last summer adjournment was successful and we hope to repeat it. If any Member has further proposals, I would be happy to consider how best to take them forward.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Rural Magistrates Courts

34. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will review policy on the closure of rural magistrates courts; and what assessment he has made of the findings of the Auld report on this subject. [25048]

Mr. Wills: No. The Government's policy is that decisions concerning the number, location and future of magistrates courts are for magistrates courts committees to determine, in consultation with its local paying authority.

In answer to the second part of my hon. Friend's question, we will consider this carefully, taking account of responses to Sir Robin Auld's Review Report. The assessment will be made after the period for public comment closes on 31 January.

Magistrates

35. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement as to the role of magistrates under the proposals in the report of Lord Justice Auld. [25050]

Mr. Wills: Sir Robin Auld recommends retaining magistrates in their present summary jurisdiction and recommends a new role for magistrates alongside professional Judges in a new intermediate District Division. The Government welcome views on these proposals. The period for public comment runs until the end of January.

CAFCASS

36. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when she last met the Chairman of CAFCASS to discuss its progress. [25051]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I met the Chairman of CAFCASS yesterday to discuss the progress of the organisation.

Courthouses (PFI)

37. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made in building new court houses by means of the private finance initiative. [25052]

Mr. Wills: The Court Service is currently supporting 12 local authority and three Court Service PFI schemes. Of these, four contracts have been signed and new courthouses have opened in Kidderminster, Hereford, Hull, Beverley and Bridlington. This is the start of a steady steam of new and refurbished court buildings being delivered that will provide a better and more efficient service to court users in modern user friendly and secure surroundings.

Charges Against Property

38. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will review the process of recording a charge against property. [25053]

Mr. Wills: The Land Registration Bill now before Parliament and rules to be made under it will modernise and simplify the law relating to charges (including charges created by electronic means) over registered land in England and Wales. The Government are also considering the recommendation made in the report of the Company Law Review Steering Group published in July last year that the Law Commission should be asked to examine the system for the registration of company charges and security and "quasi-security" generally over property other than land.

Public Guardianship Office

40. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what customer-friendly policies the Public Guardianship Office has developed since its creation. [25055]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since the PGO was created on 1 April 2001 several significant customer-friendly policies have been developed and are progressing well. These include the launch of a new website with downloadable forms, an extension to the opening hours of the Customer Contact Centre, the introduction of a text phone, and the establishment of a system of regularly surveying our customers' views. The PGO has also introduced the following initiatives:

Receivers open days

> This is a new concept for the PGO. Open days are held across the country to enable receivers, and their clients, to meet PGO staff. PGO staff have visited receivers and clients in Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol, Newcastle and Leeds. During the open Days staff meet with approximately 100 receivers and clients on each day, to share with them the activities planned by the PGO and to answer any questions they may have. Crucially, clients also get to meet their caseworkers and to resolve any outstanding issues. Stalls are set up to provide additional and specialist information about a range of topics, including investments and accounts. The open days have been a huge success and several more are planned for the first quarter of 2002, including one in Cardiff.

Receivers network

> The receivers network, set up and facilitated by the PGO, provides receivers with the opportunity to share experiences with each other. The network allows new receivers to call experienced, volunteer receivers requesting advice and information, or perhaps for an opportunity to share experiences with someone who understands the issues they are facing.

Plain-English literature (booklets)

> A distribution campaign for four new user friendly booklets will begin during the week commencing 14 January. The booklets are called "Receivers Handbook", "Enduring Power of Attorney", "Making an Application" and "Public Guardianship Office Charter Standards". Draft copies of the booklets were sent to members of the consultative forum and the receivers support panel for their comments. Feedback from these individuals was taken on board and the amended booklets were then sent to the Plain English Campaign, who accredited each booklet with the Crystal Mark.

Team-working

> This major initiative in the PGO is just getting under way as staff relocate to new premises in Archway, North London. Previously in the PGO, staff have worked in an insular and unsupported environment, with caseworkers taking sole responsibility for their own case load. Recently the PGO ran a team-working pilot, where a team of staff were given responsibility for providing customer service for a pool of cases. Team leaders have been recruited and trained. Although it will take a while for team-working to be rolled-out across the client services area it is expected that our clients will benefit from an improved continuous service from staff, who will work within an open, shared and supportive team culture.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what target she has set for the Public Guardianship Office to respond to letters from hon. Members. [27111]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office has a Key Performance Measure which applies to letters from hon. Members as well as from the general public. It currently requires 85 per cent. of letters to be responded to within 15 days of receipt. In the period 1 April to 30 November 2001 this target was exceeded and 91.9 per cent. of letters received a response before the target date. However, it is very unfortunate that the hon. Member's letter of 14 November was answered outside of this target, for which the PGO offers it sincere apologies.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Chief Executive of the Public Guardianship Office intends to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Aylesbury of 14 November 2001 about his constituent Mr. A. B. Clarke. [27112]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been informed that the Acting Chief Executive replied to the letter on 11 January 2002. I take this opportunity to apologise, on behalf of the Public Guardianship Office, to the hon. Member for the unfortunate delay in responding to his letter. The PGO is currently re-evaluating the way it deals with complaints, including letters from MPs, and plans to introduce a new, tighter and more effective handling system by April 2002.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of whether the Public Guardianship Office is continuing to meet the standards of responsiveness to inquiries from members of the public implied by its Chartermark. [27110]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office does not yet have the Chartermark. It does have a key performance measure that requires 85 per cent. of letters to be responded to within 15 days of receipt. In the period 1 April to 30 November 2001 this target was exceeded and 91.9 per cent. of letters received a response before the target date. However, it is very unfortunate indeed that a recent letter from the hon. Member was dealt with outside the target, for which the organisation offers its sincere apologies. A response has now been given. The PGO is currently re-evaluating the way it deals with complaints, including letters from hon. Members, and plans to introduce a new, tighter and more effective handling system by April 2002. The PGO is also introducing and rolling out team working throughout the Client Service area, with the aim of improving the service it offers to customers.

Judicial Appointments (Ethnic Diversity)

41. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on plans to promote ethnic diversity on the Bench. [25056]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor appoints to judicial office exclusively on merit. The number of people from ethnic minorities holding judicial office substantially reflects the number of ethnic minority practitioners in the legal profession with the appropriate period of experience, which is usually not less than 20 years.

The Lord Chancellor has already introduced a number of initiatives to encourage greater numbers to apply for judicial office and to secure equality of opportunity in the appointments process. For example, he has made information about the appointments procedures widely available, particularly through his website and the publication of the Judicial Appointments Annual Report; he applies the procedures flexibly in relation to age and sitting arrangements; he has introduced a work shadowing scheme which has proved to be very successful; he has reviewed the detailed criteria for appointment against which assessments of suitability are made; he is piloting a scheme to encourage applications from those who may think that their career progress to date understates their judicial potential; and has appointed a Commissioner for Judicial Appointments to audit and make recommendations about the appointments procedures and handle complaints.

Preparatory work for a pilot assessment centre is under way with a view to running the pilot later this year. A video about the appointments process will be produced soon. These efforts will continue and be developed with a view to increasing the numbers from ethnic minorities who apply for and are appointed to judicial office.

Auld Report

42. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will respond to Lord Justice Auld's recommendations. [25057]

Mr. Wills: The Government propose to set out their conclusions on the recommendations of Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts in a White Paper to be published in spring 2002.

Census Website

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will publish the tender specification prepared by the Public Record Office for contracting process for the design and build of the website for the 1901 Census online; and if she will make a statement. [26804]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The PRO placed a notice in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* (OJEC), seeking expressions of interest, on 6 November 1998.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the website for the 1901 Census will next be available for normal public access. [26802]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The online service for the 1901 Census is available at the Family Records Centre in Islington, at the Kew site of the Public Record Office, and at a number of local public library and archive services. The website was temporarily closed to general internet access on 7 January 2002 so that enhancements could be introduced. General internet access will be re-introduced gradually as these enhancements are achieved.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultations took place between QinetiQ and professional genealogists in the process of designing and building the website for the 1901 Census. [26806]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In order to take full account of user views in the development of the 1901 Census website, the Public Record Office set up an Advisory Panel, which comprised professional genealogists and representatives of the main user groups, as well as staff from QinetiQ Ltd. The panel provided valuable feedback both on the pilot project relating to the 1891 Census for the county of Norfolk, which ran from May to the end of July 2001, and in the run-up to the launch of the 1901 online service.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultations took place between the Public Record Office and professional genealogists in the preparation of the tender specification for the design and build of the website for the 1901 Census. [26805]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Record Office consulted on a regular basis regular basis with professional genealogists and other family history user groups as it prepared the tender specification. The final specification incorporated suggestions from these groups.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations the Public Record Office received on the proposal for and construction of the website for the 1901 Census. [26807]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Record Office consulted widely about, and received many comments on, the proposal for the 1901 Census online service. An Advisory Panel, comprising all the main user groups, met on 10 occasions and provided valuable feedback on the online pilot project relating to the 1891 Census for the County of Norfolk, concerning which over 2,000 responses were received. Many of these suggestions were incorporated into the final design for the 1901 Census online service. PRO staff also attended numerous family history fairs in the UK to seek the views of family historians.

Pleas

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in how many cases referred by magistrates to the Crown court for sentencing the defendant had pleaded *(a)* guilty and *(b)* not guilty in the latest year for which figures are available. [26151]

Mr. Wills: In 2000, the latest year for which figures are available, the Crown court disposed of 28,713 cases referred from magistrates courts for sentencing. Figures are not available on how the defendant had pleaded in these cases. However information collected in the magistrates courts Time Intervals Survey shows that 87 per cent. of defendants committed to the Crown court for sentencing in 2000 had pleaded guilty and 13 per cent. had pleaded not guilty.

Legal Aid

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to review the procedures for the application of legal aid with particular reference to the costs and benefits of a likely prosecution in order to avoid the possibility of any later withdrawal of a certificate. [27017]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We have no plans to review the cost benefit criteria for public funding in civil cases, to which I understand the question refers. Funding is available subject to satisfying the financial conditions for funding and a funding assessment under the funding code. The funding assessment (or merits test) that has to be passed before funding can be granted already includes an assessment of the case's cost-benefit ratio. That is the applicant's own case; the merits of his or her opponent's case cannot be taken into account. However, it is inevitable that cost-benefit will change in some cases as matters develop, and an applicant's case needs to satisfy the funding assessment at all stages for funding to be retained. It would be impossible to devise a test that prevented funding being lost during the life of a case if merits deteriorated to a point where it was no longer justified.

Trespass

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will institute a review of the law on landowners' rights relating to trespassers. [26011]

Mr. Wills: There are no current plans to review the law relating to landowners' rights relating to trespassers.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit and Pension Payments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals in receipt of state benefits or state retirement pensions have had their benefits or pensions withheld as a result of them being in hospital in each of the last four years. [26809]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-drugs Strategy

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the status is of the targets for reducing the consumption of class A drugs, as set out in the 10-year plan for tackling drugs misuse; what plans he has to change the targets; and if he will make a statement; [27647]

(2) what progress has been made in achieving the targets for reducing the consumption of class A drugs, as set out in the 10-year plan for tackling drugs misuse; and if he will make a statement. [27645]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend, the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on 10 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 1019W.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policy changes he plans to ensure that the 10 years anti-drug strategy meets its five and 10 year targets. [26033]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I refer my hon. Member to the reply I gave on 10 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 1019W.

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for the period between the commencement of the home detention curfew scheme and 31 December 2001 inclusive, *(a)* the number of prisoners released on the scheme, *(b)* the number of prisoners convicted of each offence who were released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, including offences committed by prisoners normally classified under the categories (i) other homicide and attempted homicide, (ii) other violence against the person, (iii) drug offences, (iv) assaults and (v) other offences, including a breakdown of the prisoners normally classified in the sub-category of other offences called other offences, *(c)* the average sentence (A) received and (B) served, and the average period spent on the scheme, in respect of each offence, *(d)* the number of prisoners released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, who (1) breached the conditions of the curfew, (2) disappeared and were recaptured, (3) disappeared and remain unlawfully at large and (4) had their licences revoked with reasons, *(e)* the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme while on the scheme, including offences committed, by prisoners who committed more than one offence and *(f)* the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme who committed a further offence while on the scheme that was similar in character to that for which they were originally convicted, including offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence; and if he will make a statement. [27649]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

TETRA Masts

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what evaluations were made by his Department before permitting the National Radiological Protection Board to erect TETRA masts for the emergency services; [14622]

(2) what assessment he has made of the risks to the emergency services of erecting TETRA masts; and if he will make a statement; [14618]

(3) what evaluations were made by his Department before permitting the National Radiological Protection Board to erect TETRA masts for the emergency services; [14619]

(4) what assessment he has made of the number of TETRA masts to be erected in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales. [14620]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 93W.

Data Protection

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is reviewing the draft PIU report into delivering electronic Government in the context of his consideration of entitlement cards and the threats posed by terrorism; when he expects to publish the report; and if he will make a statement. [17195]

Mr. Blunkett: The Performance Innovation Unit (PIU) report "e.Gov-Electronic Government Services for the 21st Century" was published in September 2000 by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister before the Government began their consideration of a universal entitlement card scheme.

The hon. Gentleman may have meant to refer to the PIU study into Privacy and Data Sharing in his question. The results of this study are being considered and will be published in due course. In their consideration of an entitlement card scheme, my officials are working closely with the PIU and the Office of the E-Envoy.

The Government do not consider that an entitlement card scheme would have a significant effect in combating terrorism in the United Kingdom.

Extraditions

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people the Government sought to be extradited to face trial in the UK from *(a)* other EU countries and *(b)* non-EU countries in each of the last 10 years broken down by categories of offence; and how many requests were (i) accepted, (ii) refused and (iii) withdrawn. [26150]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Reliable statistics covering the last 10 years are not available. The information since 1997 is as follows:

	Requests made[1]		*Outcomes*[2,3]		
	EU1	*non-EU*	*Granted*	*Refused*	*Withdrawn*
1997	17	31	30(13)	4(2)	14(5)
1998	43	20	38(19)	3(1)	14(7)
1999	39	10	36(9)	2(0)	20(10)
2000	50	20	31(7)	1(0)	10(4)
2001	57	25	52(17)	6(2)	17(2)

Notes:

1. The figures do not include requests made to Ireland which are governed by the Backing of Warrants (Republic of Ireland) Act 1965 and are not collected centrally.

2. Outcomes in any given year do not necessarily correspond to the number of requests made.

3. Non-EU figures shown in brackets

The following table indicates for the same five year period into which broad categories of offence requests made fell.

			Year[3]		
Offence[1,2]	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Drugs	11(7)	19(4)	14	17(2)	13(2)
Murder	—	2	4	9	11(4)
Manslaughter	—	—	—	1	2
Terrorism	—	—	—	—	(3)
Rape	(1)	(3)	4(3)	3(2)	4(1)
Violence against the person	5(3)	3	1(2)	2(1)	4
Indecent assault	5(3)	4(1)	(1)	5(2)	6(2)
Firearms/explosives possession	2(1)	—	—	—	—
Theft/robbery	6(2)	14(7)	12(2)	12(1)	17(2)
Fraud/deception	6(3)	4	14(1)	12(5)	15(8)
Kidnap/false imprisonment	1	1	1	2(1)	2
Offence					
Child abduction	—	3	—	(5)	3(1)
Tax/VAT evasion	1	3	2	7	6(2)
Forgery/counterfeiting	—	—	—	1	2
Arson	—	—	(1)	1	—
Official Secrets Act	—	1	—	—	—
Money laundering	—	1	—	—	—
Blackmail	(1)	—	—	(1)	—
Pornography	(1)	2(1)	—	1	1
Affray	—	(1)	—	—	—
Arranging bogus marriages	—	(1)	—	—	—
Death by reckless driving	1	1	—	—	1
Drunk on aircraft	—	—	(1)	—	—
Perverting course of justice	—	1	—	—	—

Notes:

1. Offences are defined broadly, and include conspiracies or attempts to commit offences.

2. The figures do not perfectly match the number of requests in the preceding table some fugitives are sought for more than one offence.

3. Non-EU figures shown in brackets

Murder

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what information he has on the present *(a)* murder rate per 1,000 of the population and *(b)* attempted murder rate for (i) Manchester and (ii) the UK; [25772]

(2) what information he has on the clear-up rate for *(a)* murder and *(b)* attempted murder for (i) Manchester and (ii) the UK. [25773]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Figures for the murder and attempted murder rate per 1,000 of the population for Greater Manchester and England and Wales for year ending March 2001 are:

(a) (i) Homicides (murder, manslaughter and infanticide) for Greater Manchester is .022; (ii) homicides for England and Wales is .016.

(b) (i) Attempted murder rate for Greater Manchester is .031; (ii) attempted murder rate for England and Wales is .013.

Figures for the clear-up rates for murder and attempted murder for Greater Manchester and England and Wales for year ending March 2001 are:

(a) (i) Detection rate for homicide in Greater Manchester is 91 per cent.; (ii) detection rate for homicide in England and Wales is 90 per cent.

(b) (i) detection rate for attempted murder in Greater Manchester is 72 per cent; (ii) detection rate for attempted murder in England and Wales is 81 per cent.

Information for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for their respective Ministers.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the latest date for which figures are available, how many asylum seekers have been dispersed since the introduction of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; and how many asylum seekers receiving support from the NASS under section 95 of the Act, and living in London and the south-east, have had dispersal directions cancelled on medical grounds. [24363]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

Information recorded by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) shows that as at the end of September 2001, the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in NASS accommodation was 32,890[1,2]

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Cases which have had their support terminated are excluded from this figure.

Information is not available on the numbers of asylum seekers who have had dispersal directions cancelled on medical grounds.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2001, (15273), when he expects to conclude the final list of categories of data to be stored on the micro-chip on the asylum seeker identification card. [25278]

Angela Eagle: The list of data initially contained within the micro-chip of the Application Registration Card will be finalised shortly before production commences which is expected to be at the end of January 2002. However, it will remain subject to review and change.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 479W, if it is his intention that an asylum seeker who has been accommodated in a reception centre or accommodation centre immediately prior to being recognised as a refugee or being granted exceptional leave to remain, will have to establish a local connection when making an application for housing assistance from a local authority under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. [26767]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

Housing applicants who have been accommodated in a reception centre or accommodation centre and who have been granted either refugee status or exceptional leave to remain would be treated on the same basis as all other applicants.

Under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, local housing authorities must consider all applications for housing or housing assistance where they have reason to believe the applicant is, or may be, homeless or threatened with homelessness. They may also take account of whether or not applicants have a local connection with the district of another local housing authority, if they wish.

Where an applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, the authority dealing with the application must accept responsibility for any duty owed, if the applicant has a local connection with the authority's district or does not have any local connection with any district in England, Wales and Scotland. If such an applicant does not have a local connection with the authority's district but does have one with another district, the authority may seek to refer the applicant to the authority in the other district.

Visas

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that the hon. Members' hotline is kept up to date with the latest information on those seeking visa applications. [26782]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The MPs hotline staff answer a large range of queries from hon. Members regarding those wishing to remain in the United Kingdom. The MPs hotline staff seek to ensure that all information provided to hon. Members is up to date. None the less, we are looking at improvements in process and equipment to ensure that the service provided is as rapid and accurate as possible.

Naturalisation Applications

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were made for naturalisation; and what was the *(a)* average and *(b)* upper decile time taken to determine applications, in each year since 1997. [25999]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Information on naturalisation applications received and on the upper decile time to determine applications is not available.

Statistics on the total number of applications for British citizenship received, 1997 to 2000, are given in the table. Data for 2001 will be published in the Home Office statistical bulletin "Persons Granted British Citizenship, 2001" in the summer this year.

Information on the average waiting time for citizenship are not routinely published. The most recent published information relates to March 2001, when the average waiting time was 11.6 months.

One of the Government's Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets is to reduce the average time taken to grant citizenship (naturalisations and registrations) to six months by the end of 2001–02. It is expected that performance on this target will be reported on in due course.

Applications for British citizenship received in the United Kingdom, 1997–2000

Number of persons

	Applications received
1997	66,000
1998	68,030
1999	67,400
2000	[1]63,700

[1] Provisional

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 12 October, 16 November, 12 December 2001 and 9 January 2002, relating to her constituent, Ms Audrey Stanley of Cheshunt. [26777]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Rooker replied to the hon. Member on 10 January 2002.

Sex Offenders

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to her statement of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 7, on sex offenders, for what reason she has concluded that it is not in the interests of child protection to make people's names and addresses widely accessible in the community; and if she will make a statement. [25515]

Beverley Hughes: The police already have and use the power to disclose information to members of the public about sex offenders in the community where, in their judgment, it is necessary to do so to prevent a crime from being committed. We believe, in common with the public protection agencies, that making information about sex offenders widely available would hinder child protection rather than helping it. Offenders subject to the requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 would be less likely to comply with those requirements if they knew their details would be publicly available, and might be driven into hiding due to fear of vigilante action. Sex offenders in this situation would not then be subject to the inhibiting controls of the public protection agencies and, for example, would be less likely to undertake treatment due to a fear of being identified. As a result, they would pose a greater risk to children.

This conclusion is borne out by the experience following the *News of the World's* sex offender campaigns in 1998 and 2000. The Association of Chief Officers of Probation provided anecdotal evidence about the effects of those campaigns, including that a number of high risk sex offenders lost contact with the public protection agencies; many others who were previously participating in treatment programmes stopped doing so for fear of being identified; a number of serious assaults on people who were mistaken for sex offenders took place; and the families, who in some cases had been the victims of sex offenders, were also assaulted and abused by members of the public. All these factors are deeply regrettable but perhaps the most regrettable potential consequence of community notification is that children will be placed at greater risk from sex offenders who are not complying with the requirements of the Sex Offenders Act.

The National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has also recently published a report on the community notification system in the United States (Megan's Law). That report concludes:

> "There is very little evidence to substantiate claims that community notification enhances child safety".

Trial in Absentia

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the offences for which trial in absentia is permitted in the United Kingdom. [26603]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There is no list of offences; an accused can plead guilty in writing to a magistrates court if the offence is liable for a sentence of less than three months' imprisonment.

A magistrate may proceed with a hearing if the accused fails to appear, or if (s)he is satisfied that there is no good reason for their absence.

As a general rule, the accused is required to be present during Crown Court trials. There are, however, exceptional circumstances when the accused's presence may be dispensed with. Such decisions are at the judge's discretion, and include situations such as misbehaviour by the accused or his/her voluntary absence.

Child Protection

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are registered on the Sex Offenders List that have been found guilty of child abuse. [26609]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Until March 2001, data on the number of registered sex offenders were collated biannually on a national basis from the police national computer. However, this arrangement was overtaken by guidance issued by the Home Office in respect of the statutory provisions in section 67 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The guidance requires information about the number of registered sex offenders in each police area to be published. This will take place from April 2002 and local systems are being put in place to deliver it. A collated report on the national situation should be available during the summer. However, until these systems are in place such information could be obtained only by a specific research exercise.

There is, in any case, no specific offence of child abuse as many sexual offences are capable of being committed against either adults or children. Indeed some sex offences against children are committed by children. The statistical information which will be required of Chief Officers of Police and Probation in relation to their work on Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels (MAPPPs) is one of the areas which are currently being developed.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions for animal cruelty there were in each year since 1990. [24904]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database showing the number of prosecutions and convictions for offences relating to animal cruelty during the period 1990–2000 is given in the table.

Number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates courts and offenders convicted at all courts for offences relating to animal cruelty, England and Wales 1999–2000

	1990		*1991*		*1992*	
Legislation	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Protection of Animals Act, 1911 (as amended)	1,167	968	1,202	862	1,154	926
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 8	7	7	1	0	4	4
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	1	1	0	0	0	0
Protection of Animals (Cruelty to Dogs) Act, 1933	61	48	33	25	31	27
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	1	1	1	1	1	1
Docking and Nicking of Horses Act, 1949	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pet Animals Act, 1951	9	6	10	6	23	18
Cockfighting Act, 1952	0	0	0	0	1	0
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	21	21	39	30	29	26
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs. 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs. 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	53	43	98	78	73	62
Slaughterhouses Act, 1974	12	8	4	4	5	5
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec. 1	52	41	47	41	62	54
Offences against other enactments	0	0	0	0	0	0
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	0	0	2	2	5	5
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	4	3	10	9	5	5
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	10	7	8	6	5	4
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	0	0	2	2	3	3
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1967, Secs. 1, 2 and 6	13	11	18	17	16	12

Number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates courts and offenders convicted at all courts for offences relating to animal cruelty, England and Wales 1999–2000

	1990		*1991*		*1992*	
Legislation	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Badgers Act 1973 (as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 Sec. 26 and Badgers Act 1991 Sec. 1)	42	26	24	17	50	28
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec. 13)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 9	6	6	4	2	6	5
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 11	4	3	4	4	3	3
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	11	10	11	9	23	18
Diseases of Animals Act	123	123	169	136	128	105
Wild Birds Protection Acts	81	112	109	87	92	61
Total	1,678	1,445	1,796	1,338	1,719	1,372

	1993		*1994*		*1995*	
Legislation	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Protection of Animals Act, 1911 (as amended)	1,084	861	908	731	927	754
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 8	3	2	0	0	3	3
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	1	0	0	0	0	0
Protection of Animals (Cruelty to Dogs) Act, 1933	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	9	8	4	3	2	2
Docking and Nicking of Horses Act, 1949	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pet Animals Act, 1951	9	8	13	12	7	6
Cockfighting Act, 1952	1	1	0	0	0	0
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	39	33	33	27	18	17
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs. 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs. 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	42	34	37	26	49	42
Slaughterhouses Act, 1974	1	1	3	3	—	—
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec. 1	53	38	21	16	18	13
Offences against other enactments	0	0	0	0	0	0
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	7	5	1	1	0	0
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	4	3	0	0	5	3
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	3	2	0	0	5	3
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	2	2	4	3	5	2
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1967, Secs. 1, 2 and 6	35	34	32	21	18	13
Badgers Act 1973 (as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 Sec. 26 and Badgers Act 1991 Sec. 1)	48	22	39	27	41	27
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec. 13)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 9	15	5	7	4	0	0
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 11	0	0	3	3	6	6
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	5	3	2	2	1	1
Diseases of Animals Act	67	48	56	48	48	43
Wild Birds Protection Acts	117	75	119	94	126	93
Total	1,545	1,185	1,282	1,021	1,279	1,028

	1996		*1997*		*1998*	
Legislation	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Protection of Animals Act, 1911 (as amended)	967	764	1,051	867	1,107	889
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 8	2	1	8	8	2	2
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protection of Animals (Cruelty to Dogs) Act, 1933	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	3	2	6	4	4	4
Docking and Nicking of Horses Act, 1949	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pet Animals Act, 1951	5	5	4	4	7	6
Cockfighting Act, 1952	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	18	16	34	30	23	20
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs. 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs. 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	58	43	76	68	87	73
Slaughterhouses Act, 1974	1	1	0	0	3	3
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec. 1	25	19	26	21	36	26
Offences against other enactments	0	0	0	0	0	0
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	0	0	1	1	1	0
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	4	4	2	2	7	7

Legislation	*1996*		*1997*		*1998*	
	Prosecutions	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	6	4	1	—	1	1
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	5	5	6	3	18	15
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1967, Secs. 1, 2 and 6	23	16	10	9	5	5
Badgers Act 1973 (as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 Sec. 26 and Badgers Act 1991 Sec. 1)	31	19	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec. 13)	[1]—	[1]—	44	25	19	4
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 9	6	3	5	3	0	0
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 11	1	1	2	0	3	3
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	[1]—	[1]—	7	3	8	7
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	4	4	5	4	5	4
Diseases of Animals Act	52	43	97	81	103	80
Wild Birds Protection Acts	203	184	84	63	68	42
Total	1,414	1,134	1,469	1,196	1,507	1,191

Legislation	*1999*		*2000*[2]	
	Prosecutions	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Protection of Animals Act, 1911 (as amended)	1,050	828	1,074	861
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 8	1	1	6	4
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	0	0	0	0
Protection of Animals (Cruelty to Dogs) Act, 1933	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	0	0	1	1
Docking and Nicking of Horses Act, 1949	2	0	2	2
Pet Animals Act, 1951	10	9	19	14
Cockfighting Act, 1952	0	0	0	0
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	25	21	24	15
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs. 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs. 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	56	51	31	23
Slaughterhouses Act, 1974	4	4	0	0
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec. 1	17	12	26	13
Offences against other enactments	0	0	4	0
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	0	0	0	0
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	8	6	11	4
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	0	0	3	2
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	8	7	0	0
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1967, Secs. 1, 2 and 6	15	11	16	10
Badgers Act 1973 (as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 Sec. 26 and Badgers Act 1991 Sec. 1)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec. 13)	30	10	21	4
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 9	3	0	0	0
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec. 11	4	3	0	0
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	0	0	5	4
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	5	4	3	2
Diseases of Animals Act	72	53	26	22
Wild Birds Protection Acts	157	118	96	80
Total	1,467	1,138	1,368	1,061

[1] Not available

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

Criminal Justice and Police Act

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been initiated under section 46 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. [25105]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Home Office Court Proceedings Database began separately identifying prosecutions completed for this offence from 1 January of this year. Such information will become available, after the publication of court proceedings statistics for 2002, in the autumn of next year.

Bachir Aouni

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the money defrauded from Barclays Bank by Bachir Aouni and his associates has been traced; and if he will make a statement. [25178]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The tracing of property suspected to be the proceeds of crime is a matter for the police.

Traffic Offences

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many traffic offences were committed by drivers under the age of 16 in each of the last 20 years. [25019]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Data prior to 1990 are not available for the age group required. The table gives information on offences most likely to have involved a traffic offence.

Findings of guilt at all courts for traffic offences[1] committed by offenders aged 10–15 years and offence group England and Wales 1990–2000

		Number of offences										
Offence group	*Offence type[1]*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Age 10–15												
1	Causing death or bodily harm	4	—[2]	20	4	8	4	4	7	6	6	3
2	Dangerous driving	208	—[2]	226	111	111	150	116	105	130	138	173
3	Driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	65	—[2]	41	42	59	89	135	128	114	120	129
4	Careless driving	219	—[2]	131	102	117	129	123	109	135	146	202
5	Accident offences	180	—[2]	105	121	133	126	111	118	123	144	189
16	Speed limit offences	15	—[2]	20	6	2	9	5	10	8	12	12
17	Motorway offences (other than speeding)	0	—[2]	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
18	Neglect of traffic directions	75	—[2]	52	55	44	71	86	56	69	80	97
19	Neglect of pedestrian rights	40	—[2]	20	18	35	36	30	20	22	29	25
20	Obstruction, waiting and parking offences	5	—[2]	1	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	3
24	Offences peculiar to motor cycles	443	—[2]	256	279	398	448	408	410	422	397	452
25	Miscellaneous motoring offences	110	—[2]	85	111	111	157	95	92	105	120	89
	Total traffic offences	1,364	—[2]	958	853	1,020	1,221	1,115	1,058	1,138	1,194	1,374
	As a percentage of total offences committed by persons all ages	0.25	—[2]	0.18	0.20	0.25	0.30	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.29	0.36

[1] The list of offence types group those offences most likely to have involved a traffic offence. They exclude offences committed by pedal cyclists.

[2] Not available.

Note:

Data taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database.

Taxis

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents there were in which taxi drivers and minicab drivers were successfully prosecuted for *(a)* causing death by dangerous driving and *(b)* driving without due care and attention in each of the last 10 years. [25119]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database does not identify the occupation of a defendant. For some offences the occupation can be inferred from the offence description but this is not the case for causing death by dangerous driving or driving without due care and attention.

Child Trafficking

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent of the slave trade in children in the United Kingdom. [25199]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are currently no reliable data about trafficking in people either nationally or internationally. The clandestine nature of the offence means that it is difficult to measure the extent to which the United Kingdom receives children trafficked for sexual and labour exploitation. However, there is no evidence to indicate that there is large-scale trafficking of children to the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom is one of the strongest supporters of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. In recognition of the seriousness of the offence of trafficking children on an international scale, we are working across Government, and with a variety of organisations, to encourage ratification and implementation of the convention world-wide.

Air Weapons

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average age of individuals convicted of offences involving air weapons in the last year; [25140]

(2) how many individuals were convicted of offences involving the misuse of air weapons in the last year in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [25141]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The available information for England and Wales is in terms of convictions for offences involving air weapons as defined under the Fireams Acts, as opposed to all offences where air weapons were used. The table, derived from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, gives the number of persons convicted in 2000 and their average ages for those offences identified by the database.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Persons convicted of offences[1] under the Firearms Acts connected with air weapons—England and Wales 2000

	England[2]		Wales	
Offence	*Persons convicted*	*Average age*	*Persons convicted*	*Average age*
Possessing air weapon or imitation air weapon at time of committing or being arrested for an offence specified in schedule 1 of the Act	2	15	1	13
Possessing air weapon or imitation air weapon with intent to commit an indictable offence, or resist arrest etc.	4	16	—	—
Possession of an air weapon or imitation air weapon with intent to cause fear of violence	20	17	—	—
Possession of air weapons by persons previously convicted of crime	30	27	6	27
Supplying air weapons to person denied them under section 21	—	—	—	—
Carrying loaded air gun in public place etc.	160	21	10	24
Trespassing with air weapon in a building	3	15	—	—
Trespassing with air weapon on land	17	22	1	38
Person under 17 acquiring air weapon	3	16	—	—
Person under 14 having with him an air weapon or ammunition therefor	15	12	1	12
Person under 17 having with him an air weapon in a public place	47	15	5	15
Person under 14 making improper use of air weapon when under supervision	1	11	—	—
Person supervising person under 14, permitting improper use of air weapon	1	25	1	39
Selling or letting on hire an air weapon to person under 17	—	—	—	—
Supplying air weapon to person under 14	2	28	—	—
Supplying air weapon to person drunk or insane	—	—	—	—
Failure to hand over air weapon or ammunition on demand by constable	—	—	—	—
Total	305	20	25	23

[1] Data are given on a principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against at magistrates court for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

Source:

Home Office Crime and Criminal Justice Unit

Unlicensed Vehicles

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions were secured for the non-payment of road fund licence in the last year in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* Scotland. [25134]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database shows that in 2000 there were 21,580 convictions in Wales for offences under the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, s29—failure to pay appropriate duty—and 278,641 convictions within England.

Information relating to Northern Ireland and Scotland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to re-examine the methods for the operation of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme and in particular the restrictions placed upon those individuals who have previously had criminal convictions on receiving compensation. [27018]

Mr. Keith Bradley: All aspects of the scheme were re-examined following a major public consultation launched in 1999, and a number of significant changes and improvements were brought into force with effect from 1 April 2001. There are no plans for further re-examination, though the general operation of the scheme is kept under continuing review.

Previous convictions do not automatically or permanently preclude payment of compensation. In assessing applications, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and the complementary independent Appeals Panel take into account other relevant factors. Convictions spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 must be disregarded.

Bogus Children's Charities

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms are in place between his Department and the Home Office to crack down on bogus children's charities. [24309]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Responsibility for the investigation of organisations which claim falsely to be charities rests with the police. The Chief Charity Commissioner will write to the hon. Member with information on how the Charity Commission identifies and deals with possible abuse and maladministration in charities concerned with children. A copy of his letter will be placed in the Library.

Immigration

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state against each category of appeal, and for the last full year for which records are kept, *(a)* the (i) target and (ii) actual time for dispatch of explanatory statements by entry clearance officers from notification by unsuccessful applicants of their notice of appeal, *(b)* the time such statements are held in the Home Office before being sent to the Immigration Appellate Authority and *(c)* for what reason figures are not published in the Home Office annual report; what proposals he has for reducing the delay; and if he will make a statement. [25349]

Angela Eagle: The target time for dispatch of explanatory statements from entry clearance posts to the Home Office is one month from receipt of the notice of

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appeal for non-settlement applications and three months for settlement applications. Information on the actual time for dispatch is not available.

Information on the time such statements are with the Home Office is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

These figures were not published in the last Home Office report as they do not measure performance against a Public Service Agreement or Home Office target.

The scope for reducing timescales will be kept under review as part of the substantial expansion in appeals capacity announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department on 29 October 2001.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Correspondence

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will answer the questions from the hon. Member for Maidenhead on the grant payment deed for *(a)* NGCL and *(b)* Renewco, Refs 22067, 22068 and 22069. [27332]

Mr. Byers: I have answered the hon. Member's questions today.

London Underground

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library the assumptions underlying the judgment about the amount of money that would be saved by the effect of the London Underground PPP on staff as opposed to the effect of the public sector alternative on staff; and if he will make a statement; [26037]

(2) if he will place in the Library his assumptions underlying the judgment about the amount of money that would be saved by introducing private sector management skills through London Underground PPP as opposed to through the public sector alternative; and if he will make a statement; [26036]

(3) if he will place in the Library the assumptions underlying the judgment about the amount of money that would be saved by large projects in the London Underground system being implemented through the proposed PPP as opposed to through the public sector alternative; and if he will make a statement. [26038]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 846W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 498W, on London Underground, what steps are being taken to increase the capacity of the Jubilee line to 27 trains per hour. [26441]

Mr. Spellar: London Underground informs me that work is currently in hand to improve capacity. Under the planned public-private partnership, London Underground's intention is that responsibility for delivering the capacity it specifies, whether through improved signalling or other means, will be that of the private sector infrastructure company.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average number of carriages in each train on each line of the London Underground is. [27661]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information set out in the table which shows the number of carriages per train for each line on the Underground.

Line	*Number of carriages per train*
Bakerloo	7
Central	8
Circle	6
District[1]	6
East London	4
Hammersmith and City	6
Jubilee	6
Metropolitan[2]	8 or 4
Northern	6
Piccadilly	6
Victoria	8
Waterloo and City	4

[1] Two different types of train stock are used on the District line. The Edgware Road to Wimbledon service comprises "C" stock. All other services on the line make use of "D" stock. Both types of stock are used in six carriage train sets.

[2] All Metropolitan line trains comprise eight carriages, with the exception of the single four carriage train providing the shuttle service between Chesham and Chalfont and Latimer.

Council Tax Benefit

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he intends to make compensation adjustments as a result of the abolition of council tax benefit subsidy penalty for Devon county council's settlement for 2002–03; [27309]

(2) by what percentage the £1.4 million Devon county council will benefit from in 2002–03 will be reduced as a result of the abolition of council tax benefit subsidy penalty. [27310]

Dr. Whitehead: No adjustments will be made to any local authority's settlement figures for 2002–03 as a result of the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme. Like other local authorities, Devon county council will no longer need to make, or include in its budget requirement, a contribution under the scheme for 2002–03 or future years. It will therefore benefit from the abolition of the scheme. The figure of £1.4 million is its contribution to benefit costs under the scheme in 2001–02.

South-East Manchester Multi-Modal Study

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress he has made with the south-east Manchester Multi-Modal Study; and when he will announce his decision and the first tranche of funding. [27417]

Mr. Spellar: I am currently considering the report and the north-west regional assembly's recommendations and hope to make an announcement shortly.

"Planning: Delivering A Fundamental Change"

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans parish councils to have a role under the proposals relating to planning in his paper, "Planning: delivering a fundamental change"; and if he will make a statement. [27503]

Ms Keeble: The consultation document "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" does not propose planning functions for parish or town councils. It envisages, however, that action plans drawn up as part of the proposed local development frameworks might include neighbourhood, village or parish plans drawn up with the involvement of the local community (paras 4.13–15 and 4.24).

Starter Home Initiative

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the estimated number of new homes for nurses in south-east England which will be built under the Starter Home Initiative over the years 2001–02 to 2003–04. [26921]

Ms Keeble: Around 3,500 nurses and other essential health workers in London and the south-east will be helped to buy homes through the Starter Home Initiative allocations totalling £230 million which were announced on 6 September 2001. The arrangements for allocating Round 2 Starter Home Initiative funding of £20 million will be announced shortly.

We expect the majority of key workers being helped through the Starter Home Initiative will purchase existing properties. A number of schemes will provide new build properties only, a number will target existing properties and a number of large schemes will target existing properties and also try to identify opportunities for new build.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will allow access to the Starter Home Initiative for key workers to teachers in further education colleges. [26012]

Ms Keeble: The subsidy we are providing to assist people into home ownership is limited and has to be targeted in ways that best help our communities. The Starter Home Initiative funding available for teachers is being targeted on teachers working in schools because this is where the most severe recruitment and retention problems in the profession are being experienced.

Teachers in further education and other key workers will benefit from our wider housing policies to increase the supply of affordable homes, particularly in areas where demand is high. Investment in housing will rise to more than £4 billion by 2003–04 and we are consulting on radical proposals for the more effective delivery of affordable housing through the planning system which would help provide greater opportunities for key workers.

Asset Management Plans

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated cost is of the building *(a)* repair and *(b)* maintenance backlog contained within the Asset Management Plan of each local authority; and if he will make a statement. [25785]

Dr. Whitehead: Local authorities have submitted Asset Management Plans to Government as part of the first live round of the single capital pot during 2001. Each authority was asked to provide an estimate of its maintenance backlog for all assets—housing, education, transport, office accommodation etc. No distinction was made between repair and maintenance for this purpose.

The response rate on the question of backlog was over 70 per cent. for counties, metropolitan districts and unitary councils, 57 per cent. for London boroughs and 24 per cent. for district councils. The average backlog for those authorities responding was used to produce an estimate for the whole population.

The totals should be treated with caution as most authorities are not yet well advanced in asset management and we are not able to confirm that consistent and robust methods were used to assess the backlog.

	Average per council £ million	*Total estimate of backlog £ billion*
Counties	139	4.4
Metropolitan districts	251	7.8
Unitary councils	96	3.8
London boroughs	143	4.7
District councils	19	4.4
Total		25.1

Transport Emissions

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by how much and over what periods of time he expects emissions from the transport sector to fall as a result of the Government's 10-Year transport plan. [26526]

Mr. Spellar: The three tables set out the Government's forecasts of the reduction of CO_2, NO_x and PM_{10} emissions between 2000 and 2010 as the result of the actions set out in the Government's 10-Year Plan for Transport.

Forecast 2010 CO_2 emissions in Great Britain

(MtC)

	Total emissions	*Saving compared to 2000*
2000	31.0	—
2010 without Plan	31.7	+0.7
2010 with Plan	30.1	–0.9

Forecast 2010 NO_x emissions in England

	Total emissions (Kt)	*Percentage change on 2000*
2000	501	—
2010 without Plan	213	–57.5
2010 with Plan	208	–58.5

Forecast 2010 PM_{10} emissions in England

	Total emissions (Kt)	*Percentage change on 2000*
2000	20.3	—
2010 without Plan	11.1	–45.3
2010 with Plan	11.0	–45.8

Source:
"Transport 2010: The Background Analysis", Figures 14 and 15. DETR, July 2000

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to bring up to the national average the standard spending assessment for the over 65s in Devon for the financial year 2002–03. [27308]

Dr. Whitehead: We announced the provisional 2002–03 local government finance settlement for consultation on 4 December 2001. It does not include any proposals to change the current standard spending assessment methodology for elderly social services. However, we have also announced that 2002–03 will be the last year to use this system. We intend to introduce a fairer, more intelligible formula-based approach for use in 2003–04.

We are actively involving local government in our review of the system, and we will be consulting widely before taking final decisions on the best way forward.

3 Marsham Street

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has responsibility for the former Department of the Environment building at 3 Marsham street. [23369]

Dr. Whitehead: I presume that the hon. Member means 43 Marsham street, in which case the answer is yes.

My Department holds a lease of the whole of Romney house which expires on 24 December 2003.

Urban Regeneration

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by his Department; how much each scheme has available to invest; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough councils and *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25479]

Ms Keeble: The Department is collating the information and I will write to my hon. Friend when it is available. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Tolls

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of tolls are on major *(a)* bridges, *(b)* tunnels and *(c)* roads in the United Kingdom. [26067]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions only has policy responsibility for tolled undertakings in England. My hon. Friend should contact the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales for information about tolled undertakings within their jurisdiction.

Following is a list of major tolled bridges and tunnels (there are currently no major tolled roads open in England) and the tolls charged for motorcars and large goods vehicles:

Undertaking	*Motorcar*	£ *Large goods vehicle*
Dartford Crossings (each way)	1.00	2.90
Humber Bridge (each way)	2.40	9.60 to 16.10
Mersey Tunnels (each way)	1.20	2.40 to 4.80
Severn Bridges (one way)	4.40	13.30
Tamar Bridge (one way)	1.00	2.50 to 5.50
Tyne Tunnel (each way)	1.00	1.20

Transport Infrastructure

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of *(a)* public spending and *(b)* GDP will be taken up by investment in transport infrastructure in each of the next three years. [26297]

Mr. Spellar: The proportion of total public spending that will be taken up by public investment in transport infrastructure and rolling stock for the three-year period 2001–02 to 2003–04 will be 1.0 per cent., 1.2 per cent. and 1.6 per cent. respectively. A proportion for 2004–05 is not available, because a figure for total public expenditure for that year is not available.

The proportion of GDP that will be taken up by total investment in transport infrastructure and rolling stock for the four-year period 2001–02 to 2004–05 will be 0.9 per cent., 1.0 per cent., 1.1 per cent. and 1.1 per cent. respectively.

Road Crossings

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal requirements exist to require local authorities to provide fixed crossings on major roads close to schools. [26468]

Ms Keeble: There are no legal requirements compelling local highway authorities to provide pedestrian crossings. Local authorities have powers to provide crossings on their roads under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Automatic Train Protection

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the introduction of automatic train protection on the ability of the rail industry to manage other major projects at the same time; [26461]

(2) if it remains his policy to require the rail industry to introduce ATP; and by what date. [26460]

Mr. Spellar: Under existing law, by the end of 2003 a train protection system should be in service wherever trains are operated. Where it is reasonably practicable to install it, this means automatic train protection (ATP). European Interoperability regulations will also require the European rail traffic management system (ERTMS), which includes ATP, to be fitted in certain circumstances. In addition, the Government have undertaken to bring measures arising from the public inquiry into train protection chaired jointly by Lord Cullen and Professor Uff within the 10-Year Plan for Transport.

The Health and Safety Commission are preparing advice for the Government on a realistic timetable for extending automatic train protection coverage. This advice will take account of the industry's ability to manage other projects at the same time.

Rail Industry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions his Department has had with its counterpart in the Netherlands relating to competition in the rail industry. [26464]

Mr. Spellar: Officials in my Department and the Strategic Rail Authority are in regular contact with their Dutch counterparts on a number of issues.

Rail Safety

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy to enforce the transition to cup and cone train linkages by the end of 2003. [26309]

Mr. Spellar: The Railway Safety Regulations 1999 require Mark 1 passenger rolling stock to be modified by the end of 2002, and to be withdrawn from service by the end of 2004. Enforcement of these regulations rests with the Health and Safety Executive. The Executive can grant exemptions from the requirements, but I understand that no application for exemption has yet been received.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what further measures he will put in place to control the quality of maintenance and repair of rail tracks and other track infrastructure. [26070]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack has the legal duty to ensure that the infrastructure is properly maintained. This involves ensuring that work undertaken by its infrastructure contractors is of proper quality.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to measure and control the quality of train wheel maintenance. [26069]

Mr. Spellar: Individual train companies are responsible under health and safety law for the maintenance and replacement of train wheels to ensure they remain safe. Railtrack, train operators, rolling stock suppliers and infrastructure maintainers are co-operating to implement measures aimed at improving the quality of the wheel-rail interaction.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of derailments have been caused by *(a)* track failures, *(b)* train wheel failures and *(c)* foreign items on the track, in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [26071]

Mr. Spellar: The Health and Safety Executive does not classify derailments in the form requested. Track failures and train wheel failures are both classified as track defects by Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate. The number of derailments due to different types of defects during the last five years is shown in the table.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Locomotive	4	2	2	3	1
Carriages	6	10	12	2	7
Track	46	36	53	39	29
Signalling apparatus	1	0	0	0	0
Over-line equipment	0	0	0	0	0
Other structures	1	0	0	0	1
Combined defects	1	1	1	1	3
Traction and Braking shocks	1	0	7	5	5
Total	60	49	75	50	46

Derailments specifically due to foreign objects are not separately classified. They are included in the figures as follows.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Snow, landslides, floods, etc.	1	1	3	2	5
Animals on line	1	0	0	2	0
Vandalism	4	1	4	2	5
Level crossing	0	0	0	0	2
Total	6	2	7	6	12

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact ambient temperature has on rail track failures. [26056]

Mr. Spellar: The assessment of impact ambient temperatures on rail track failures is a matter for Railtrack. They have undertaken considerable research to understand the relationship between temperature and the effect on track failure and have implemented necessary control measures.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of train weight on rail track failures; and if he plans to introduce new weight regulations. [26057]

Mr. Spellar: Controls on the routing of trains already take account of their weight and restrictions apply on certain routes. There are no proposals to introduce new train weight regulations.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to restrict train speed and weight to prevent track failures. [26074]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack have information on traffic flows using their infrastructure and are responsible for ensuring the proper level of maintenance and replacement of the track in order to keep it in a safe condition.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many derailments have occurred in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [26075]

Mr. Spellar: The numbers of derailments reported to the Health and Safety Executive in the last five years are shown in the table.

	Total derailments
1996–97	119
1997–98	93
1998–99	117
1999–2000	89
2000–01	93

Further information of derailments and other railway safety data can be found in the Chief Inspector of Railways annual reports on railway safety, copies of which are available in both House Libraries.

Ministerial Meetings

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when *(a)* he and *(b)* his ministerial colleagues last met officials from the RMT. [26298]

Mr. Spellar: Ministers meet representatives of railway trade unions and other relevant organisations in the industry on a regular basis.

Bus Fuel Rebate Scheme

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was paid *(a)* in total and *(b)* to individual bus companies under the bus fuel rebate scheme in each of the last seven years. [26054]

Ms Keeble: Total expenditure on bus fuel duty rebate in Great Britain in each of the last seven years was as follows.

	£ million
1994–95	224
1995–96	229
1996–97	228
1997–98	227
1998–99	[1]271
1999–2000	[2]333
2000–01	[3]362

[1] England £222 million

[2] England £277 million

[3] England £301 million

From 1998–99 onwards my Department has been responsible for funding rebate payments to bus operators only in England; the totals are shown above. The funding of rebate payments to operators in Scotland and Wales is now the responsibility of the Scottish Executive and National Assembly for Wales respectively, though my Department continues to administer those payments at their request.

There are some 1,800 operators who receive the rebate. The amounts received by individual claimants are regarded as commercially confidential.

Traffic Signs

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the 1989 Guildford Demonstration Project research into traffic sign conspicuity. [26063]

Ms Keeble: The Guildford Direction Signs Demonstration Project trialled a series of measures aimed at improving the overall quality of direction signs and making them easier for drivers to follow. No formal report was published, but the lessons learned were incorporated into the new Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions which came into force in 1994. Guidance on the correct use and design of signs was published in 1994 in Local Transport Note 1/94 "The Design and Use of Directional Informatory Signs" and 2/94 "Directional and Informatory Signs Interim Design Notes". The latter was superseded in 1997 by Chapter 7 of the Traffic Signs Manual "The Design of Traffic Signs". All were published by the Stationery Office.

London Buses

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* bus services and *(b)* night bus services in London were cancelled due to (i) breakdowns and (ii) lack of drivers, on a borough basis in each year since 1997. [26456]

Ms Keeble: This is a matter for Transport for London (TfL). However, TfL have provided the following information which may be helpful.

Bus services in London are competitively tendered and run under contract to TfL by a number of private bus operating companies. Service losses are measured in terms of bus kilometres and used as one of the key performance indicators of service delivery.

Performance since 1997–98 is shown in the table. It is not possible to give figures for kilometres not operated broken down by borough. Bus routes, by their nature, cross borough boundaries and very few routes run wholly within one borough.

The two main categories of lost kilometres shown are:

Staff—resulting from journeys cancelled owing to the lack of a driver and/or a conductor.

Engineering—resulting from journeys cancelled or curtailed owing to the lack of a suitable vehicle or because of mechanical breakdown.

Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available. However, TfL have indicated that between April to December 2001 there was a progressive drop in the amount of kilometres lost for staffing reasons. This performance measure continues to be significantly better than the level in the preceding 12 months, despite a higher number of scheduled kilometres.

	Percentage of scheduled kilometres lost due to:		
Financial year	*Staffing*	*Engineering*	*Scheduled kilometres (Million)*
1997–98	0.8	0.4	348
1998–99	1.0	0.5	350
1999–2000	1.9	0.5	364
000–01	2.0	0.6	374
2001[1]	1.2	0.5	289

[1] 1 April to 28 December

Night Bus Services

In 2000–01 1 per cent. of scheduled kilometres were not operated by night buses. Of this, 0.8 per cent. was due to staffing and 0.2 per cent. due to mechanical reasons.

Separate data for night bus services are not available for years before 2000–01.

Planning Appeals (Listed Buildings)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to refer planning appeals involving listed buildings to a panel of inspectors for determination when a single inspector has made a ruling contrary to the view of English Heritage; and if he will make a statement. [25967]

Ms Keeble: Listed building appeals involving Grade I and II* listed buildings are already decided by the Secretary of State rather than by planning inspectors. Other appeals involving listed buildings may also be recovered for decision by the Secretary of State at his discretion. Where appeals are determined by individual planning inspectors, however, I am satisfied that they are equipped to consider all relevant aspects of the case. It is for them to decide the weight that should be attached to the views of English Heritage and other consultees and to other material considerations in the light of all the circumstances of the particular case. We have no plans to change the current arrangements.

Homelessness

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people are estimated to be homeless in the UK; and what proportion are aged *(a)* over 50 and *(b)* under 18. [26629]

Ms Keeble: The Department collects information about action by local authorities in England under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts. In the third quarter of 2001, 30,910 households were accepted by local authorities as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in a priority need category. The latest Statutory Homelessness Statistical Release, issued on 11 December 2001, presents these and other related figures up to the end of September 2001, and copies are available in the Library.

An analysis by the age of the household head is not collected and so precise information about the proportion aged over 50 or under 18 is not available centrally. However, the priority need categories include those where one or more household members are considered vulnerable due to old age, typically, of pensionable age or youth, typically, a non-dependant aged 16–18. Estimates of cases where authorities regarded one of these categories to be the most crucial in determining priority need are given in the table.

Homeless households accepted by local authorities in England by priority need category—July to September 2001

	Number	*As percentage of all acceptances*
Household member vulnerable due to:		
Old age	1,110	3.6
Young person	1,500	3.8

Note:

Households containing vulnerable member(s) but accepted under another priority need category (such as with dependent children or with a pregnant woman) cannot be separately identified and are not included in these figures.

Source:

DTLR Statutory Homelessness: England Third Quarter 2001 Statistical Release

For information about other parts of the United Kingdom, I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Electrically Powered Vehicles

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government have taken to assist the introduction of electrically powered vehicles and other alternatives to the petrol fuelled motor vehicle. [25934]

Mr. Spellar: The Government are encouraging the introduction of cleaner vehicles, such as those powered by electricity and gas, through targeted grants and fiscal incentives.

The Energy Saving Trust's PowerShift programme, which is funded by my Department, provides grants towards the additional cost of vehicles running on electricity and gas. The programme started in 1996 and has proved very successful to date in helping to generate a significant increase in demand for alternative fuel vehicles, in particular for LPG cars. PowerShift has a total budget of £10 million for this financial year with £20 million over the next two years and is aiming to support the purchase and conversion of up to 35,000 cleaner fuel vehicles in this period.

From 1 March 2001, vehicle excise duty for new cars has been graduated on the basis of CO_2 emissions. Under the new scheme, gas-powered cars benefit from a modest discount and electric vehicles are exempt from the tax altogether. In addition, there is a low rate of duty on road gas fuels—around 6p per litre, compared with 45.82p per litre on petrol and diesel.

Looking beyond existing clean vehicle options, the Government recently issued a discussion document entitled "Powering Future Vehicles" which sets out and has invited comment on the UK's draft strategy for supporting the shift to low carbon road transport. This paper sets out the UK strategy for promoting the development, introduction and take-up of fuel cell and other new technologies—and for ensuring that the UK automotive industry is fully engaged in the technology.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26996]

Dr. Whitehead: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly. We are committed to managing sickness absence effectively and are seeking to reduce the incidence within the Department.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26979]

Dr. Whitehead: For details of my Department's advertising spend since 1997 (covering DETR and DTLR) by media, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 9 November 2001 *Official Report,* column 453W.

Each campaign may use national and regional media. For national, a mix of broadsheets and tabloids have been used frequently. For regional advertising, space has been taken in many prominent regional newspapers as well as hundreds of more local papers. The target audience/message to be conveyed influence our choice of media and details of advertising by title could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

For details of total expenditure by the Department's agencies and NDPBs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverly Hughes) to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on 23 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 58W. A breakdown of agency/NDPB expenditure on newspaper advertising by title could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Central Railway

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the references to Central Railway in the documentation for the M1 multi-modal study reflect his policy on the proposal. [26733]

Mr. Spellar: The Government are considering carefully Central Railway's proposals for a hybrid Bill as a means of authorising its scheme. We will take a view on the issues raised by proposals and respond to Central Railway in due course.

Multi-modal studies are considering the contribution all modes of transport can make to solving transport problems around the country. The M1 (North South Movements in the East Midlands) Multi-Modal Study has yet to make any specific recommendations.

Buses (Essex)

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was paid under the rural bus subsidy grant to schemes affecting the county of Essex in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [26850]

Ms Keeble: The Rural Bus Subsidy Grant scheme was introduced in 1998–99. RBSG is paid direct to the local authority for the support of scheduled local bus services, it is for the local authority to decide which services to support using this funding. The grant payments for the county of Essex are given in the table:

	Grant (£)
1998–99	693,164
1999–2000	735,774
2000–01	795,231
2001–02	[1]1,341,087

[1] Allocation

Buses

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he will take to ensure that the proposed system of local authority funding for 2003–04 will be fair; and whether the new system will be fully implemented by 2003–04. [26908]

Dr. Whitehead: We are working with local government and other stakeholders to make the grant distribution system fairer and more intelligible. The changes will take effect from April 2003.

Piracy

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to reduce the risk presented by piracy to UK-registered or owned shipping. [26701]

Mr. Spellar: The United Kingdom Government have taken positive steps to identify and deal with the problem of piracy against ships at sea.

This includes readily available guidance to UK seafarers and shipowners on how to avoid or deal with acts of piracy. It has been made available on the internet to ensure a wide coverage.

Concerted action by the international community is the key to addressing the problem. In the past few years the UK has supported and participated in counter piracy missions and seminars in "hotspot" areas sponsored by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Last year, through the IMO, we prepared codes of practice for the investigation of piracy incidents and the registration of "phantom" (stolen) ships. These codes have now been issued as circulars to all IMO member states and adopted at the IMO General Assembly. We continue to raise the matter in other international fora, including the United Nations General Assembly, to highlight the issue and raised the topic at ministerial level in areas where the problem continues to be of concern. We also meet the maritime industry on a regular basis to discuss how best we can continue to deal with the issue and whether there are any new ways of tackling the problem. We are currently reviewing the use of technical aids to counter piracy and will issue further advice to the industry when this is completed.

STCW 95 Standards

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many applications for dispensation from the requirement to validate certificates to STCW 95 standards have been granted by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. [26700]

Mr. Spellar: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), has granted no dispensations from the requirement to validate certificates to STCW 95 standards. No revalidation to STCW 95 will be given unless the necessary short courses have been completed.

However, a lack of places on short training courses has meant that some officers have not been able to revalidate in time for the 1 February deadline. In December, with the support of industry and the officers' union NUMAST, the MCA issued an Advice Note that enables dispensations to be applied for up to 31 January 2002, with a maximum validity of up to 31 July 2002. These are issued under Article VIII of STCW 95, are ship specific, non-renewable and apply only to officers serving below the ranks of Master and Chief Engineer, enabling them to complete the necessary courses. The number of those applying for these dispensations will not be known until later in February.

Maritime Security

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he plans to make to the International Maritime Organisation concerning the adequacy of existing shipping and port security measures. [26703]

Mr. Spellar: The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) will hold an additional, intercessional meeting from 11 to 15 February to review proposals for further maritime and port security measures. Based on its own work since September, the Government intend to make an active contribution to that review.

Building Inspectors

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to monitor the quality of the work of approved independent building inspectors following the introduction of statutory instrument 2532. [26745]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department cannot intervene in specific decisions taken by building control bodies, but we would carefully consider any complaints about the quality of the building control service provided by an inspector approved by the Secretary of State under Part II of the Building Act 1984.

Any complaints about the quality of service provided by inspectors approved under Part II of the Act by the Construction Industry Council would be considered by that council. All inspectors approved under Part II of the Act must periodically apply to the Construction Industry Council for re-approval.

In addition, my Department is participating in the work of the Building Control Performance Standards Advisory Group, which is drawing up proposals for performance indicators that will apply both to approved inspectors and to building control departments of local authorities.

Air Travel Trust Fund

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation to provide powers to impose a levy to recoup the costs of the Air Travel Trust Fund set up in 1975. [27144]

Mr. Spellar: A draft Bill to secure the necessary powers to impose a levy will be introduced as soon as a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

Disused Railway Lines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to safeguard the trackbed of disused railway lines where lines could be re-opened; and if he will make a statement. [27166]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has instituted a review process for disposals of former British Rail non-operational land which was not transferred to Railtrack at privatisation. The process involves a property advisory group, which includes representatives of the Rail Passengers Council, the Rail Freight Group and local authorities, advising the SRA on potential future use of sites for rail and other integrated transport uses. In this way sites with potential for future transport use are identified while surplus sites can be sold with proceeds re-invested by the SRA in support of its objectives. Where disused lines are in other ownership the local planning authority may restrict development which may prevent future re-opening.

Motorcycles

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to allow motorcycles to use bus lanes. [26923]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities can make traffic regulation orders allowing motorcycles or other vehicles to use bus lanes. The Department's advice does not promote this but we are carrying out research to see whether this should be changed. The Secretary of State can permit motorcycle use of bus lanes on trunk roads and motorways if he considers it appropriate.

Heathrow

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has for compensation for residents living under the flight path to Heathrow Airport; [26918]

(2) what discussions he has had with BAA on raising airport taxes to pay for compensation to residents living under the Heathrow flight path. [26919]

Mr. Spellar: We have no such plans.

Ministerial Travel (India)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the financial implications were to his Department of his recent return from India earlier than he had planned; [25993]

(2) what the cost was to public funds of the travel and accommodation involved in his planned meetings in India in January with Indian Government representatives. [25992]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* None.

Number Plates

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the new regulations on Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) will be laid before Parliament. [27409]

Mr. Spellar: Amendments to the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 and the Road Vehicles (Lighting) Regulations 1979 are required. The legal process will commence following completion of technical discussions with the number plate industry in the next week or so.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether *(a)* car number plate manufacturers can produce plates with a national identifier in the UK in accordance with the DTLR press release of 28 December and *(b)* vehicle owners can use such plates in advance of the new regulations being promulgated. [27410]

Mr. Spellar: Negotiations are currently taking place with the number plate industry about specific designs in advance of an amendment to the regulations. In the meantime, manufacturers may produce number plates displaying the flags and national identifiers as announced on 28 December.

Current regulations do not allow for the display of national flags on number plates. However, in the short period before the regulations are amended the police have been requested not to prosecute those who choose to display national flags and national identifiers on vehicle number plates.

Speed Cameras

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many automatic speeding cameras were in operation at the most recent date for which figures are available; and what the total was in each of the past 10 years. [27008]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* This information is not collected centrally. It is for local highway authorities, in conjunction with the police, to decide where speed cameras are deployed. Guidance on deployment is available to local authorities in Circular Roads 1–92.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will publish the grant payment deed for *(a)* NGCL and *(b)* Renewco; [22067]

(2) if the grant payment deed for NGCL formed part of the paper presented to the court on 8 October for consideration of his Department's petition to place Railtrack plc into administration; [22068]

(3) when the grant payment deed for NGCL was *(a)* drawn up and *(b)* passed to the Office for National Statistics. [22069]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The SRA prepared and negotiated a draft Deed of Payment of SRA grant for NGCL (ie Renewco) over the summer. A draft was sent to the ONS on 17 September. The draft was not relevant to the decision to take Railtrack into administration.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 494W, ref. 21483, on what date he expects a response to the application. [26562]

Mr. Spellar: A response to the Secretary of State's application is a matter for the European Commission.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the organisations with which he or his Department have held meetings to discuss the future structure of Railtrack since 7 October 2001; [26463]

(2) if he will list the external organisations with which he and his Department held discussions about Railtrack between 1 July and 7 October 2001. [26462]

Mr. Spellar: Ministers and departmental officials have held meetings with a wide range of organisations about Railtrack since July 2001, including Railtrack and its advisers, the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR), the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), trade unions, the administrator, potential bidders and groups representing passengers, shareholders and transport interests more widely.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress made to date in bringing Railtrack out of administration. [26293]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the administrator. He shares the Government's objective that the process should be completed as quickly as possible.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 494W, ref 21483, if the amounts exceed the specific funding provisions encompassed in the commercial loan agreement. [26561]

Mr. Spellar: Yes.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assistance he has requested from the Railtrack administrator under section 8.1.3 of the commercial loan agreement. [26305]

Mr. Spellar: None.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Railtrack administrator will be permitted to sell railway property assets to raise funding to repay the liabilities incurred under the commercial loan agreement. [26301]

Mr. Spellar: The Railtrack administrator is not permitted to sell Railtrack plc property assets to raise funding to repay the commercial loan agreement.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many relevant dates for repayment have been defined, as referred to in section 9.3 of the Railtrack commercial loan agreement. [26306]

Mr. Spellar: None.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 495W, Ref. 23211, for what purpose the funding is required. [26459]

Mr. Spellar: No funding has as yet been requested from this facility.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her latest estimate is of the overspend in relation to the individual learning accounts scheme; and what impact she expects this to have on her Department's budget in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [26477]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* At 31 December the overspend on individual learning accounts was £62.9 million. This takes account of the total budget available and expenditure in England over the two years 2000–01 and 2001–02. This includes both DfES budget allocations and money that has been recycled from TEC resources. The final overspend, which will not be known until later in 2002–03, will depend upon a number of factors, in particular: the full extent of claims outstanding and bookings for learning that had been confirmed by 23 November; the extent to which claims will be validated after investigation; and analysis by officials and the amount of money recouped from providers who have filed invalid claims for payment.

The final overspend will be met from within the Department's existing resources. The majority of financial activity will have occurred in 2001–02, minimising the impact on the 2002–03 budget.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what investigations are taking place in relation to alleged fraud in the operation of the individual learning accounts scheme with particular reference to *(a)* the contractor Capita, *(b)* its contractors and *(c)* its employees. [26475]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The Department's Special Investigation Unit has had 86 learning providers referred to it: four learning providers did not require investigation and 82 learning providers are in the process of being investigated. Of these, the police are already investigating 13 learning providers and the SIU is discussing a further 42 with the police. To date the police have made 39 arrests in connection with cases involving two registered learning providers. One individual has been charged.

Investigations into the control and security arrangements that were in place in the ILA system continue and we have engaged consultants from Cap Gemini to support that process. We are working closely with Capita on this work.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will give the standard spending assessment per pupil for the primary and secondary sectors for *(a)* Cambridgeshire and *(b)* Suffolk in each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02, adjusted for inflation at current values; [27633]

(2) if she will list the standard spending assessments per pupil for the primary and secondary sectors by local education authority for England and Wales in each year from 1990–91 to 2001–02, and projected for the financial year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values. [27632]

Mr. Timms: The information requested for England is contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries. Funding for schools in Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for shire counties *(a)* the education service block standard spending assessment for each county divided by the total number of full-time equivalent pupils financed by that county, *(b)* the primary education service sub block SSA for each county, divided by the number of primary pupils financed by that county and *(c)* the secondary education service sub block SSA for each county divided by the number of secondary pupils financed by that county, in the financial year 2002–03. [27626]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is in the following table.

Provisional education SSA per pupil for 2002–03

LEA	*Primary per 5–10 pupil*	*Secondary per 11–15 pupil*	*Total education per 4–19 pupil*[1]
Bedfordshire	2,663	3,408	3,074
Buckinghamshire	2,656	3,411	3,072
Cambridgeshire	2,533	3,225	2,859
Cheshire	2,469	3,149	2,826
Cornwall	2,594	3,335	3,000
Cumbria	2,581	3,299	2,965
Derbyshire	2,492	3,197	2,848
Devon	2,559	3,290	2,919
Dorset	2,494	3,179	2,851
Durham	2,628	3,378	3,039
East Sussex	2,713	3,498	3,116
Essex	2,710	3,465	3,094
Gloucestershire	2,497	3,186	2,847
Hampshire	2,582	3,322	2,901
Hertfordshire	2,750	3,503	3,169
Kent	2,708	3,470	3,105
Lancashire	2,589	3,319	2,962
Leicestershire	2,411	3,094	2,764
Lincolnshire	2,586	3,311	2,972
Norfolk	2,606	3,325	2,978
North Yorkshire	2,557	3,244	2,927
Northamptonshire	2,529	3,232	2,890
Northumberland	2,562	3,288	2,983
Nottinghamshire	2,506	3,219	2,913
Oxfordshire	2,671	3,399	3,057
Shropshire	2,534	3,228	2,875
Somerset	2,529	3,245	2,856
Staffordshire	2,451	3,146	2,827
Suffolk	2,526	3,221	2,907
Surrey	2,718	3,466	3,072
Warwickshire	2,489	3,173	2,832
West Sussex	2,638	3,365	3,007
Wiltshire	2,509	3,220	2,844
Worcestershire	2,472	3,157	2,817

[1] Total education SSA divided by total pupils aged 4 to 19 (includes 4-year-olds in PVI—private and voluntary institutions.

Learning Disabilities (Exclusion Guidance)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she gives to education authorities on the exclusion of over 25s with learning disabilities from activities and clubs on the basis of their age. [22306]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Local education authorities fund Statutory Youth Services directly. Their core client group is 13 to 19, although historically services will operate within the age range of 11 to 25. Therefore, upon reaching the age of 25 and over the persons involved would transfer to an adult education group. The Department does not issue guidance to local education authorities on the detailed delivery of its services.

Capital Assets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 889W, on capital assets, if she will place in the Library information on the accounting treatment of the public private partnership projects relating to *(a)* Birmingham Schools refurbishment project, *(b)* Sheffield city council Group Schools Projects, *(c)* Imperial College, *(d)* Essex LEA New School, Loughton, *(e)* Kingston upon Hull Primary School and *(f)* Human Resources Partnership; and if she will make a statement. [24178]

John Healey: The following private finance initiative projects have all been assessed against the Accounting Standards Board financial reporting standard known as FRS5:

Birmingham group schools;

Sheffield city council group schools;

Essex LEA—Loughton school;

Kingston upon Hull primary school.

All of these projects were considered by the financial advisers of the LEAs concerned to be 'off-balance sheet'. In each case, the district auditor for the authority confirmed that they had not seen any evidence that would conflict with that judgment.

Imperial College is an independent body and the Secretary of State is not required to hold information on its commercial contracts or activities. The Employment Service human resource partnership project is a matter for the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Voluntary Aided Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the proposed reduction in contribution by the governors of voluntary aided schools towards building costs is included in the broadly neutral reallocation of costs between governors, local education authorities and her Department; and if she will make a statement. [24266]

John Healey: As part of our reform of the funding of premises work at Voluntary Aided (VA) schools, we are proposing that the governing bodies of those schools would be liable for capital work to virtually all of the school premises, excluding playing fields. This would replace the current complex set of arrangements for dividing liability between governing bodies and local education authorities (LEAs). The proposed new arrangements would provide greater flexibility in the way in which capital funds can be used, and lead to a substantial streamlining of the related administrative and funding processes.

Our estimate of the financial impact of the proposed changes takes account of the average initial and ongoing costs of providing and maintaining VA school buildings, and of how these costs would fall to the parties involved. Our estimates have demonstrated that most of the proposed increase in the standard rate of grant support—from 85 per cent. to 90 per cent.—would be required to meet the additional premises liabilities which would transfer from LEAs to VA school governing bodies.

Implementation of the reforms is subject to approval under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. Further information on the proposals, including our overall assessment of cost neutrality, is provided in the Department's Statement which accompanied the proposed draft Regulatory Reform Order. Copies of the relevant documents are available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will place in the Library a copy of the responses received to "Responsibilities for Premises Work at Voluntary Aided Schools"; and if she will provide a list of respondents. [25538]

John Healey *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* A copy of the Department's statement, together with the proposed draft Regulatory Reform Order, has been placed in the Library. The statement contains, at Annexe A, a list of who was consulted, and indicates those who responded. The statement also contains, at Annexe B, details of the responses to the consultation.

Sure Start

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* parents and *(b)* children have had contact with Sure Start in Battersea since its inception. [24410]

Yvette Cooper: Since Sure Start Battersea was approved in October 2000 it has been in contact with approximately 190 different children under four between October 2000 and November 2001. The programme is likely to have been in contact with many of these children many times over this period.

No information is available on the number of parents seen.

Schools Access Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which schools in the Buckingham constituency have benefited from the Schools Access Initiative; and how much each school was awarded. [24864]

John Healey: The Schools Access Initiative provides resources to make mainstream schools accessible to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. Over the three year period 2001–02 to 2003–04 we are investing £220 million in the Schools Access Initiative. This is crucial to the Government's commitment to improving educational standards for all children and working towards a more inclusive approach for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

The funding is allocated to local education authorities and it is for each authority to decide its priority schemes. At the end of each financial year, LEAs are required to report back to the Department the projects funded from the Schools Access Initiative. The table lists the schools in the Buckingham constituency that have received funding from the Schools Access Initiative.

£

School name	*Total project cost*
1996–97	
Page Hill First School	3,296
1997–98	
Page Hill First School	7,042
1998–99	
Page Hill First School	4,260
Royal Latin Grammar School	10,000
1999–2000	
Royal Latin Grammar School	11,978
Buckingham Middle School	10,046

Teacher Numbers

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and secondary teachers, and *(b)* school support staff there were per thousand of population in (i) Staffordshire (ii) other shire authorities in each year since 1995. [24933]

Mr. Timms: Full-time equivalent regular teachers in maintained primary and secondary schools in existing and former non-metropolitan local authorities[1], per thousand of population[2], in January of each year, were as follows:

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Isles of Scilly	13.3	13.4	10.6	11.5	11.1	8.8	10.0
Former Avon	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.1	7.0	7.0	7.2
Former Cleveland	8.8	8.8	8.8	8.6	8.5	8.7	8.7
Former Humberside	7.9	7.9	7.7	7.6	7.7	8.0	8.0
Former North Yorkshire	7.7	7.8	7.7	7.6	7.8	8.0	8.1
Former Bedfordshire	8.8	8.6	8.6	8.5	8.4	8.4	8.2
Former Buckinghamshire	7.9	7.8	7.5	7.7	7.6	7.7	7.8
Former Derbyshire	7.6	7.6	7.4	7.2	7.2	7.3	7.6
Former Dorset	6.3	6.2	6.6	6.7	6.8	6.7	6.9
Former Durham	7.9	7.9	7.7	7.7	7.8	7.8	7.8
Former East Sussex	6.6	6.6	6.5	6.4	6.3	6.5	6.6
Former Hampshire	7.1	7.0	7.0	6.9	7.0	6.9	6.9
Former Leicestershire	8.2	8.1	8.0	7.9	8.1	8.0	8.3
Former Staffordshire	*7.4*	*7.6*	*7.6*	*7.5*	*7.7*	*7.7*	*7.8*
Former Wiltshire	7.8	7.6	7.5	7.4	7.3	7.2	7.5
Former Berkshire	7.6	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.4	7.5	7.5
Former Cambridgeshire	7.8	7.6	7.3	7.2	7.2	7.3	7.3
Former Cheshire	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.1	8.1	8.2	8.2
Former Devon	6.9	6.9	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.1	7.2
Former Essex	7.4	7.5	7.6	7.5	7.7	7.6	7.8
Former Hereford and Worcester	7.5	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.4	7.5
Former Kent	7.9	8.0	8.1	8.0	7.9	8.1	8.1
Former Lancashire	8.0	7.8	7.7	7.8	7.9	8.0	7.9
Former Nottinghamshire	7.6	7.4	7.2	7.3	7.3	7.5	7.5
Former Shropshire	7.7	7.6	7.6	7.5	7.4	7.5	7.8
Cornwall	7.4	7.3	7.3	7.2	7.1	7.3	7.4
Cumbria	8.0	7.9	8.0	8.0	8.2	8.4	8.3
Gloucestershire	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.6	7.6	7.7	7.8
Hertfordshire	8.5	8.5	8.4	8.2	8.3	8.2	8.3
Isle of Wight	7.8	7.7	7.8	7.7	7.8	7.9	8.2
Lincolnshire	7.7	7.9	7.9	7.8	7.6	7.6	8.0
Norfolk	7.4	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.2	7.1	7.2
Northamptonshire	9.2	8.8	8.6	8.3	8.3	8.5	8.2

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Northumberland	8.4	8.2	8.3	8.0	8.1	8.0	8.2
Oxfordshire	7.1	6.7	6.6	6.5	6.5	6.9	7.1
Somerset	7.3	7.0	6.9	6.9	6.6	6.9	7.3
Suffolk	7.9	7.8	7.8	7.8	7.9	7.8	7.9
Surrey	6.1	6.5	6.5	6.4	6.3	6.5	6.4
Warwickshire	7.8	7.5	7.3	7.4	7.5	7.6	7.8
West Sussex	7.0	7.0	6.9	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0
England	7.8	7.7	7.7	7.6	7.7	7.7	7.8

[1] To give consistent time series, data for new authorities created by local government re-organisation in 1996, 1997 and 1998 have been added together to produce data for the former authority areas.

[2] Estimated population data provided by the Office for National Statistics.

Full-time equivalent non-teaching staff[1] in maintained primary and secondary schools in existing and former non-metropolitan local authorities[2], per thousand of population[3], in January of each year, were as follows:

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Isles of Scilly	2.7	3.2	2.9	3.2	2.9	3.2	4.5
Former Avon	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.8
Former Cleveland	1.8	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.4	2.6	3.4
Former Humberside	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.8	3.0	3.7
Former North Yorkshire	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.6
Former Bedfordshire	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.9	3.1	3.4	4.0
Former Buckinghamshire	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.7	3.1
Former Derbyshire	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.6	3.1
Former Dorset	1.6	1.8	1.9	2.1	2.4	2.7	3.2
Former Durham	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.8	1.9	2.1	2.3
Former East Sussex	1.7	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.6	3.0
Former Hampshire	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.4
Former Leicestershire	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.9	3.1	3.6
Former Staffordshire	*1.9*	*2.0*	*2.1*	*2.3*	*2.5*	*2.7*	*3.1*
Former Wiltshire	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.8	3.2
Former Berkshire	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.9	3.4
Former Cambridgeshire	2.9	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.8
Former Cheshire	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.7
Former Devon	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.7	2.9	3.4
Former Essex	2.3	2.5	2.7	2.8	3.0	3.2	3.7
Former Hereford and Worcester	1.5	1.7	1.8	2.0	2.1	2.4	2.6
Former Kent	2.3	2.6	2.8	2.8	3.0	3.3	3.7
Former Lancashire	1.7	1.8	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.6	3.0
Former Nottinghamshire	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.6	3.1
Former Shropshire	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.8	3.2
Cornwall	2.7	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.7	3.9
Cumbria	1.9	1.9	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.8
Gloucestershire	1.8	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.7
Hertfordshire	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	3.0	3.3
Isle of Wight	2.6	2.8	2.9	3.3	3.8	4.1	5.1
Lincolnshire	2.0	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6	3.1
Norfolk	1.8	2.0	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.7	3.3
Northamptonshire	2.3	2.6	2.7	2.9	3.0	3.5	4.1
Northumberland	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.5	2.9
Oxfordshire	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.8	3.1
Somerset	2.7	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.7
Suffolk	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.8
Surrey	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.8
Warwickshire	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.8	3.2
West Sussex	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.8	3.1
England	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.8	3.3

[1] Non-teaching staff includes teaching assistants, administrative staff, technicians and other education support staff.

[2] To give consistent time series, data for new authorities created by local government re-organisation in 1996,1997 and 1998 have been added together to produce data for the former authorities areas.

[3] Estimated population data provided by the Office for National Statistics.

Children and Young Persons Unit

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people work in the Children and Young Persons Unit in her Department. [25969]

Mr. Denham: 78 people currently work in the Children and Young People's Unit. That total includes full and part-time staff, people working on short-term secondments to the unit and people working jointly to the Children and Young People's Unit and the Sure Start Unit. 65 people work in the Children and Young People's Unit in London and 13 work in the Government offices in the regions.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the budget is for the Children and Young Persons Unit in her Department. [25970]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 254W.

Correspondence

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to reply to the hon. Member for Colchester's letter to her of 26 November 2001 concerning St. George's Infant School, Colchester. [25963]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills replied to the hon. Member's letter of 26 November 2001 on 11 January 2002.

Teacher Vacancies (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there are in local education authority schools in Worcestershire. [26405]

Mr. Timms: There were eight vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in Worcestershire in January 2001. The annual census for 2002 will be carried out on 17 January, though it will be some time before all the information obtained is ready for publication.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many teachers in Somerset local education authority have passed the threshold for performance-related pay in round 1 of assessment; [26570]

(2) how many teachers in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Somerset local education authority have applied to pass the threshold for performance-related pay in round 1 of assessment. [26571]

Mr. Timms: About 200,000 teachers in English local authorities—including nearly 2,000 in Somerset—applied for the threshold assessment in the first (2000) round. The proportion of teachers in Somerset assessed as meeting the standards, at about 97 per cent., is in line with the national average.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the number of high performing *(a)* classroom teachers, *(b)* advanced skills teachers and *(c)* leadership group members who will be awarded additional points on the upper pay scale in 2002–03 in (i) England and Wales and (ii) Somerset local education authority. [26572]

Mr. Timms: The number of performance points awarded to teachers and members of the leadership group will be determined by the governing bodies of individual schools. My Department will be making a special grant worth £250 million over the next two financial years available for performance points. But the purpose of this grant will be to encourage schools to award such points, not to fund a particular number of awards. Funding for teachers' pay in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Assistant Heads

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many assistant heads there were in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Somerset local education authority in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [26575]

Mr. Timms: In January 2001 local authorities reported 6,960 full-time assistant heads in the maintained schools sector in England, and 20 in Somerset. More assistant heads may have been appointed after the survey date.

The information was not collected before January 2001 and is not yet available for January 2002.

Information for Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Teacher Assaults (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers within the Hillingdon local education authority were assaulted by *(a)* pupils and *(b)* parents in each of the last four years. [26857]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not hold this data. We have also been informed that Hillingdon local education authority does not hold this information centrally.

Class Sizes

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools within the Hillingdon local education authority had 30 or more pupils in a class in *(a)* September 2001 and *(b)* January 2002. [26925]

Mr. Timms: The September class size count in 2001 showed there were 23 schools within the Hillingdon local education authority that had 30 pupils in infant classes with one teacher and one school that had 31 or more pupils in infant classes with one teacher. This data collection only gathers information on infant classes.

For January 2001 there were 48 primary schools within the Hillingdon local education authority that had 30 pupils in a class and 35 primary schools that had 31 or more pupils in a class. The corresponding figures for secondary schools are 14 schools with 30 pupils in a class and 10 schools with 31 or more pupils in a class.

Data on class sizes for all age groups will be collected by the Annual Schools' Census on 17 January 2002, and will be available in the spring.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many primary school children in England and Wales are being taught in classes of over 35. [23412]

John Healey: The number of pupils in maintained primary schools in classes of over 35 taught by one teacher as at January 2001 was 93,950 (2.3 per cent.) of all pupils. This compares with 165,672 pupils (4.1 per cent.) in 1998. Average class sizes have fallen from 27.7 in 1998 to 26.7 by January 2001.

As a result of our infant class size pledge, only 8,000 infant pupils (0.5 per cent.) were in classes of 31 or more in September 2001 compared with 485,000 (22 per cent.) in January 1998.

For information on class sizes for schools in Wales, I refer the hon. Member to the National Assembly for Wales.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in her Department. [26975]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

The DfES is committed to reducing sickness absence in line with the targets agreed across Whitehall.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the education maintenance allowance evaluation will be published. [26930]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We published the first evaluation report in March 2001. This looked at the positive effect of EMAs on levels of participation in post-16 education in the first year of the scheme.

We expect to publish reports on the second year of the scheme in the near future, including studies of the effect of EMA on drop out rates and further analysis of the effect on participation.

Secondary Education

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the role of local government in delivering better quality secondary education. [25927]

Mr. Timms: Our White Paper, "Schools—Achieving Success" made clear that local education authorities are key partners in delivering our aims to transform secondary education and raise standards throughout the schools system.

LEAs have a central role to play in providing local leadership and strategic planning, and in the critically important tasks of supporting school improvement, challenging under-achievement and tackling school failure. In addition, it is important that they secure cost-effective services for schools that allow them to concentrate on delivering improved standards and that they are free to innovate.

Secondary School Places

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assessment she has made of the adequacy of secondary school places in Kent; [27170]

(2) what plans she has to provide more secondary school places for the children of Aylesham. [27171]

Mr. Timms: Local education authorities (LEAs) have a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places for their area. The Government believe that decisions concerning the supply of school places are best taken locally by the main partners in the provision of education who have knowledge of local needs. Each year LEAs must publish a school organisation plan setting out how they plan to deal with any surplus or deficit of places over a five year rolling period.

Where an LEA can demonstrate overall growth in the need for school places, it may apply to my Department for capital funding.

Specialist Colleges

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the specialisms that specialist colleges will cover following the March 2002 round of funding; if the Government have a target number for *(a)* each of the specialisms and *(b)* each round of applications in future years; and what plans she has to increase the funding available for specialist colleges following the increase in the number of specialisms. [27492]

Mr. Timms: The March 2002 specialist school competition will cover all eight specialisms: business and enterprise, engineering, science, mathematics and computing, arts, languages, technology, and sport. As part of the Government's Sports Strategy there is a published target of 200 sports colleges by September 2004 but there are no target numbers for other specialisms. Our target is to have at least 830 specialist schools by September 2002, at least 1,000 by September 2003 and at least 1,500 by September 2005. The level of funding available for the specialist schools programme will take account of the Government's commitment to expand the number of specialist schools.

TREASURY

Public Corporations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for the end of each year from 1990 to 2000 totals for public corporations which were at the end of 2000 classified as within the public sector for tangible assets, financial assets and financial liabilities, breaking down figures for financial assets and liabilities between claims on or liabilities to central Government and other claims or liabilities. [26274]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury does not hold balance sheet information on individual public corporations. Such information can be found in the annual reports and accounts of the public corporations. "The

National Asset Register", Cm 5221, has information on the assets, but not liabilities, of individual public corporations as at end March 2000.

Tables 3.2.9 and 10.4 of "United Kingdom National Accounts", "The Blue Book", 2001 edition, and table 1.1D of "Financial Statistics", published by the Office for National Statistics, give balance sheet information for public corporations classified as such in each year shown in the tables.

Public Employee Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the earnings are of those public employees on top salaries as defined by the relevant pay review body. [26311]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The regular annual reports of the Review Body on Senior Salaries (SSRB) cover senior military officers, the judiciary and the senior civil service. Their current rates of pay, or pay ranges, are those recommended by the SSRB last year. Details of their recommendations are given in their 46th Report (Cm 4995) published on 9 February 2001. The main pay rates, produced by applying those recommendations, are as follows.

	Minima	*Maxima*
Senior military Officers		
Four star—Range 8	130,000	152.517
Four star—Range 7	107,305	129,468
Four star—Range 6	95,000	119,128
Three star—Range 5	79,500	99,276
Three star—Range 4	77,625	88.902
Two star—Range 3	69,605	84,376
Two star—Range 2	68,610	81,134
Judiciary		
Group 1	—	171,375
Group 1.1	—	163,213
Group 2	—	157,699
Group 3	—	149,897
Group 4	—	132,603
Group 5	—	107,346
Group 6.1	—	99,420
Group 6.2	—	95,666
Group 7 (London)	—	83,767
Group 7 (outside London)	—	79,767
Senior civil service		
Permanent Secretaries	104,292	179,022
Pay band 9	92,696	131,276
Pay band 8	84,811	123,856
Pay band 7	77,635	116.904
Pay band 6	70,905	110,428
Pay band 5	64,768	104,292
Pay band 4	59,088	98,494
Pay band 3	53,534	87.598
Pay band 2	48,552	77,869
Pay band 1	44,038	69,178

From time to time, the SSRB also makes recommendations on other senior salaries that may be referred to them, including parliamentary pay and allowances (Cm 4997, 16 March 2001), the Greater London Authority (Cm 4547, 3 February 2000) and MEPs and the devolved Administrations (Cm 4188 and 4246, 31 March 1999) but these groups are not part of their regular annual process.

EU Budget Contribution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the latest figures are for the United Kingdom contribution to the European budget in each year since 1973 at current prices. [26107]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the United Kingdom's net contributions to the EC budget for the period 1973–74 to 1999–2000 can be obtained from various departmental reports of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments or, prior to 1992, Government Expenditure Plans. The net contribution figure for 2000–01 can be found at footnote 2 to Table B13 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318).

Personal Savings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the level of personal savings. [26118]

Ruth Kelly: In recent years the stock of households' financial assets has been at record levels in relation to disposable income.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by Department the capital expenditure under the Private Finance Initiative in each of the last four years and his estimate for the next four years *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash. [26101]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Detailed figures setting out estimates of capital investment by the private sector in support of PFI deals (both signed and those at preferred bidder) have been published annually in the Financial Statement and Budget report.

Public Expenditure

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 328W, on public expenditure, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the change between the projections for *(a)* Adjustments for Public Corporations and *(b)* Adjustments for expenditure financed by receipts for 2001–02 in Table 15 of the pre-Budget report 2001 and the projections made in Table B20 of the pre-Budget report 2000; and if he will make a statement. [26915]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Changes to the projections for these items, between the pre-Budget report 2001 and the pre-Budget report 2000, are partly due to a re-estimation of the size of these items in light of new outturn information and partly due to revisions to their definitions mirroring changes to various public sector national accounts aggregates made in the 2001 UK National Accounts Blue Book published on 25 September 2001. The largest of these changes is described in the footnotes to table B13 of the pre-Budget report 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the nations and regions of the United Kingdom the amount of public money spent per capita in each of the last four years. [27932]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information on identifiable public expenditure per head by country and region is given in Tables 8.2b to 8.6b, 8.10 and 8.12 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02" (Cm 5101) published in April 2001.

EU Budget

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the EU budget is spent on *(a)* agriculture support, *(b)* the Social Fund and *(c)* the Regional Fund. [26106]

Ruth Kelly: The latest published outturn figures for total payments made from the General Budget of the European Communities relate to 2000. However, these do not include a breakdown of structural spending by instrument.

In the financial year 2000 agricultural expenditure (EAGGF Guarantee section) amounted to 40.4 billion euro and constituted approximately 48.4 per cent. of total payments.

In 2000 approximately 27.6 billion euro, or 33.1 per cent. of total payments, was spent on Category 2 (structural operations) which includes both the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to amend legislation in relation to the offence of insider dealing. [26270]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 introduced a new civil market abuse regime to complement existing insider dealing and other criminal legislation. The Government have no further plans to amend the legislation in this area, although some adjustment of the UK legislation may be necessary when and if the proposed European Market Abuse Directive is agreed.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of legislation relating to insider trading. [27444]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are committed to ensuring that UK financial markets are, and are seen to be, a safe and fair environment in which to trade. Insider dealing is a criminal offence under the Criminal Justice Act 1993. The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, which came into force on 1 December last year, introduced a new civil market abuse regime to complement existing insider dealing and other criminal legislation. Under the new provisions, the FSA can impose financial penalties on, and publicly censure, those who abuse markets, including through misuse of information. The FSA can also now investigate and prosecute insider dealing offences under the Criminal Justice Act 1993.

Reputational Externalities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place his Department's internal guidance on the calculation of reputational externalities in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [27602]

Mr. Andrew Smith: As I said in my letter of 11 December 2001 to the hon. Member, whether and how reputational externalities need to be taken into account varies according to the specific circumstances of each case. Treasury officials have discussions with counterparts on a variety of evaluation issues, as appropriate.

Fuel Duty

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if it is his policy to use the level of fuel duty as an environmental policy tool; [26420]

(2) what his policy is towards the option of seeking a derogation under article 8.4 of the Mineral Oil Directive (92/81/EC) to allow a lower rate of duty to be applied to a given quantity of bio-transport fuel; [26442]

(3) what his policy is towards duty derogation under the Pilot Plant scheme to encourage the use of bio-fuels; [26443]

(4) if it is his policy to impose a fuel escalator if crude oil prices trade at a level sharply below that pertaining at the time of the 2000 and 2001 Budgets. [26527]

Mr. Boateng: It is our policy to review all taxes annually as part of the Budget process. In making his judgment, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor considers all relevant economic, social and environmental factors.

We have already announced that, under the Green Fuel Challenge, we will be seeking a derogation under Article 8(4) of the mineral oils structures directive to enable us to introduce a reduced rate of duty for biodiesel later this year; and, subject to European agreement, we will be providing a duty exemption for a pilot project involving biogas.

Tax Returns

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax returns the Inland Revenue *(a)* issued and *(b)* processed in tax years (i) 1972–73, (ii) 1980–81, (iii) 1990–91 and (iv) 2000–01. [26947]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue issued 9,469,404 ITSA returns in the year 2000–01 for the return years 1996–97 to 1999–2000.

The Inland Revenue processed 9,354,047 ITSA returns in the year 2000–01 for the returns years 1996–97 to 1999–2000. The number processed will include returns received in the previous year but not processed by the year end.

No details are held for the years 1972–73, 1980–81 or 1990–91.

Mortgage Administration Charges

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce measures to prevent mortgage providers levying an administration charge every time a customer switches their building insurance to an alternative provider. [27260]

Ruth Kelly: Buildings insurance is essential. Without it, it may not be possible for a borrower to pay for repairs. This would affect the value of the property, and consequently the lender's investment. It is not unreasonable for the lender to check that the new policy has the equivalent provisions as the old one, and to make a small charge for this purpose.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the total costs of the *(a)* construction, *(b)* equipping and *(c)* finishing of the new building for the Scottish Parliament will be paid for by (i) the UK Government and (ii) the Scottish Executive. [27153]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The costs of the Scottish Parliament building are a devolved matter and are funded from within the Scottish Executive's budget.

Capital Appraisal

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1003W, on capital appraisal, for what reason the Treasury considered that the project appraisal and capital approval system needed to be reviewed; and if he will make a statement. [26909]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The rationale was set out in the answer referred to.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the advertising campaigns commissioned by HM Treasury since May 1997, showing for each *(a)* its objectives, *(b)* its beginning and end dates, *(c)* the media used, *(d)* the criteria adopted to judge its effectiveness, *(e)* the extent to which effectiveness criteria were met, *(f)* any agency involvement and *(g)* its cost. [26006]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* With regards to advertising campaigns by HM Treasury, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), on 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 49–50W, and the reply given to the then hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) on 18 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 1256W by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary.

Child Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 743W, how many families in each region are eligible for the children's tax credit. [24223]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that around five million families will benefit from the children's tax credit. The breakdown requested is as follows.

Estimated number of families benefiting from the children's tax credit

Thousand

Country/region of England	*Number of families*
North East	225
North West	625
Yorkshire and The Humber	450
East Midlands	400
West Midlands	450
East of England	450
London	475
South East	675
South West	475
Wales	250
Scotland	400
Northern Ireland	125
United Kingdom	5,000

Notes:

1. The regions of England are Government Office regions.
2. Based on projecting forward to 2001–02 Family Expenditure Survey data for 1995–96 to 1997–98.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of those *(a)* dealt with by way of penalty and *(b)* prosecuted as a result of Inland Revenue investigation into working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit fraud had previously been (i) dealt with by way of a penalty or caution and (ii) prosecuted as a result of benefit fraud. [25024]

Dawn Primarolo: Up until 31 December 2001, of those people dealt with by way of penalty following investigations into their working families or disabled person's tax credit applications, 34 already had a previous penalty or caution. Of the 28 prosecutions heard up to that date in relation to false applications for working families tax credit, 17 had other benefit offences heard concurrently. We do not have figures to show whether any of those people mentioned had any previous prosecutions for benefit fraud.

Contingent Liabilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list contingent liabilities accepted by the Government since 1 May 1997. [26131]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund supplementary statements list, on an annual basis, reportable contingent and actual liabilities which have been taken on by Departments during the financial year and which are outstanding from previous years. They are also noted in departmental estimates and appropriation accounts.

Contingent liabilities may be classified as 'reportable' under rules set out in chapter 26 of "Government Accounting". Under these rules, Departments are required to report contingent liabilities only when they are statutory or, in the case of non statutory liabilities are not incurred in the normal course of departmental business and they are over £100,000.

Information on contingent liabilities is not collected in the way requested and could be done so only at disproportionate cost.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the performance of the Financial Services Authority. [26117]

Ruth Kelly: The process by which the FSA is accountable for its performance, to Ministers, Parliament and the wider public, was set out in a letter from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to Sir Howard Davies, Chairman of FSA, in December 2001. A key element of the framework is that the FSA will report on its performance against its statutory objectives in its annual report, which the Treasury will submit to Parliament.

A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House and was attached to a press notice, issued on 13 December 2001, which is accessible from the Treasury website.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families are *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* in receipt of help with child care costs through the working families tax credit. [25978]

Dawn Primarolo: The numbers of families receiving the child care tax credit within working families tax credit (WFTC) are shown in the WFTC Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library.

It is not known how many families are eligible for the child care tax credit.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost of the working families tax credit was for each financial year to date; and what the projected cost is for *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03, *(c)* 2003–04 and *(d)* 2004–05. [28061]

Dawn Primarolo: The figures for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are shown at Appendix 1 of the Inland Revenue annual report for the year ending 31 March 2001, a copy of which is in the Library. Projections to 2003–04 made at the time of the pre-Budget report of expenditure on the working families' and disabled person's tax credits are shown in Table B15 of the document.

Tax Units

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax units paying a marginal tax rate of 40 per cent. have children; and how many tax units have children. [26282]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated from household survey data that there are about 7.5 million families with dependent children (including those aged up to 18 and in full-time further education), and that about 1 million of these contain at least one adult who pays income tax at the higher rate.

Public Sector Current Balance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cyclically adjusted public sector current balance in cash terms for *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03, *(c)* 2003–04, *(d)* 2004–05 and *(e)* 2005–06. [26104]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Projections for the cyclically-adjusted current budget are published as a percentage of GDP. The latest projections are set out in table B2 on page 165 of the 2001 pre-Budget report.

Tax Receipts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tax receipts are anticipated from the clearing banks for the year 2001–02. [26219]

Ruth Kelly: Forecasts of tax receipts are not available in any more details than that published in Budget and pre-Budget reports.

Scottish Provident Institution

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 802W, to the hon. Member for Colchester (ref. 24558), on the Scottish Provident Institution, what action he has taken in respect of representations he has received about the Scottish Provident Institution and the performance of the FSA in dealing with matters raised by Scottish Provident Action for Membership. [27176]

Ruth Kelly: I understand that Scottish Provident Action for Membership has been in contact with the Financial Services Authority. This is primarily a matter for the company and relevant former policyholders.

Stability and Growth Pact

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the stability and growth pact on the conduct of the United Kingdom's fiscal policy. [27001]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's fiscal policy objectives and fiscal rules are set out in the 2001 pre-Budget report. The pre-Budget report contains projections of the public finances which show that the Government remain on track to meet both their fiscal rules over the cycle, including in the cautious case. The projections are consistent with a prudent interpretation of the stability and growth pact which takes into account the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment (as specified in Article 104 of the EU treaty).

Public Works Loan Board

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes have been made in the last three years to the quotas for lending to local authorities by the Public Works Loan Board. [27000]

Ruth Kelly: The total quota entitlements for lending to local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales were £4.962 billion in 1998–99, £4.361 billion in 1999–2000 and £5.256 billion in 2000–01. The rules governing the quota entitlement set by the Public Works Loan Board remained unchanged in each of the three years.

Financial Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross domestic product of *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each region was accounted for by financial services in each of the last four years. [27442]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 17 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accounted for by financial services for the United Kingdom and for the regions and countries. I am replying in his absence. (27442)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA) at basic prices (previously referred to as GDP) with an industrial breakdown for the 12 regions and countries of the United Kingdom. GVA at basic prices differs from GDP only in that it does not account for taxes or subsidies on products. For estimating proportions GVA and GDP can be treated synonymously.

These data were published as an ONS News Release on 27 February 2001 and in the March 2001 edition of Economic Trends, consistent with the United Kingdom National Accounts "The Blue Book" 2000. These publications are available in the House of Commons Library and on the web at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/regionalaccounts.

Mr. Gus O'Donnell

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the presentation and slides produced by Mr. Gus O'Donnell for a seminar with economics undergraduates and students on 30 November 2001; and if he will make a statement. [26556]

Ruth Kelly: The slides have been placed in the House of Commons Library. They were available on the university of Nottingham website following a similar talk given by Mr. O'Donnell at that university on 3 December.

European Central Bank

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proposals he has made to reform the European central bank in order to *(a)* improve policy-making transparency and *(b)* improve the definition of the inflation target; and if he will make a statement; [26547]

(2) what steps he is taking to secure increased transparency and accountability in the decision-making process of the European central bank; [27464]

Ruth Kelly: As the Chancellor said to the House of Lords Select Committee in January 1999,

> "the issues of transparency in decision making, which we dealt with in our reform of the Bank of England and the symmetry of the inflation target, which have proved to be central to the success of the United Kingdom's new monetary framework, will also be issues for future debate in Europe".

Charities (Scotland)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to respond to recommendation 9 of the McFadden report on a regulatory regime for charities in Scotland. [27142]

Ruth Kelly: We are currently examining issues relating to the partnership in service delivery between the voluntary and public sectors, and how barriers to this partnership might be overcome.

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff at the Bank of England are involved in working on the preliminary technical work for joining the euro; and if he will make a statement. [26697]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury is in regular contact with the Bank of England on a whole range of issues, including aspects of the preliminary and technical work. But it is clear that the assessment will be a Government assessment, and the work will be undertaken by the Treasury.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if there will be a political judgment involved in the decision as to whether or not Britain should join the euro; and if he will make a statement. [26550]

Ruth Kelly: As the Chancellor stated in October 1997, the determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Government's decision to join the euro will be affected by *(a)* the level of the pound against the euro and *(b)* the degree of progress on harmonisation in Europe; and if he will make a statement. [26554]

Ruth Kelly: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clean and unambiguous. The five economic tests will define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reforms to the *(a)* fiscal policy rules and *(b)* operational arrangements for monetary policy, in relation to members of the Single European Currency, are being sought by the Government before Britain will join the euro; and if he will make a statement. [26553]

Ruth Kelly: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is his policy to seek a devaluation of the pound sterling against the euro before Britain joins the single European currency; and if he will make a statement. [26555]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Financial Secretary, on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what budget allocation has been made by his Department for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 for carrying out the preliminary technical work for evaluating the five economic tests for membership of the euro; and if he will make a statement. [26544]

Ruth Kelly: No separate budget allocation has been made for this work for either year. The resources needed will be found from the budgets of the several Treasury management units which will contribute to the preliminary and technical work.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the *(a)* officials, *(b)* special advisers and *(c)* Ministers of his Department who are involved in the preliminary technical work for joining the euro; and if he will make a statement; [26549]

(2) how many officials of HM Treasury were involved in the preliminary technical preparations for joining the euro at *(a)* 1 January 2001, *(b)* 1 June 2001, *(c)* 1 December 2001 and *(d)* the latest date for which data are available; and if he will make a statement. [26551]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 25 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 373W.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is *(a)* his estimate of the date on which the Treasury will complete its evaluation of whether the five economic tests for joining the euro have been met and *(b)* the latest date by which their evaluation is due to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [26552]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 2 July, *Official Report,* column 67W.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the five economic tests for membership of the euro will have to be met clearly and unambiguously if Britain is to join the euro; and if he will make a statement. [26548]

Ruth Kelly: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous. The five economic tests will define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Treasury will commence consultation on the proposed changes to the landfill tax credit scheme; and if he will make a statement. [27665]

Mr. Boateng: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will shortly be issuing a consultation document on the shape of any replacement scheme and how any transition arrangements could be managed to ensure that worthwhile projects continue to receive funding.

Euro Preparations Committee

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who are the members of the cross-party HM Treasury Euro-Preparations Committee; how many times the Committee has met in the last four years; on which dates meetings are scheduled during 2002; and if he will make a statement. [26540]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the minutes of the meetings of the cross-party Euro-Preparations Committee; [27488]

(2) if he will list those members of the House who serve on the Euro Preparations Committee. [27462]

Ruth Kelly: All parliamentary parties are invited to send representatives to attend the Cross Party Group on Euro Preparations. The group was reconvened after the last general election, and has met twice since then, the last occasion being 5 December 2001. The Committee plans to meet regularly throughout 2002. Minutes of the meetings are available to those that attend the group.

Eurozone

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecasts have been produced by his Department of eurozone short-term interest rates over the period 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [26541]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury does not publish any interest rate forecasts. Further detail on Treasury economic forecasts can be found in the pre-Budget and Budget reports.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of *(a)* fiscal policy co-ordination in the eurozone and *(b)* monetary/fiscal policy co-ordination in the eurozone; and if he will make a statement. [26696]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor's June 2001 Mansion House speech set out the Government's thinking on how economic policies aimed at achieving stability and economic reform can create a more competitive and prosperous Europe.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to extend to *(a)* charities and *(b)* voluntary organisations, the provisions of section 33 of the VAT Act 1994 on the recovery of import tax. [26537]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no plans to extend the section 33 refund scheme in this way.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the total annual amount of irrecoverable VAT paid by charities. [26538]

Mr. Boateng: No estimate has been made.

Tax Exemptions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer in each of the last four years of granting tax exemptions to the income, profits and gains of Government, foreign states and integral bodies of foreign Governments arising in the United Kingdom. [26110]

Dawn Primarolo: The table details the approximate amounts refunded during the last four years to states or organisations granted sovereign immunity from taxation. Precise details are not held of other income (such as interest) which is relieved from tax at source, or of capital gains. Some of these items would in any case be exempted and payable without deduction of tax under the terms of a double taxation convention, or the UK tax legislation, as those apply to any non resident.

£ million

Tax year	*Total payments*
1997–98	121
1998–99	63
1999–2000	16
2000–01	8
2001–02[1]	2

[1] To 31 December 2001

Notes:

1. The amounts shown include payments of tax credits attaching to dividends payable on shares in UK companies, and tax deducted from interest.

2. The legislation enabling payment of dividend tax credits to exempt bodies was repealed with effect from 6 April 1999. The amounts shown as refunded in subsequent years comprise tax credits attributable to periods prior to 6 April 1999, and tax deducted from interest.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the gain to the Exchequer in each of the last four years of the exemptions granted by overseas Governments to the income, profits and gains of the United Kingdom Government and United Kingdom Government bodies arising within the jurisdiction of those overseas Governments. [26111]

Dawn Primarolo: The average gain to the UK Exchequer from exemptions granted by overseas Governments to income arising on the UK reserves invested abroad, is estimated as approximately £250 million for each of the last four years.

Tax Refunds

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax was refunded to states or organisations granted sovereign immunity in each year since 1990. [26272]

Dawn Primarolo: The table details the approximate amounts refunded to states or organisations granted sovereign immunity from taxation.

£ million

Tax year	*Total paid*
1990–91	138
1991–92	164
1992–93	116
1993–94	117
1994–95	99
1995–96	120
1996–97	89
1997–98	121
1998–99	63
1999–2000	16
2000–01	8
2001–02[1]	2

[1] To 31 December 2001

Notes:

1. The amounts shown include payments of tax credits attaching to dividends payable on shares in UK companies, and tax deducted from interest.

2. The figures for years to 1993–94 inclusive are inflated by some refunds (to international organisations) that did not depend upon sovereign immunity. This element has been removed from the amounts shown for 1994–95 onwards.

3. The legislation enabling payment of dividend tax credit to exempt bodies was repealed with effect from 6 April 1999. The amounts shown as refunded in subsequent years comprise tax credits attributable to periods prior to 6 April 1999 and tax deducted from interest.

Incomes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the total unearned and *(b)* the total earned income of the top (i) one per cent., (ii) five per cent., (iii) 10 per cent., (iv) 20 per cent., (v) 25 per cent., (vi) 50 per cent., (vii) 70 per cent. and (viii) all taxpayers in each of the last five years. [26259]

Dawn Primarolo: The total amount of earned and investment income for the groups of taxpayers requested are in the table.

£ million

Group of taxpayers by range of total income	*Earned income*	*Investment income*	*Total income*
1997–98			
Top 1 per cent.	38	10	47
Top 5 per cent.	87	15	102
Top 10 per cent.	127	19	146
Top 20 per cent.	191	22	213
Top 25 per cent.	218	23	240
Top 50 per cent.	320	27	347
Top 70 per cent.	376	30	405
All taxpayers	425	35	461
1998–99			
Top 1 per cent.	44	10	54
Top 5 per cent.	99	16	115
Top 10 per cent.	143	19	162
Top 20 per cent.	211	24	234
Top 25 per cent.	239	25	264
Top 50 per cent.	346	33	378
Top 70 per cent.	405	36	441
All taxpayers	458	40	498
1999–2000			
Top 1 per cent.	47	10	58
Top 5 per cent.	107	16	123
Top 10 per cent.	154	20	174
Top 20 per cent.	226	24	250
Top 25 per cent.	256	26	282
Top 50 per cent.	370	32	402
Top 70 per cent.	431	36	467
All taxpayers	487	40	527
2000–01			
Top 1 per cent.	54	10	64
Top 5 per cent.	117	15	133
Top 10 per cent.	167	19	186
Top 20 per cent.	242	24	266
Top 25 per cent.	274	25	299
Top 50 per cent.	392	32	424
Top 70 per cent.	456	36	492
All taxpayers	513	40	553
2001–02			
Top 1 per cent.	56	10	66
Top 5 per cent.	121	16	137
Top 10 per cent.	173	19	192
Top 20 per cent.	251	24	275
Top 25 per cent.	284	25	309
Top 50 per cent.	407	32	439
Top 70 per cent.	474	36	510
All taxpayers	534	39	574

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which accountancy firms have provided paid services to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* agencies for which he is responsible in each of the last four years. [27441]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Duty Free Goods

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the yield to the Exchequer in the next three years resulting from the system of duty free goods. [27489]

Mr. Boateng: No revenue is received from the sale of duty free goods.

VAT (Church Repairs)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has made to the European Commission on the issue of reducing VAT on repairs to historic churches; and if he will make a statement. [28081]

Mr. Boateng: The European Commission has indicated that it will consider a reduced rate of VAT for listed places of worship in their general review of the reduced rates in 2003.

The Chancellor announced in Budget 2001 the introduction of a UK-wide grant scheme to help congregations with the VAT cost of the repair and maintenance of listed buildings that are used as places of worship. The effect of the grant is to reduce the VAT cost on eligible repairs from 17.5 to 5 per cent.

This grant scheme, known as the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, was launched on 4 December.

Registrar's Department

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of the Registrar's Department and on progress in reviewing options for its future. [27924]

Ruth Kelly: It is not clear to which Registrar's Department the hon. Gentleman's question relates. If he would clarify the point, I will endeavour to provide him with the information he seeks.

Standing Committee

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions the Standing Committee set up by the Memorandum of Understanding between the Treasury, the Bank of England and the Financial Services Authority has met; and if he will publish the minutes of the meetings. [27918]

Ruth Kelly: The committee meets roughly monthly. Much of its work is confidential, and discussions are often subject to statutory protections of information under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.

Inland Revenue Services (Rural Areas)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the future provision of Inland Revenue services in rural areas. [27920]

Dawn Primarolo: I am aware of no such recent representations relating to the provision of services in rural areas.

Hypothecation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the merits and demerits of hypothecation. [28023]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 526W.

Customs and Excise Forecasts

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons underlying the growth in the level of manual adjustments made by HM Customs and Excise to their modelled forecasts for receipts over the years from 1995–96 to the present. [26412]

Mr. Boateng: Officials in HM Customs and Excise make manual adjustments to forecasts produced by economic models in consultation with officials from HM Treasury. The purpose of these adjustments is to provide more accurate forecasts of revenue receipts. This is conventional practice and such adjustments are made so as to capture events or trends that are not explicitly modelled, eg one-off events, such as the millennium celebrations; changes to the scope of the tax; changing tastes or new products.

The models for alcohol and petrol and diesel were re-estimated by Professor Marcus Chambers in 1999 (published as Government Economic Service Working Paper, Number 138). For most items the manual adjustments have been considerably reduced as a result.

Rail Infrastructure Company

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement in the proposed structure of the successor company to Railtrack. [27891]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers and officials have been kept informed of DTLR's work on this subject.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26997]

Ruth Kelly: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

Pension Tax Codes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis the Inland Revenue indexed the amount of state pension included in pension tax codes between 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [26797]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The Inland Revenue does not routinely index the amount of state pension when it issues tax codes to pensioners before the start of the tax year. It bases the tax code on information provided to it by the Department for Work and Pensions (the Department of Social Security before June 2001) for individuals receiving the state pension, which takes into account the increase in the state pension that comes into effect in the new tax year. If for any reason the information is not provided by DWP, the estimated amount of state pension already included in the tax code is increased by reference to the appropriate percentage increase in state pensions as announced in the pre-Budget report.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer further to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 32W, on Capital Gains Tax, what estimates for the Capital Gains Tax yield in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04 are used to derive the estimates for tax revenues contained in the pre-Budget report of November 2001; and if he will make a statement. [25784]

Dawn Primarolo: The available estimates of Capital Gains Tax receipts in years to 2002–03 are given in Table B11 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report and receipts mostly relate to accruals of the previous tax year. Estimates for later years are highly dependent on assumed growth in asset values.

Rural Support Scheme

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his projection is for the funding required to match the modulated funds in the rural support scheme. [27029]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Expenditure on rural support match funding in Scotland is a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive within their devolved budget.

Economic Stability Document

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 197W, on the Economic Stability Document, how many copies of the volume "Reforming Britain's Economic and Financial Policy" *(a)* have been printed and *(b)* are planned to be printed over the next six months; and if he will make a statement. [25783]

Ruth Kelly: "Reforming Britain's Economic and Financial Policy" has been published commercially by Palgrave, the academic publishing division of Macmillan. The number of copies printed is a commercial decision for the publisher.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to exempt nuclear energy from the climate change levy. [25889]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The climate change levy is designed to encourage energy efficiency across the business and public sectors and to increase the use of sustainable forms of energy. The Government have no plans to exempt the nuclear power industry from the levy.

NHS Charges

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax revenue is generated from c[illegible]es in the national health service. [25297]

Dawn Primarolo: Prescription and other national health service patient charges are outside the scope of VAT. NHS charges are not directly chargeable to income or corporation tax but NHS practitioners will be taxable on their income and profits in the normal way. It is not possible to separate tax revenue on NHS charges from tax revenue on other income.

Charitable Donations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals are making charitable donations; what the total amount given to charity is; and what the cost is to the Exchequer of tax relief thereon. [26253]

Ruth Kelly: Information on the full extent of charitable giving is not available from administrative sources. A study by the Charities Aid Foundation and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) estimated that about 30 million adults in Great Britain gave to charities in the year 2000. A survey by NCVO/NOP suggested that this was worth nearly £6 billion excluding legacies. There are also significant amounts of giving by companies. The cost to the Exchequer of donations under Deeds of Covenant, Gift Aid and Payroll Giving is estimated at £525 million for 2000–01.

Tax Returns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum *(a)* levied and *(b)* paid in fines for late submission of tax returns in each of the last four years. [26231]

Dawn Primarolo: The table shows the amounts for penalties raised by the Inland Revenue from late filing penalties on tax returns over the last four years and the total of fines paid, in each of those years. The Inland Revenue accounts for its receipts in accounts years running from November to October.

Inland Revenue

£

Accounts year	*Penalties raised*	*Penalties paid*
1997	0	0
1998	113,200,000	18,085,069
1999	112,200,000	29,360,479
2000	118,400,000	32,960,556
Total	343,800,000	80,406,104

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been issued with personal tax returns by the Inland Revenue in each of the last five years. [26260]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of personal ITSA returns issued by the Inland Revenue in the last four years is as follows:

Return years	*Issued to*	*Number*
1996–97	31 March 1998	7,686,551
1996–97 and 1997–98	31 March 1999	8,399,694
1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99	31 March 2000	8,567,728
1996–976, 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000	31 March 2001	8,560,419

Figures for the current return years 2000–01 are not yet available.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were fined for late submission of their tax returns in each of the last four years; and what was the total of fines paid, including interest, in each of those years. [26337]

Dawn Primarolo: The table show the number of penalties raised by the Inland Revenue from late filing penalties on tax returns over the last four years and the total of penalties paid, in each of those years. There is no information available about the number of people fined. Interest on penalties cannot be distinguished separately so has not been included.

The Inland Revenue accounts for its receipts in accounts years running from November to October

£

Accounts year	*Penalties raised*	*Penalties paid*
1997	0	0
1998	1,132,000	18,085,069
1999	1,122,000	29,360,479
2000	1,184,000	32,960.556
Total	3,438,000	80,406,104

Private Medical Insurance Tax Relief

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of private medical insurance tax relief if *(a)* one million, *(b)* two million, *(c)* three million, *(d)* four million, *(e)* five million and *(f)* 10 million qualify for tax relief. [26265]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of any income tax relief for private medical insurance would depend on a number of factors including the type of relief given, the exact requirements for qualification for the relief, as well as the numbers of individuals or policies qualifying. Consequently it is not possible to provide the estimates requested.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax reliefs available on redundancy payments. [26341]

Dawn Primarolo: Payments made to compensate an individual for being made redundant are exempt from income tax up to a limit of £30,000 and taxable beyond that.

Advance Corporation Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total advance corporation tax repayments made by the Inland Revenue were in the last financial year. [26287]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him on 8 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 790W.

Hypothecation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce *(a)* full and *(b)* partial hypothecation of taxes. [26134]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 6 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 526W.

Taxpayers (Traceability)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers there were for whom the ground for non-payment of tax in each of the last four years was that they were untraceable. [26236]

Dawn Primarolo: The tables show, for the years 1997 to 2000, the latest year available, the number of cases and amounts involved where tax was classed as irrecoverable because the taxpayer has become untraceable or has moved abroad.

Table 1: Untraceable

	Income Tax		*Capital Gains Tax*	
Year	*£*	*Cases*	*£*	*Cases*
1997	39,110,709.17	39,906	1,459,842.88	194
1998	29,846,737.49	23,265	1,472,515.64	144
1999	23,557,517.41	16,364	1,695,508.31	99
2000	16,199,976.11	12,365	612,182.11	61

Table 2: Moved abroad

	Income Tax		*Capital Gains Tax*	
Year	*£*	*Cases*	*£*	*Cases*
1997	7,663,933.70	4,844	580,057.07	111
1998	7,398.148.66	4,238	1,690,326.69	74
1999	6,012,605.04	2,572	351,713.29	47
2000	7,269,203.50	5.558	1,103.379.09	106

Tax Write-offs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax was remitted or written off as irrecoverable in each of the last four years; and what was the number of taxpayers for whom the ground for non-payment was that they *(a)* had gone abroad or were untraceable, *(b)* were insolvent and *(c)* were suffering hardship. [26229]

Dawn Primarolo: The tables show, for the years 1997 to 2000, the latest year available, the number of cases and amounts involved where tax was classed as irrecoverable or was written off because the taxpayer was *(a)* untraceable or had moved abroad, *(b)* was insolvent, *(c)* was suffering hardship.

Table a: Taxpayer untraceable or moved abroad

	Income Tax		*Capital Gains Tax*	
Year	*£*	*Cases*	*£*	*Cases*
1997	46,774,642.87	44,750	2,039,899.95	305
1998	37,244,886.15	27,503	3,162,842.33	218
1999	29,570,122.45	18,936	2,047,221.60	146
2000	23,469,179.61	17.923	1,715,561.20	167

Table b: Taxpayer insolvent

	Income Tax		*Capital Gains Tax*	
Year	*£*	*Cases*	*£*	*Cases*
1997	306,630,972.66	99,813	10,352,690.11	1,030
1998	402,816,473.26	90,610	17,393,163.47	900
1999	358,843,664.48	82,327	10,764,638.35	683
2000	266,949,276.47	80,020	2,449,982.29	349

Table c: Taxpayer suffering hardship

	Income Tax		Capital Gains Tax	
Year	*£*	*Cases*	*£*	*Cases*
1997	2,084,183.53	3,660	0.00	0
1998	2,327,543.69	6,333	71,494.40	12
1999	2,190,979.15	3,404	2,492.40	1
2000	2,927,225.17	3,172	4,930.00	1

Corporation Tax

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the results were in terms of additional tax, duty, interest and penalties achieved in each of the last three years to 31 March 2001 *(a)* by Inland Revenue large business offices (corporation tax) as a whole expressed in terms of recoveries from individual taxpayers banded (i) £0 to £1 million, (ii) £1 million to £10 million, (iii) £10 million to £50 million, (iv) £50 million to £100 million, and (v) £100 million and above, and *(b)* by each of the geographic offices of the large business office (corporation tax) expressed as a total for that geographic office. [26842]

Dawn Primarolo: Inland Revenue Large Business Office (corporation tax) records the adjustments made to corporation tax profits as a result of its work and the estimated tax effect of each adjustment. The tables give the requested analyses of tax effect of adjustments for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Detailed analyses for 1998–99, and analyses of related interest charges or penalties, are not available. The geographic analysis allocates yield to the office currently dealing with the relevant case: because of transfers of cases between offices that may reflect work done in a different large business office location.

Table (a)

	Number of adjustments	*Total yield (£ million)*
1999–2000		
£0 to £1 million	4,483	503
£1 million to £10 million	304	784
£10 million to £50 million	26	527
£50 million to £100 million	1	59
£100 million+	0	0
2000–01		
£0 to £1 million	4,038	518
£1 million to £10 million	318	861
£10 million to £50 million	13	262
£50 million to £100 million	1	100
£100 million+	2	398

Table (b)

£ million

Office	*1999–2000 yield*	*2000–01 yield*
Bristol	85	163
City A	146	160
City B	52	58
City C	46	60
City D	288	174
City E	104	352
City F	5	8
Edinburgh	232	126
Glasgow	72	79
Leeds	70	96
Liverpool	57	77
Manchester	195	168
Nottingham	115	179
Peterborough	97	56
West Midlands	291	368
Cases no longer in the large business office	17	15

Public Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total amount of public expenditure per head of population in each of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom in each of the last four years. [27451]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information on identifiable total managed public expenditure per head by country is given in Tables 8.2b to 8.6b of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02 (Cm 5101) published in April 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the expenditure of local authority capital receipts in each of the last four years has counted as public expenditure; and what is the total amount of such expenditure. [27450]

Mr. Andrew Smith: All capital expenditure, net of all sales of capital assets, by local authorities counts as public expenditure as measured by Total Managed Expenditure (TME).

Gross capital expenditure (before netting off sale receipts) by local authorities is shown in table 6.8 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02, Cm5101". Receipts from the sale of capital assets are shown in table. 6.9.

Further information on capital receipts in England was published in tables 6.5 and 6.7 of "Local Government Financial Statistics 2001."

Value for Money

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission independent research into the progress of Departments in securing value for money. [27469]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The National Audit Office produce regular independent reports on value for money issues across Government.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27305]

Ruth Kelly: The cost to the Department's budget of fraud (excluding thefts) since 1 May 1997 is estimated at £18,030. Steps have been taken to learn lessons and to minimise the risk of reoccurrence.

Education Maintenance Awards

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning funding for education maintenance awards as part of the comprehensive spending review. [27383]

Dawn Primarolo: To date, the Chancellor has received no such representations.

Financial Services Regulation

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are engaged in financial services regulation. [27613]

Ruth Kelly: 2,765 staff are engaged in the regulation of financial services in the UK, according to the FSA annual report 2000–01. This excludes support staff. This is an increase from 2,548 staff in 1999–2000.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are directly employed as regulators by the FSA. [27614]

Ruth Kelly: At 31 March 2001, the FSA had 2,119 employees, an increase from 1,961 on 31 March 2000. The average number over the year employed as regulators by the FSA was 2,041. These figures are quoted in the FSA annual report 2000–01.

The annual report gives a breakdown of the average FSA employment over 2001:

	Number
Supervision and Policy	1,085
Enforcement and Consumer Relations	463
Central Departments	160
Operations and Support	273
UKLA	60
Total	2,041

Pilot Projects

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what pilot projects have been undertaken in his Department since May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [27604]

Ruth Kelly: Pilot projects are undertaken in the Treasury when appropriate. A central record is not kept and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bank Notes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has on the effects of the rise in part-time employment on the level of demand for bank notes. [27443]

Ruth Kelly: There could be some effect on the demand for money from labour market developments, such as the rise in part-time employment, although the levels of economic activity and prices, nominal interest rates and the inflation rate are usually viewed as more important. Contributory factors to the growth in part-time employment are assessed in Box B1, Annex B of the Financial Stateral and Budget Reportof FSBR 2001.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, dated 4 December 2001 with regard to Patricia Andrews. [27318]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have done so.

Population Statistics (Kirklees)

Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the numbers of residents (1) in each parliamentary constituency wholly or partly within Kirklees metropolitan council area in each year since 1991 indicating the percentages in the age ranges *(a)* 0 to 4, *(b)* 5 to 14, *(c)* 15 to 18, *(d)* 19 to 25, *(e)* 26 to 59 and *(f)* over 60 years; [26243]

(2) if he will estimate the numbers of residents in Kirklees metropolitan council area in each year since 1991, indicating the percentage in the age ranges *(a)* 0 to 4, *(b)* 5 to 14, *(c)* 15 to 18, *(d)* 19 to 25, *(e)* 26 to 59 and *(f)* over 60 years. [26242]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Ann Taylor, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions concerning the number of residents in Kirklees and its parliamentary constituencies. I am replying in his absence. (26243, 26242)

The attached table gives population estimates for Kirklees Metropolitan council area, together with the percentage age distribution of the population.

ONS does not produce population estimates on parliamentary constituency boundaries. The smallest area level for which we produce population estimates is for local authorities.

The population estimate for Kirklees from mid-1991 to mid-2000 including a percentage age distribution

		Percentage in each age range					
Mid-year	*Estimated number of residents (thousand)*	*0 to 4*	*5 to 14*	*15 to 18*	*19 to 25*	*26 to 59*	*60 and over*
1991	381.5	7.1	13.1	5.3	11.1	43.8	19.6
1992	383.2	7.1	13.2	5.0	11.0	44.2	19.5
1993	385.8	7.0	13.4	4.8	10.7	44.7	19.4
1994	386.9	7.0	13.4	4.8	10.4	45.1	19.3
1995	387.7	6.9	13.4	4.9	10.0	45.4	19.3
1996	388.8	6.8	13.5	5.1	9.7	45.7	19.2
1997	389.5	6.7	13.6	5.2	9.4	45.9	19.2
1998	390.9	6.7	13.6	5.1	9.3	46.1	19.3
1999	392.3	6.6	13.6	5.0	9.3	46.1	19.3
2000	395.1	6.6	13.5	5.0	9.5	46.1	19.2

Cost of Living Index

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give an index for the cost of living for consumers based on the retail prices index but excluding indirect taxes for each of the last 10 years. [26251]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking if he will give an index for the cost of living for consumers based on the Retail Prices Index but excluding indirect taxes for each of the last ten years. I am replying in his absence. (26251)

I am unable to provide an index exactly answering these requirements due to the disproportionate cost involved. However, the ONS does publish a version of the Retail Prices Index, namely RPIY, that excludes both mortgage interest payments and indirect taxes. The annual average of RPIY for the years 1990 to 2000 is presented below together with the annual average of the 12-month percentage change. The annual average figure for 2001 will be available on Tuesday 15 January 2002 when the Retail Prices Index for December is published.

RPIY (all items RPI excluding mortgage interest payments and indirect taxes)[1]: Annual averages 1999–2000

Calendar year	Index January 1987 = 100	Change over 12 months (percentage)
1990	121.4	7.3
1991	129.5	6.7
1992	135.1	4.3
1993	139.0	2.9
1994	141.3	1.7
1995	144.5	2.3
1996	148.2	2.6
1997	151.5	2.2
1998	154.5	2.0
1999	157.1	1.7
2000	159.9	1.8

[1] The taxes excluded are council tax, VAT, duties, vehicle excise duty, insurance tax and airport tax.

Source:

Office for National Statistics

These data, together with the indices for each individual month, are available on the ONS website www.statistics.gov.uk/rpi.

VAT-Exempt Goods and Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate total expenditure in the latest year for which figures are available on *(a)* food, *(b)* fuel, *(c)* children's clothes and shoes, *(d)* books, newspapers and periodicals and *(e)* bus, tube and train fares. [26615]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning household expenditure for the latest year for which figures are available. I am replying in his absence. (26615)

Expenditure by households is published quarterly as part of the National Accounts in 'Consumer Trends', available on the ONS website at www.statistics.gov.uk/products/p242.asp. The year 2000 is the latest complete calendar year for which figures are available. The information on children's clothing and footwear is not separately available. An approximate allocation between adults' and children's goods may be made using more detailed information on average weekly expenditure published in "Family Spending 1999–2000", Table 7.1.

Company Investment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total level of fixed investment was in each of the last five years by industrial and commercial companies in plant and machinery, dwellings, company cars, other vehicles, other new buildings and works purchase less sales of land and existing buildings and all fixed assets. [26261]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question about the total level of fixed investment in each of the last five years. I am replying in his absence. (26261)

Fixed capital formation for the private sector, public non-financial corporations and general government can be found in the "United Kingdom National Accounts: Blue Book", which was last published by ONS in 2001 [ISSN 0267–8691], under tables 9.2 and 9.4 (pages 261 and 262). These tables contain most of the asset information as requested in the question. Separate estimates for company cars are not available. These are included in the transport equipment figures.

Further fixed capital formation data can be found in our business investment quarterly first release at the following website address:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/binv1201.pdf

Copies of the United Kingdom National Accounts: Blue Book is available in the House of Commons Library.

Dependent Children

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average income of women of working age with *(a)* no dependent children, *(b)* at least one dependent child under five years and *(c)* children aged five to 16 years. [26257]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 15 January 2002:

The national Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the average income of working-age women. I am replying in his absence. (26257)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the gross hourly earnings of female employees of working age (ie. those aged 16–59 years) by age of youngest dependent child. The latest available estimates are for summer (June to August) 2001. These are given in the table overleaf.

Average gross hourly earnings of female employees of working age[1] by age of youngest dependent child[2]: United Kingdom; summer (June to August) 2001; not seasonally adjusted

£

	Average gross hourly earnings
All female employees aged 16–59	8.0
With youngest dependent child aged:	
Under 5 years	9.0
5–16 years	7.7
17–18 years	8.8
With no dependent children	7.9

[1] Women aged 16–59 years

[2] Children under 16 years of age; or those aged 16–18 years who are never married and in full-time education

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Personal Sector Deficit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the financial deficit of the personal sector was in each year since 1997 in *(a)* constant and *(b)* cash terms, (i) in total and (ii) per household. [26284]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question about what the financial deficit of the personal sector was in each year since 1997 in (a) constant and (b) cash terms, (i) in total and (ii) per household. I am replying in his absence. (26284)

The net lending/borrowing of the combined households and non-profit institutions serving households is available on the National Statistics website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk. The time series NSSZ is also available within table A41 of the release "United Kingdom Economic Accounts".

Information on the number of households in Great Britain is also available within the publication "Housing Statistics 2001" and is found in table 4.14. Data for the United Kingdom is not available.

Data for net lending/borrowing at constant prices are not available.

Suicide Rates

Dr. Fox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the death rate per 100,000 due to suicide and undetermined injury was in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [27402]

Ruth Kelly: The information falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Dr. Liam Fox, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning the death rate per 100,000 due to suicide and undetermined injury in each of the last five years for which figures are available. I am replying in his absence. (27402)

The figures requested are given in the table below:

Calendar year	*Death rate per 100,000 persons*
1996	9.4
1997	9.5
1998	9.8
1999	9.8
2000	9.3

Note:

Suicide and undetermined injury is defined by ONS using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision: E950-E959, E980-£989, excluding E988.8.

Source:

ONS

Cancer Deaths

Dr. Fox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the death rate per 100,000 among people under 65 due to cancer was in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what the death rates were in the age groups *(a)* 45–55 and *(b)* 55–65. [27401]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Dr. Liam Fox, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning the death rate per 100,000 amongst people aged under 65 due to cancer in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what were the death rates in the age groups (a) 45–54 and (b) 55–64. I am replying in his absence. (27401)

The answer is given in the table below:

Death rate per 100,000 persons

Calendar year	*All ages under 65*	*Ages*	
		45–54	*55–64*
1996	77.3	137.6	394.1
1997	74.8	134.0	378.9
1998	75.3	134.2	380.4
1999	73.9	130.8	369.5
2000	73.1	128.7	359.6

Note:

Cancer is defined by ONS using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision: 140–208.

Source:

ONS

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what mechanism recipients of the proposed child tax credit and working credit will be able to recover underpayments of tax credit which arise through an over-estimate by the claimant of his income in the current year. [26794]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* If an underpayment of tax credit should arise because of a difference between estimated and actual income for a

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tax year, it would be identified as part of the end of year process of finalising claims and paid out by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in cases where assessment for tax credit purposes is based only on that part of the increase in current year income which exceeds a threshold, whether subsequent assessments will take account of that part of increased income below the threshold. [26798]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Decisions on what regulations to propose under the provisions of Clause 7(3) of the Tax Credits Bill have not yet been taken. But if it were the case that part of a rise in income in the current tax year, by comparison with the previous year, were to be left out of account in assessing tax credits for the current year, the full amount of the income would be relevant in deciding tax credit entitlement in the following tax year.

Tax Credits Bill

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason the definition of a couple for purposes of the Tax Credits Bill is different from that used in the State Pension Credit Bill. [26796]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The definition of couple used in the Tax Credits Bill follows that used in the Taxes Acts, including for the existing children's tax credit.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish draft versions of the regulations referred to in the Tax Credits Bill in advance of the scrutiny of that Bill in Committee. [26795]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Draft regulations under the powers provided in the Tax Credits Bill will be made available as soon as possible.

Union Fees

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the trade unions which have tax relief for their members' membership fees. [26792]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Details of organisations, including trade unions, for which tax relief can be claimed on fees paid to them can be found in the Inland Revenue booklet List 3, copies of which can be found on the Inland Revenue website.

Pensioner Taxation

David Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment has been made of the number of pensioner couples whose tax allowances have been reduced by the abolition of married couples allowance resulting from them attaining the age of 60 or 65 years after 5 April 2000; [26890]

(2) what assessment has been made of the number of pensioner couples in north-west Leicestershire whose tax allowances have been reduced by the abolition of married couples allowance resulting from them attaining the age of 60 or 65 years after 5 April 2000. [26889]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* No taxpayer will have their tax allowances reduced as a result of reaching 60 or 65 after 5 April 2000. Most pensioner taxpayers will qualify for an increased personal allowance after reaching the age of 65.

Drug Smuggling

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the level of drug smuggling from Jamaica to the United Kingdom in the last five years. [26530]

Mr. Boateng: Customs seized 11 tonnes of cocaine destined for the UK during the financial year 2000–01 of which about 750 kilos arrived from Jamaica.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what form the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review will be published; and if he will make a statement. [26139]

Mr. Andrew Smith: It is anticipated that the conclusions of the 2002 Spending Review will be published in a Command Paper and accompanied by a statement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as with those of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review, and the 2000 Spending Review.

VAT

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to synchronise the VAT rates between local education authorities and further education colleges in respect of further and sixth form education. [27382]

Mr. Boateng: VAT is not charged on education taught in LEA schools or in further education colleges.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT was paid per average household on all goods and services, at current prices, in each of the last four years. [26226]

Mr. Boateng: Information on VAT receipts as a percentage of household expenditure for the years 1991–92 to 2000–01 is contained within the Value Added Tax Factsheet September 2001 produced by Customs and Excise, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

VAT (Digitised Products)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason VAT is applied to digitised books. [26446]

Mr. Boateng: Digitised books do not fall within the ordinary meaning of books and cannot be zero-rated for VAT.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what analysis he has made of the risk to future revenue from VAT as a result of the growth of trade in digitised products. [26447]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise have for several years have been working alongside business and the UK's partners in the EU and OECD to ensure that the tax system adapts to increased trade in digitised products, and to minimise any risks to the revenue. Customs' current assessment is that the potential risk is very small.

VAT (Audiology Treatment)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change VAT on hearing aid audiologist treatment. [25971]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise are consulting businesses and bodies such as the Royal National Institute for the Deaf to assess whether recent legal rulings have implications for the VAT treatment of audiologist's services provided to a patient at the same time as a hearing aid.

VAT (Charities)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his current estimate is of the revenue that would be forgone were he to treat charities in the same way as local authorities under section 33 of the VAT Act 1994. [26450]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimate has been made.

VAT Misdeclarations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue the Exchequer has received in penalties arising from misdeclaration of value-added tax *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the total tax value for VAT in each of the last four years. [26113]

Mr. Boateng: It is not possible to provide the information requested since no separate record is kept of payments of VAT misdeclaration penalties. Payments of all penalties as a percentage of total VAT receipts over the last four years, all expressed in real terms, were as shown in the table.

	Penalties receipts (£ million)	*Total VAT receipts*[1] *(£ billion)*	*Percentage*
2000–01	13.5	102.6	0.13
1999–2000	12.0	98.2	0.12
1998–99	10.6	93.7	0.11
1997–98	10.4	91.6	0.11

[1] Does not include penalty receipts

Manufacturing Productivity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of manufacturing productivity in each of the last four years. [26146]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are implementing a comprehensive strategy for delivering stronger productivity growth in the UK. This addresses issues at the regional, national and international levels and involves stakeholders from across all sectors of the economy.

E-commerce

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the present and future impact of e-commerce on the concept for tax purposes of corporate residence. [26449]

Dawn Primarolo: E-commerce of itself is unlikely to have significant short-term impact on the concept for tax purposes of corporate residence. However the UK tax authorities continue to be engaged in discussions at OECD, in consultation with the business community, on this and related e-commerce issues.

Tax Planning (Revenue Losses)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax lost to the Inland Revenue in each of the last four years as a consequence of tax planning by accountancy firms. [26234]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax planning is a term commonly used to describe the organisation of financial affairs in an entirely lawful manner in order to minimise liability to tax. It is not really practicable to estimate the tax liabilities that would have arisen had accountants organised the affairs of their clients in a less efficient manner. Consequently, there can be no reliable measure of the tax lost to the Inland Revenue as a consequence of tax planning.

Beer Duty

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumption he has made in his forecasts for the revenue from beer duty of the rate of duty pass-on by retailers to their customers. [26454]

Mr. Boateng: Appendix A1 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2000 details the assumption made regarding pass-on of excise duty by retailers to consumers. This assumption is unchanged.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of changes to the rate of beer duty on the volume of duty-paid imports from other EU countries. [26453]

Mr. Boateng: About 1 per cent. of all beer consumed in the UK has been legitimately bought duty-paid in another EU country. The impact of changes to the rate of beer duty on this volume appears to have been negligible.

Beer Clearances

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what he attributes the fall in beer clearances over the last decade. [26413]

Mr. Boateng: Between 1990–2001 and 2000–01 beer clearances fell by 9 per cent. on the basis of alcohol content. The fall is likely to have resulted from numerous contributory factors which are not possible to attribute accurately.

Green Technology Challenge

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he expects to receive the agreement of the EU Commission for his proposals to introduce further enhanced capital allowances under the Green Technology Challenge; [26421]

(2) when he will publish details of the technologies which he proposes should be eligible for enhanced capital allowances under the Green Technology Challenge; [26451]

(3) what level of first year enhanced capital allowances he plans to introduce under the Green Technology Challenge; [26431]

(4) if it is his policy that the sum available for enhanced capital allowances under the Green Technology Challenge should be cash limited; [26432]

(5) what representations he has made to the European Commission in respect of the Green Technology Challenge proposals listed in paragraph 7.23 of the pre-Budget report. [26419]

Mr. Boateng: The Government propose to introduce enhanced capital allowances under the Green Technology Challenge during 2002–03. Work is continuing in order to identify specific technologies that are suitable candidates for inclusion in the scheme. Details of qualifying technologies will be announced in due course. Decisions on whether it is necessary to seek European Commission approval for the inclusion of specific technologies in the scheme will be taken once qualifying technologies have been identified.

It is not currently proposed that the sum available for enhanced capital allowances under the Green Technology Challenge will be cash limited. The proposal is that all investments in eligible technologies will qualify for enhanced capital allowances. No decision has been made on the level of first year enhanced capital allowances to be introduced under the Green Technology Challenge.

BP Ltd. *v.* EEC

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for Government policy of the decision of the European Court of Justice in the case of BP Ltd. *v.* EEC (27 September 2000, Ref. T-184/97). [26444]

Mr. Boateng: The Government believe that their policies are consistent with the decision of the Court of First Instance of the European Court of Justice in the case of BP Ltd. *v.* EEC. The case, however, currently proceeds on appeal to the ECJ.

Alcohol

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of drawback paid on alcohol in 2000–01. [26428]

Mr. Boateng: The level of drawback paid on alcohol in 2000–01 was £32,619,309.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue yield and impact on the retail prices index of revalorisation of excise duties at *(a)* the present rate of inflation and *(b)* the present rate of inflation less the mortgage component of inflation. [26252]

Ruth Kelly: The revenue yield from changes in excise duties is shown in Table 6 of "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" published by HM Treasury in November 2001. The impact on the retail prices index of revalorising a particular excise good is contingent on a number of factors including the nature of the excise good in question, and its retail price at the time of any duty change.

Income Tax

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many PAYE coding notices changes were made by the Inland Revenue in *(a)* 1970–71, *(b)* 1980–81, *(c)* 1990–91 and *(d)* 2000–01. [26949]

Dawn Primarolo: The total number of PAYE coding notices issued during the year 2000–01 was 31,056,370.

Statistics for 1970–71, 1980–81 and 1990–91 are no longer available.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what studies the Inland Revenue has commissioned into reform of the administration of income tax since 1997; and if he will list their *(a)* names, *(b)* authors and *(c)* publication dates or expected publication dates; [26862]

(2) what studies the Inland Revenue has commissioned into replacing the PAYE coding system with a non-cumulative, end-of-year reconciliation system *(a)* before 1997 and *(b)* since 1997; and if he will place copies in the Library; [26864]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue keeps all aspects of the administration of income tax including PAYE under continuous review. Internal reviews of the tax system or possible changes to it are published where it is appropriate to do so.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the proportion of income to be paid in tax by the top *(a)* 1 per cent., *(b)* 5 per cent. and *(c)* 10 per cent. and the bottom 50 per cent. of tax payers in 2001–02. [26212]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for income tax as a percentage of total income for the quantile groups specified are in the table.

Quantile group	*Tax liability as a percentage of total income 2001–02*
Top 1 per cent.	34
Top 5 per cent.	30
Top 10 per cent.	27
Bottom 50 per cent.	8

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the number of people who would cease to pay income tax if the personal income tax allowance were raised to *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £7,500 and *(c)* £10,000; and what his estimate is of the cost of raising the personal income tax allowance to (i) £5,000, (ii) £7,500 and (iii) £10,000. [26335]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of people who would cease to pay income tax in 2001–02 if the personal allowance were raised and the cost of raising the allowance are shown in the table.

Personal allowance	*Number of people taken out of income tax (thousand)*	*Cost of increasing the personal allowance (£ billion)*
£5,000	600	2.6
£7,500	3,700	15.1
£10,000	6,800	25.9

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the pre-Budget report 2001.

Tax Units

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of tax units will be paying more income tax and national insurance in real terms in 2001–02 than in 1996–97; and how many tax units will be paying a higher proportion of their gross income in tax and national insurance in 2001–02 than 1996–97. [26276]

Dawn Primarolo: It would be possible to provide a reliable answer only at disproportionate cost.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of tax evasion in each of the last four years have led to a recovery of funds; and what proportion of the sums recovered in each case was *(a)* tax, *(b)* interest and *(c)* penalty. [26237]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue annual reports, available in the House of Commons Library, set out details, by regional office, of the total number of tax inquiries undertaken for each year.

Those reports also set out details for each year of the total additional tax, interest and penalties brought into charge as a result of work tackling non-compliance. Details of the number of cases that led to a recovery of funds and the proportion of those recoveries made up of tax, interest and penalties are not readily available and the costs of isolating that information would be disproportionate.

Tax Avoidance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures have been taken in each of the last four years to counter tax avoidance; and how much has been saved in each of those years. [26332]

Dawn Primarolo: Measures to counter tax avoidance are a regular feature of legislation presented to Parliament in the Finance Bill. However, it is not feasible to measure the difference between the amount of tax paid to the Exchequer and the amount of tax that would have been paid had these measures not been in place. It is therefore not possible to assess with any degree of accuracy the amount of tax saved as a result of anti-avoidance measures.

Incomes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* amount and *(b)* share of pre-tax income accrued to the (i) top 1 per cent., (ii) top 5 per cent., (iii) top 10 per cent., (iv) top 25 per cent., (v) bottom 70 per cent., (vi) bottom 5 per cent. and (vii) all taxpayers in 2000–01; and what the (A) amount and (B) share of tax liability was for each of these groups. [26256]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is in the table.

Group of taxpayers	*Pre-tax income (£ million)*[1]	*Percentage of total*	*Tax liability (£ million)*[1]	*Percentage of total*
Top				
1 per cent.	64,000	12	21,900	23
5 per cent.	133,000	24	39,500	41
10 per cent.	186,000	34	49,700	51
Bottom				
70 per cent.	224,000	41	24,100	25
5 per cent.	7,000	1	70	[2]—
All	553,000	100	97,000	100

[1] Non-taxable income such as that from ISAs is not included as this information is not available on an individual basis.

[2] Negligible

These estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Inland Revenue Rewards

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to section 32 of the Inland Revenue Regulation Act 1890, if Commissioners have made use of this power since 1972 to reward their own officers involved in a case. [26843]

Dawn Primarolo: We are not aware of any cases in which the Commissioners of Inland Revenue have used their power under section 32 of the Inland Revenue Regulation Act 1890 to reward their own officers.

Children's Tax Credit

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of families in Stoke-on-Trent who will benefit from the increase in children's tax credit in April 2002. [26933]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government announced in Budget 2001 that we would increase the children's tax credit to up to £20 a week for families in the year of a child's birth from April 2002. This is expected to benefit around half a million families, but no estimate is available of the number that will benefit in Stoke-on-Trent.

Smuggling

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cars with their contents of tobacco and alcohol were confiscated by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in the last 12 months; and how many of these cars originated in the north-east. [26726]

Mr. Boateng: Customs records of the numbers of vehicles seized do not disaggregate between the nature of the offences, the type of vehicle or the origin of the vehicle involved in each case.

For the number of vehicles seized by Customs, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 625W.

World AIDS Day Postcards

Ann McKechin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many World AIDS Day postcards promoted by the World Development Movement and Jubilee Scotland were received by his Department in 2001. [R] [26907]

Mr. Boateng: 746 World AIDS Day postcards promoted by the World Development Movement and Jubilee Scotland were received by HM Treasury in 2001.

Aircraft Fuel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to tax aircraft fuel. [26920]

Mr. Boateng: The Government's taxation plans are announced in my right hon. Friend's annual Budget.

Poverty Relief

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what conditions he has set to define the relief of poverty in respect of his 2015 targets arising from trade liberalisation as set out in his Ottawa speech. [26934]

Mr. Boateng: Full trade liberalisation could lift at least 300 million people out of poverty by 2015. Even diminishing protectionist tariffs in agriculture and in industrial goods and services by 50 per cent. would boost the world's yearly income by nearly 400 billion US dollars, a boost to growth of 1.4 per cent. Developing countries would gain 150 billion US dollars and a greater than average increase in GDP growth.

That is why we strongly welcome the WTO agreement in Doha to launch a new trade round focused on development. And in the next phase we must take forward the agreements to open up trade in agriculture, build the capacity of developing countries to participate more effectively in the negotiations and open up greater access to medicines.

On the other hand developing countries must pursue corruption-free policies for stability, for opening up trade and for creating a favourable environment for investment. In return, developed countries should be prepared to increase assistance to meet the 2015 UN millennium development goals agreed.

Developed countries have the responsibility for ensuring that trade liberalisation is accompanied by social justice, creating conditions under which people in developing countries are enabled to benefit from expanding economic opportunities.

Towards this end all developed countries should offer access to all but military products from the least developed countries and, by banning export credit guarantees for unproductive expenditure, discourage and diminish the diversion to arms expenditure of resources needed for education and health.

Tax Relief (Residential Care)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give tax relief for those taxpayers who are paying the full cost of a spouse residing in a nursing home. [26910]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have no plans to introduce tax relief for those taxpayers who are paying the full cost of a spouse residing in a nursing home.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the working families tax credit on the income levels of the poorest working families in the Edinburgh North and Leith constituency. [27484]

Dawn Primarolo: The working families tax credit (WFTC) is a success in making work pay for families with children. At August 2001 WFTC was helping 1,270,000 families. This is 52 per cent. more families than were benefiting from family credit at its peak, and families were receiving on average around an extra £35 per week. In the Edinburgh, North and Leith constituency 1,216 families with children were benefiting from WFTC at August 2001.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people *(a)* are eligible for the working families tax credit and *(b)* claim the working families tax credit. [27761]

Dawn Primarolo: The numbers of recipients of working families tax credit (WFTC) are shown in the WFTC Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library. No reliable estimate of the number of families eligible for WFTC in 2000–01 can be attempted until the Family Resources Survey for 2000–01 is analysed.

Insurance (Reserving)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the tax system on reserving in the insurance business. [27440]

Dawn Primarolo: No such assessment has been made.

Tax Competition

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the most recent *(a)* report and *(b)* other publication of the Code of Conduct Group on harmful tax competition. [27463]

Dawn Primarolo: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer explained in the answer he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 770W, the ECOFIN Council received a written report from the Code of Conduct Group at its meeting on 4 December 2001.

The Code of Conduct states that it is for ECOFIN to decide whether reports should be published. On 28 February 2000, the ECOFIN Council agreed to publish the Code of Conduct Group (Business Taxation) Report of 23 November 1999.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many domestic motor cars were seized by HM Customs and Excise during 2000; [27203]

(2) how many domestic motor cars were seized by HM Customs and Excise as a consequence of seizures of *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* tobacco during 2000; [27204]

(3) how many motor cars have been seized by HM Customs and Excise *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* which were registered in west Yorkshire, *(c)* which were registered in south Yorkshire and *(d)* which were registered in Barnsley in the last three years. [27202]

Mr. Boateng: Customs records of the number of vehicles seized do not disaggregate between the nature of the offences, the type of vehicle or the origin of the vehicle in each case.

For the number of vehicles seized by Customs in 2000–01, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 625W.

For the number of vehicles seized by Customs in 1998–99 and 1999–2000, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on 8 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 794W.

Lower Income Earners

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the proportion of the income of the bottom 10 per cent. of income earners in each of the last four years taken by *(a)* VAT and *(b)* other indirect tax. [27439]

Mr. Boateng: Precise information on income earners is not available. The closest information available is that published in "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income, 1999–2000", Economic Trends No. 569, April 2001.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes in the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [27600]

Mr. Boateng: An assessment of the impact of changes to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme will be made as part of the current review of the scheme. A consultation document will be issued shortly.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 805W, question 25025, on the aggregates levy, if he will specify the environmental benefits the imposition of the aggregates levy in Scotland will deliver. [27475]

Mr. Boateng: The aggregates levy will bring about environmental benefits by making the price of aggregates better reflect the environmental costs of their extraction (noise, dust, visual intrusion, loss of amenity and damage to biodiversity) and by encouraging the more efficient use of aggregate and the greater use of alternative recycled materials.

HEALTH

Tilt Report

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have moved out of hospitals as a result of the implementation of the Tilt report. [22089]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 December 2001]*: Additional funding is being made available, as recommended in the Tilt report, to facilitate the movement, by 2004, of patients no longer needing high security care. The funding is being made available to aid the development of new services to help reduce delays in moving patients. A target for the number of patients to be moved, and the associated funding, has recently been agreed with each region.

IT Systems

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the use of the international ICD coding standard for recording clinical details for all patient activity in other countries. [10262]

Ms Blears: There are approximately 41 countries that have planned or actually implemented the latest version of ICD which is ICD-10 for the coding of national mortality and morbidity statistics including the United States of America, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many episodes of clinical psychology treatment occurred in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1999–2000. [14109]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 November 2001]*: During the period from 1996–97 to 1999–2000 the number of new episodes of care fell by nearly 5 per cent. from 197,000 to 188,000. However, the average duration of each episode rose. All information relating to new episodes of care for clinical psychology services for each year since 1988–89, including an explanation of the data, is contained in the statistical report "Clinical psychology summary information for 2000–01, England". A copy of the summary is in the Library and is available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/public/KT240001.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many calls the London ambulance service received during the most recent 12 months for which figures are available; [24690]

(2) how many hoax calls were made to the London ambulance service during the last year; [24698]

(3) what proportion of calls made to the London ambulance service over the last year that were acted upon were deemed inappropriate calls; [24688]

(4) what was the average time it took, for the latest year for which figures are available, for the London ambulance service to respond to calls; and what the equivalent figures were for the previous three years; [24629]

(5) what was the average response time of the London ambulance service over the last year; [24689]

(6) how many call outs were made to the London ambulance service in the latest year for which figures are available; [24630]

(7) how many calls to the London ambulance service during the last year were screened, with a subsequent determination that the sending of an ambulance was not necessary. [24709]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Information about the number of emergency calls and the number resulting in an emergency response arriving at the scene of the reported incident for the London ambulance national health service trust are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000/01". The bulletin also contains information about the response times to emergency calls. A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Information on the number of hoax calls made to the London Ambulance Service (LAS) is not collected centrally. However, the LAS classify a hoax call as one where, on arrival of an ambulance crew or first responder, there is no patient to be found at the scene. The LAS recorded 391 such calls between the beginning of January and the end of November 2001. This figure represents less than 0.5 per cent. of the total workload for that period.

The LAS recognise that the majority of patients who dial 999 require some form of medical help or other assistance but also believe that, for many, their illness and injuries do not require an emergency ambulance to attend them. It is, however, extremely difficult to set a strict definition as to what constitutes an inappropriate call.

The LAS launched on 17 December 2001 a public education campaign to reduce the more blatant inappropriate use of the service by patients who could make their own way to an accident and emergency department or, in some cases, do not require hospital treatment at all. The campaign also highlights the fact that people should not phone the LAS for advice and so clog up the 999 call-taking system, but should instead be phoning NHS Direct or seeking advice from their GP.

Community Pharmacists

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the value of the fee paid to community pharmacists in December 1997; [24722]

(2) what is the value of the fee paid to community pharmacists; and what was the value in December *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [24707]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Community pharmacies in England are paid a variety of fees and allowances, but the basic dispensing fee paid for the large majority of prescriptions is currently 87.4p. Comparable fee levels for prescriptions dispensed in December 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 are shown in the table.

pence

December	*Basic dispensing fee*
1997	94.1
1998	94.1
1999	97.5
2000	97.5

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much community pharmacy contractors are receiving in dispensing fees; and what the equivalent figure was in May 1997. [24721]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* For September 2001 (the latest month for which figures are available) total remuneration paid to pharmacy contractors in England was £58.8 million. The equivalent figure for May 1997 was £52.9 million.

Prescriptions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England and Wales failed to get all or part of their prescriptions dispensed between 1 December 2000 and 1 December 2001. [24714]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested is not available for England. Responsibility for the national health service in Wales lies with the National Assembly for Wales.

Orthodontist Services

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many orthodontists there were in England *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* in March 1997, broken down by each health authority area. [24712]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital dental consultants within the orthodontics specialty by health authority[1]—as at 30 September 2000

Number

	1997	*2000*
England	150	160
Avon HA	10	10
Barking and Havering HA	0	0
Barnet HA	—	0
Barnsley HA	—	—
Bedfordshire HA	0	0
Berkshire HA	0	0
Bexley and Greenwich HA	—	0
Birmingham HA	10	10
Bradford HA	0	0
Brent and Harrow HA	0	—
Bromley HA	0	—
Buckinghamshire HA	0	0
Bury and Rochdale HA	—	—
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	0	0
Cambridge HA	0	0
Camden and Islington HA	10	10
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	0	0
County Durham HA	—	—
Coventry HA	0	—

Hospital dental consultants within the orthodontics specialty by health authority[1]—as at 30 September 2000

	Number	
	1997	*2000*
Croydon HA	0	0
Doncaster HA	0	0
Dorset HA	0	0
Dudley HA	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	0	0
East and North Hertfordshire HA	0	—
East Kent HA	0	0
East Lancashire HA	0	0
East London and The City HA	0	0
East Riding HA	0	0
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	0	0
Enfield and Haringey HA	0	—
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	—	—
Gloucestershire HA	—	—
Herefordshire HA	—	0
Hillingdon HA	—	0
Isle of White HA	—	—
Kingston and Richmond HA	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	10	20
Leeds HA	10	0
Leicestershire HA	0	0
Lincolnshire HA	0	0
Liverpool HA	0	0
Manchester HA	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	0	0
Morecambe Bay HA	0	—
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	—	0
Norfolk HA	0	0
North and East Devon HA	—	0
North and Mid Hampshire HA	0	0
North Cheshire HA	0	0
North Cumbria HA	0	0
North Derbyshire HA	0	0
North Essex HA	0	0
North Nottinghamshire HA	—	—
North Staffordshire HA	0	0
North West Lancashire HA	0	—
North Yorkshire HA	0	0
Northamptonshire HA	0	0
Nottingham HA	0	0
Oxfordshire HA	0	0
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	0	0
Rotherham HA	0	0
Salford and Trafford HA	0	0
Sefton HA	0	0
Sheffield HA	0	0
Shropshire HA	0	0
Somerset HA	0	0
South and West Devon HA	0	0
South Cheshire HA	0	0
South Derbyshire HA	0	0
South Essex HA	0	0
South Humber HA	0	0
South Lancashire HA	0	—
South Staffordshire HA	0	0
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	0	0
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	0	0
Stockport HA	0	0
Suffolk HA	0	0
Sunderland HA	0	0
Tees HA	0	0
Wakefield HA	0	0
Walsall HA	0	0
Warwickshire HA	0	0
West Hertfordshire HA	0	0
West Kent HA	0	0
West Pennine HA	0	—
West Surrey HA	0	0
West Sussex HA	0	0
Wigan and Bolton HA	0	0
Wiltshire HA	0	0
Wirral HA	0	0
Wolverhampton HA	0	0
Worcestershire HA	0	0

[1] Where HAs are shown, staff holding appointments in more than one HA are included in each HA. The sum of HA totals therefore differs slightly from the England total and a direct comparison between England totals and HA totals is not advised.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. '—' denotes zero.
3. '0' denotes less than five.

Source:

Department of Health 2000 medical and dental work force census.

The information relates to hospital-based consultants within orthodontics.

Data showing the number of principal dentists within the General Dental Service, who have submitted one hundred or more orthodontic claims in a year are in the following table.

General Dental Service: Total number of orthodontists[1]—England

Health authority	*1996–97*	*2000–01*
Avon	19	29
Barking and Havering	6	8
Barnet	8	20
Barnsley	0	0
Bedfordshire	4	3
Berkshire	18	17
Bexley and Greenwich	8	8
Birmingham	12	17
Bradford	1	3
Brent and Harrow	10	5
Bromley	5	7
Buckinghamshire	5	10
Bury and Rochdale	8	13
Calderdale and Kirklees	7	8
Cambridge and Huntingdon[2]	9	—
Cambridge[2]	—	16
Camden and Islington	4	7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	4	9
County Durham	3	3
Coventry	2	3
Croydon	9	13
Doncaster	5	8
Dorset	6	8
Dudley	4	10
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	8	13
East and North Hertfordshire	10	15
East Kent	9	12
East Lancashire	8	12
East London and The City	6	13
East Norfolk[2]	16	—
East Riding	6	14
East Surrey	13	14
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	12	9
Enfield and Haringey	9	10
Gateshead and South Tyneside	3	1
Gloucestershire	10	17
Herefordshire	2	3
Hillingdon	5	7
Isle of Wight	3	2
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	1	8
Kingston and Richmond	8	8
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	4	7

General Dental Service: Total number of orthodontists[1]—England

Health authority	*1996–97*	*2000–01*
Leeds	6	7
Leicestershire	13	21
Lincolnshire	7	10
Liverpool	7	7
Manchester	6	6
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	8	11
Morecambe Bay	3	3
Newcastle and North Tyneside	4	5
Norfolk[2]	—	14
North and East Devon	9	12
North and Mid Hampshire	7	7
North Cheshire	3	4
North Cumbria	3	2
North Derbyshire	9	15
North Essex	21	25
North Nottinghamshire	8	11
North Staffordshire	10	7
North West Anglia[2]	3	—
North West Lancashire	11	8
North Yorkshire	17	17
Northamptonshire	8	12
Northumberland	3	1
Nottingham	7	9
Oxfordshire	6	12
Portsmouth and SE Hampshire	7	4
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	9	10
Rotherham	2	3
Salford and Trafford	12	14
Sandwell	2	6
Sefton	2	2
Sheffield	12	12
Shropshire	6	7
Solihull	2	3
Somerset	6	8
South and West Devon	9	10
South Cheshire	16	16
South Derbyshire	7	13
South Essex	10	12
South Humber	3	5
South Lancashire	6	8
South Staffordshire	5	6
Southampton and SW Hampshire	7	8
St. Helens and Knowsley	2	4
Stockport	5	3
Suffolk	15	20
Sunderland	2	3
Tees	4	5
Wakefield	3	2
Walsall	2	3
Warwickshire	2	5
West Hertfordshire	9	15
West Kent	12	19
West Pennine	11	10
West Surrey	13	15
West Sussex	20	26
Wigan and Bolton	16	18
Wiltshire	9	15
Wirral	5	7
Wolverhampton	4	6
Worcestershire	13	12
England[3]	739	951
England[4]	679	869

[1] An orthodontist is defined as a principal dentist who submitted 100 or more orthodontic claims in a year.

[2] In April 1999 Cambridge and Huntingdon, East Norfolk and North West Anglia HAs combined to form two HAs; Cambridge HA and Norfolk HA.

[3] Dentists are counted for each health authority in which they practice.

[4] Dentists are counted only once.

Dentists carrying out orthodontic treatment in the General Dental Service may also be carrying out orthodontic treatment for the Hospital Dental Service; therefore some dentists may have been included in both tables.

West Sussex Health Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what calculation he has made of the cost to West Sussex health authority's budget of his forecast for medical inflation in 2002–03; [24882]

(2) what assessment he has made of the increase in the West Sussex health authority budget for 2002–03 as a result of likely *(a)* pay inflation, *(b)* medical inflation, *(c)* pension contributions and *(d)* national service framework compliance. [24662]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* For 2002–03 the West Sussex health authority has received an uplift of 9.58 per cent. in its recurrent unified allocation that is an additional £53.8 million. This is to cover both pay and non-pay inflation as well as achievement of access and National Service Framework target.

The West Sussex health authority assesses the impact of pay awards to be £17 million consuming 3.3 per cent. of its 9.58 per cent. uplift.

Medical inflation is not a recognised term as the effect of medical pay awards and price movements on medical and surgical supplies and drugs forms part of the overall inflation increase.

There is no specific addition for pension contributions as there are no changes to the superannuation scheme contributions for 2002–03.

The West Sussex health authority has received additional funding within its allocation to support the achievement of National Service Framework targets. The health authority will receive earmarked additional amounts for:

	£
Cancer	1,127,000
Coronary heart disease	890,000
Mental health	1,112,000

In addition the health authority will receive earmarked additional amounts for:

	£
Information management and technology	823,000
Building capacity	6,302,000
Primary care access	1,238,000
These six items alone total to:	11,492,000

NHS Recipe Book

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who was responsible for drawing up the nutritional quality standards for hospital food included in the official NHS recipe book. [24686]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The national health service recipe book, issued in May 2001 as part of the better hospital food programme, requires hospitals to meet estimated average requirements for food energy, and reference nutrient intake for all other nutrients. These standards were set by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy, now known as the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to enable patient feedback on the standard and quality of the food they are being served from the NHS recipe book. [24624]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Hospitals currently undertake surveys to gain feedback from patients on the standard of their catering services. However, these surveys are designed and implemented locally, do not take a consistent form and do not allow for comparisons to be drawn.

To address this, the better hospital food panel is developing a national patient catering survey. This will ask a range of questions which have been designed through detailed consultation with patients about the standards of service they expect and will complement the questions on catering which will be included in the national patient survey. It will be issued as part of a new "Catering in a modernised NHS" manual of advice and guidance which will be issued to the national health service in 2002.

Drugs (Theft)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the theft of medical drugs from NHS hospitals and GP surgeries by patients and staff has cost the NHS since 1997. [24307]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Only the total value and number of losses from national health service trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts, due to "Damage to property due to theft and fraud" is reported to the Department of Health. Information on the cost to the NHS of theft of medical drugs from NHS hospitals by patients and staff is not reported separately.

No information is collected about theft from general practitioners.

Injury Compensation Claims

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and at what cost, injury compensation claims were made against the NHS as a result of non-medical accidents by *(a)* patients and *(b)* staff in 2001. [24353]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The National Health Service Litigation Authority offers an indemnity to national health service bodies against employer and public liability risks where the relevant incident occurred on or after 1 April 1999. The authority handles those claims which have a potential liability in excess of certain amounts (£10,000 for employers' liability and £3,000 for public liability). In the calendar year 2001 (data available to 6 December 2001) the authority was notified of 2,244 claims made by employees and 732 claims made by third parties (not all of whom will be patients). The total cost of these claims is not yet known as the majority have not yet been settled. The authority is however holding reserves of around £23 million for employers' liability and £6 million for public liability claims in respect of these claims.

Better Hospital Food Panel

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those chefs involved in the better hospital food panel; what the next year's budget for the better hospital food panel will be; and what the remuneration package for the chairman of the better hospital food panel is. [24623]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* There are seven chefs currently involved in the better hospital food programme—Mr. John Benson-Smith, Mr. Michael Caines, Mr. Anton Edelman, Mr. Shaun Hill, Mr. Mark Hix, Mr. Eugene McCoy and Mr. Cyrus Todiwala. None of these are members of the better hospital food panel.

Loyd Grossman, who is the chairman of the panel, has provided his services free of charge since he became involved in the programme in September 2000, and continues to do so. His involvement stems from a real desire to help the national health service modernise and improve its catering services. Likewise, no other members of the panel are remunerated for their involvement.

The NHS Plan made available £38.5 million over four years to support the programme. The better hospital food panel has no discrete budget, any expenses connected with the panel's meetings and work are met from the better hospital food administrative budget.

Ambulance Response Times

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average response time was in 2001 for the *(a)* London ambulance service and *(b)* Sussex ambulance service; and what the Government's target response times were. [24337]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Information in the form requested is not collected centrally. Information for London Ambulance National Health Service Trust and Sussex Ambulance NHS Trust about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response time is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Security Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many security staff were recruited for hospital accident and emergency departments in each year since 1997. [24355]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Security and safety of staff, patients and property in the national health service is of great importance to us.

Guidance on effective management of security in accident and emergency departments was issued by the NHS Executive in 1997 and was an important aspect of the Government strategy when funding the upgrading of accident and emergency departments.

Security is provided in trusts by "in-house" staff or by private security organisations.

The method of provision and level of staffing is a matter for individual trusts dependant on the size of the hospital, the locality, staffing levels and the general configuration of the buildings.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many security staff by hospital *(a)* were recruited to and *(b)* left West Sussex hospitals accident and emergency departments in each year since 1997. [24356]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many security staff were assaulted in hospital accident and emergency departments by patients in 2001. [24354]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Information on the levels of violent incidents against individual staff group is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by national health service employers.

The Department conducted a survey of national health service trusts in England in 1998–99. The survey found that, on average, seven violent incidents were recorded each month per 1,000 staff. This is equivalent to approximately 65,000 violent incidents against NHS trust staff each year. Details of the survey can be found in Health Service Circular 1999/229: "Managing Violence, Accidents and Sickness Absence in the NHS", a copy of which is in the Library.

Figures for recorded violent incidents in 2000–01 are currently being analysed by the Department.

Patient Complaints

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many formal complaints were made by patients about NHS services by activity area in each of the last five years; and how many complaints *(a)* were resolved within (i) four weeks and (ii) eight weeks and *(b)* remain unresolved. [24318]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Data on national health service complaints are available in the Government Statistical Service report, "Handling Complaints: monitoring the NHS complaints procedures, England", copies of which are available in the Library. The data show only complaints resolved within or outside the target for local resolution of 20 working days.

Hospital Cleaning Contracts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to local health authorities on the awarding of hospital cleaning contracts. [24357]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Health authorities do not award cleaning contracts for hospitals. It is the responsibility of individual national health service trusts to award cleaning contracts based on the principles of achieving value for money which involves consideration of quality and satisfaction as well as cost.

NHS Direct

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's public awareness strategy is for NHS Direct; and what plans he has to launch an awareness campaign over the winter. [24669]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* NHS Direct is an integral part of the Department's "Get the Right Treatment" campaign this winter, as it was last year, and the year before (when the campaign was called "Choose the Right Remedy"). NHS Direct is promoted as one of the range of health care options available to people, along with self-care, the pharmacist, the general practitioner surgery, accident and emergency and 999.

National activity includes press advertising in television listings and women's weekly magazines, and media relations campaign targeting women's consumer and lifestyle media and a centrally produced A6 folded leaflet distributed through pharmacies and GP surgeries.

A 'Get the Right Treatment' campaign toolkit has been distributed to all communications leads within the national health service, designed to help them support the national campaign at a local level.

Emergency Ambulance Services

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to stop the misuse of ambulance emergency services by the general public for non-urgent treatment. [24670]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* A number of national health service ambulance trusts have undertaken work to educate their local population about appropriate use of emergency ambulance services.

A fully crewed frontline ambulance will always be sent to life-threatening emergencies. However, ambulance services do not have to send an ambulance vehicle in response to 999 calls which do not require emergency care. Such calls will continue to receive a consistent and appropriate response based on national clinical standards.

Traditional Medicines Directive

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is towards the traditional medicines directive. [24661]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* On the basis of preliminary drafts of the proposals, we would see a directive on traditional medicines as a potential opportunity to put in place a legally secure and appropriate regulatory regime for traditional herbal remedies of the kind currently sold as unlicensed herbal remedies under Section 12(2) of the Medicines Act 1968. A regime of this kind would give the public better assurances as to safety and quality as well as providing systematic information about the use of the product. Manufacturers would be able to make agreed minor claims based on traditional use. We understand that the commission will be bringing forward formal proposals shortly. We will wish to scrutinise carefully the detailed provisions of the proposals once they are available.

Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the National Patient Access Team into waiting list management at Stoke Mandeville hospital; [25503]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the district audit analysis of alleged waiting list irregularities at Stoke Mandeville hospital; [25501]

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the district audit report into the management of waiting lists at Stoke Mandeville hospital. [25497]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* District audit carried out a thorough investigation, over several weeks, and interviewed 54 witnesses. The investigation was carried out by independent staff, with experience of the relevant issues. The Department considers the report adequate for the issues it was intended to address. A copy has been placed in the Library.

No formal report was produced following the one day National Patient Access Team review so no report is available to be placed in the Library. The review team identified a number of weaknesses in waiting list management. As a result of this review, the district audit investigation referred to was carried out.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state, in respect of the patients at Stoke Mandeville hospital who were found in the district audit investigation to have been suspended irregularly from waiting lists, how many were patients *(a)* waiting for the second stage of a bilateral procedure, *(b)* who self-deferred having declined a reasonable treatment plan and *(c)* who were suspended without reason. [25498]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The categorisation of suspensions by district audit did not include a specific number of patients waiting for a second stage of a bilateral procedure. These were included in the overall total of 35 patients who had inappropriately waited more than 18 months for treatment and who were categorised as system errors. No further analysis of these patients' cases was carried out, and such analysis would not be feasible without significant additional resources being diverted to the task.

The categorisation of patients by district audit did not include a specific number of patients who self-deferred having declined a reasonable treatment plan. These were included in the overall total of 35 patients who had inappropriately waited more than 18 months for treatment and who were categorised as system errors.

43 patients were found by district audit to have been suspended from waiting list inclusion without reason.

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest figures are for the Mid Essex hospital services NHS trust area for the *(a)* total number of people waiting for hospital treatment and *(b)* total number of people waiting less than (i) 18, (ii) 15, (iii) 12 and (iv) six months for hospital treatment. [26810]

Mr. Hutton: The total number of patients waiting at Mid Essex hospital services national health service trust at November 2001 is 8,787.

The additional information requested is given in the table.

Number of patients waiting more than 18 months, up to 18 months, up to 15 months, and up to 12 months for inpatient treatment at Mid Essex hospital services national health service trust

	November 2001
Number waiting less than 18 months for inpatient treatment	8,787
Number waiting less than 15 months for inpatient treatment	8,726
Number waiting less than 12 months for inpatient treatment	8,335
Number waiting less than 6 months for inpatient treatment	6,361

Source:

These data are nationally published data, taken from Regional Offices Data Systems.

Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the cost to the NHS of falls as identified in standard 6 of the national service framework for older people. [26816]

Jacqui Smith: No detailed estimate of the full cost of falls to the national health service has been made. Hip fracture is the most common serious injury related to falls in older people and as such makes up a large proportion of NHS costs on falls. The national service framework for older people referred to estimated annual costs of hip fracture to the NHS of around £1.7 billion.

Type II Diabetes

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive a response from the UK screening committee on their assessment of high-risk screening for type II diabetes. [27315]

Jacqui Smith: The United Kingdom National Screening Committee has decided that further research, which may require some complex studies, is needed to inform its advice. It will report to the Department in 2005.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Road Fuels

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards the possible adoption by the EU of lower sulphur control levels for road fuels. [26410]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The Government supported the political agreement reached at the December 2001 EU Environment Council on a Commission proposal to amend Directive 98/70/EC that sets a maximum limit for sulphur of 10 ppm (termed "sulphur-free" fuel) from 1 January 2009, this date being subject to review by the Commission with respect to diesel fuel. The reduction in sulphur will facilitate the optimisation of new engine technology for cars, which will substantially reduce fuel use and benefit motorists—and also reduce climate change and other environmental emissions, especially ultrafine particulate emissions.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the regional reports on the performance of the home energy efficiency scheme. [22891]

Mr. Meacher: The home energy efficiency scheme (HEES), now marketed as The Warm Front Team, is administered by two scheme managers, TXU Warm Front Ltd. (responsible for the Eastern, East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber) and Eaga Partnership Ltd. (responsible for the rest of England).

Eaga Partnership provides information (under publications) on its website: www.eaga.co.uk. TXU Warm Front, www.txuwarmfront.co.uk, is currently constructing a website, which will include data on performance. DEFRA's website, www.defra.gov.uk (under energy efficiency), will shortly be updated to identify average waiting times, by area, for insulation and heating measures and general performance delivery information for HEES.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* HEES and *(b)* HEES Plus grants were paid out in each local authority area in each month since June 2000; and what targets were set for the number of grants to be paid out over the period in order to meet her Department's target of 800,000 grants received by 2004. [19374]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 November 2001]*: The volume of information requested is such that I will write to the hon. Member separately, and place a copy of the letter and the data in the Library of the House.

The home energy efficiency scheme has an overall target of improving 800,000 properties in the period 2000–04. Between June 2000 and March 2002, the scheme has a target of improving 400,000 properties.

Portland Cement

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will name the domestic manufacturers of Portland cement who operate manufacturing plants accredited to ISO 14001; and what percentage of that industry they represent. [20514]

Mr. Meacher: There are four domestic manufacturers of Portland Cement: Blue Circle Cement UK; Castle Cement Ltd.; Rugby Cement; and Buxton Lime Industries Ltd. All are members of the British Cement Association and according to their records all the manufacturing plants of these companies are accredited to ISO 14001, representing 100 per cent. of the industry.

Environmental Protection

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many prosecutions have been initiated *(a)* by and *(b)* against local authorities in England and Wales under section 79(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [20609]

Mr. Meacher: Section 79(1) lists the statutory nuisances covered by the Environmental Protection Act 1990, although formally prosecution comes under section 80, and cases against local authorities under section 82. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) collect statistics from a sample of local authorities. The latest figures published on 20 December 2001 show that for 2000–01 there were in the order of 238,000 complaints to local authorities resulting in the order of 440 prosecutions. These are broken down as shown in the table.

	Complaints	*Prosecutions*
Domestic	169,810	313
Industrial	11,475	4
Commercial/leisure	34,745	78
Construction/demolition	10,822	39
Vehicles	5,172	2
Other machinery/equipment in streets	6,501	4

The number of prosecutions against local authorities on grounds of statutory nuisance are not held centrally.

Landfill Sites

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidelines exist to determine permitted distance between landfill sites and occupied private housing. [23691]

Mr. Meacher: The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 requires a local planning authority to consult the Environment Agency before granting planning permission for development within 250 metres of land which is or has, at any time in the 30 years before the relevant planning application, been used for the deposit of refuse or waste. Guidance to the agency in Waste Management Paper 27 on Landfill Gas, published in 1991, contains guidelines on the proximity of new housing developments to landfill sites. These guidelines do not arise from European legislation and we have had no discussions with the European Commission about changes to the guidance.

In addition, under section 42 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Environment Agency must take the steps needed to ensure that the activities authorised by a waste management licence do not cause environmental pollution, harm to human health or serious detriment to local amenities; and the conditions of a licence are complied with.

Following implementation of the Landfill Directive, the Environment Agency will be required to exercise its functions under the directive in order to prevent, or reduce as far as possible, negative effects from the landfilling of waste on the environment and any resulting risk to human health during the whole life cycle of the site. The directive also requires local planning authorities to take into consideration the distance from the site boundary when considering the location of a new landfill site. This requirement has applied to all new landfill sites from 16 July 2001 but is not applied retrospectively to existing landfill sites.

The Environment Agency can suspend, vary or revoke a waste management licence or, in future, the permit issued under the terms of the Landfill Directive, where it appears the continuation of activities would cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health or where the conditions of the permit or licence are breached.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her latest assessment is of progress towards targets for the reduction of waste in landfill sites. [23690]

Mr. Meacher: We have set a target to cut the amount of industrial and commercial waste going to landfill in England to 85 per cent. of that landfilled in 1998 by 2005. The statutory targets for reducing waste landfilled are set in the EU landfill directive. These are that by 2010 biodegradable municipal waste landfilled must be reduced to 75 per cent. of that produced in 1995, by 2013 to 50 per cent., and by 2020 to 35 per cent. The table provides estimates of the amounts of municipal waste landfilled in England and Wales based on the DEFRA annual survey of Municipal Waste Management.

England and Wales

Percentage (mtonnes)

	MW	*MW landfilled*	*BMW landfilled/ 1995 BMW*
1995–96	25.2	—	—
1996–97	26.0	85	87
1997–98	27.2	85	91
1998–99	27.9	82	91
1999–2000	29.3	81	94

Note:

Assumes proportion of MW which is biodegradable remains at 62.5 per cent.

In 1999–2000, the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill was 94 per cent. of that produced in 1995–96. Although the percentage of municipal waste going to landfill is reducing, the tonnage is still rising because the amount of waste being produced continues to rise. Statutory targets to triple local authority recycling and composting of household waste by 2005–06 in England will help reduce landfilling, and tradable landfill permits issued to waste disposal authorities will require them to meet the directive's targets. We will bring forward primary legislation for the permits scheme as soon as parliamentary time allows.

CFC Disposal

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her latest assessment is of the cost to be incurred by *(a)* private businesses, *(b)* local government and *(c)* the Exchequer of implementing the EU directive on CFC disposal. [23264]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on substances that deplete the ozone layer was undertaken in December 1998. It estimated that the total costs of compliance for business, charities and voluntary organisations would be £370 million. The report put that figure in context by stating that under the then current EC Regulation (3093/94), it was estimated that end-users would make investments totalling £4 billion spread over the next 10 to 15 years. The main effect of the new regulation would be to bring forward the timing of some of those investments.

The RIA did not estimate compliance costs for the extraction of ozone-depleting substances from the insulating foam in domestic refrigeration equipment as the draft proposal did not make it mandatory. It was not until June 2001 that the European Commission gave EU member states its final interpretation of the regulation that did require the recovery of controlled substances in the insulating foam of domestic fridges and freezers. My Department recently announced a payment of £6 million to English local authorities to cover their costs of handling fridges and freezers until March 2002. We are urgently assessing the impacts of the regulation, including the costs, and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

Recycled Plastic

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she has made in creating a market for recycled plastic; and if she will make a statement. [23879]

Mr. Meacher: The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) was created in January 2001 to create stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products, and to help remove barriers to waste minimisation, re-use and recycling.

Plastics are one of WRAP's seven set targets to increase mixed plastics recycling by 20,000 tonnes for industrial products and raise awareness of the range and quality of recycled products available.

On 5 December WRAP announced that they are funding a series of six regional workshops on plastics recycling to be delivered by the plastics recycling body, RECOUP. These seminars will focus on plastics collection and procurement, as well as providing a showcase for products.

Environment Council

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Environment Council held in Brussels on 12 to 13 December; what the Government's position was on each issue discussed, including their voting record; and if she will make a statement. [23887]

Mr. Meacher: I represented the UK at the Environment Council held in Brussels on 12 December 2001. This was the final Environment Council of the Belgian presidency. Council reached political agreement on two common positions, with the UK voting in favour of both. Council agreed conclusions on a wide-ranging set of topics: sustainable development, international environmental governance, a review of the pesticides authorisation directive (91/414 EC), a Commission Communication on the first phase of the European Climate Change Programme and a Communication on a strategy for dioxins, furans and PCBs. There was a policy debate on a proposed directive setting up an EU greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme.

There were four items on the agenda under the heading of Climate Change. Council heard a report back on the successful outcome of the Seventh Conference of the Parties (COP7) in Marrakech, which took place between 29 October and 10 November. The importance of member states now pressing ahead with ratification of the Kyoto

Protocol was stressed. Council also heard a presidency progress report on a decision to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Once the decision is agreed individual member states and the EU will be able to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the expectation being that they will do so before the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002.

Council conclusions were also agreed on the implementation of the first phase of the European Climate Change Programme (ECCP), a package of common and co-ordinated policies and measures to reduced greenhouse gas emissions that has been prepared in discussion with member states and stakeholders.

During an orientation debate on a proposed EU greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme all member states expressed support for the establishment of such a scheme. Member states were split on whether the initial phase should have voluntary or mandatory participation. There was broad agreement, however, that credits should be allocated free of charge during the initial phase, and there was also broad support for starting with carbon dioxide alone, with a view to extending the scheme to other greenhouse gases in the future.

Political agreement on a common position was agreed on a proposed directive to bring community rules into line with the second pillar of the Aarhus Convention dealing with public consultation in environmental decision-making. The Council endorsed European Parliament amendment aiming to improve information to the public about decisions taken, and to enhance the use of electronic media. The Commission wanted the proposal to apply to updating of all permits, including very minor changes. The common position will only apply in such cases likely to give rise to significant environmental effects. The Commission reserved its position to return to the issue at second reading.

Council reached political agreement on a proposal to introduce sulphur-free (<10 ppm) petrol and diesel in every member state from 1 January 2005 alongside existing fuels. Council agreed that from 1 January 2009 the use of this fuel should be mandatory. The proposal will mean lower exhaust emissions and will facilitate improvements in fuel economy in the future. The UK achieved its key objective of ensuring that the agreement would not impose fuel quality restrictions on fuel (diesel) used by non-road mobile machines (NRMM's) in advance of a full Commission review of the costs and benefits of such a measure. Council agreed conclusions in response to the Commission's communication on a strategy for dioxins, furans and polychlorinated biphenyls. The strategy proposes a number of actions aimed at preventing the formation and release of these substances; further identification of sources; establishment of indicators; and faster, cheaper measurement methods. Council broadly welcomed the Commission's approach, and asked for it to consider a number of options, including the setting of limit values for emissions under the integrated pollution prevent and control directive, improved measurement methods, and possible instruments for the control of non-industrial sources of emissions.

Council heard a brief presidency progress report on the proposed regulation on traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms. Some provisional agreement had been reached on parts of the text, although issues such as the scope, and the treatment of derived products, need further work. The UK supports the need for an effective traceability and labelling system to deliver reliable information and dependable consumer choice.

Council Conclusions on the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) clarified the role of Environment Council and its complementarity to other Council formations and the General Affairs Council's general co-ordinating role; offered views on the four priorities identified by the Gothenburg European Council and promoted the development of an external dimension to the EU SDS. Council asked the permanent representatives to report back on how to improve arrangements for co-ordinating work on sustainable development. On Global Environmental Governance, Council agreed Conclusions underlining the need to strengthen international environmental structures, as part of the preparations for, and follow up to, the World Summit on Sustainable Development. They referred to the need to strengthen the financial situation of the United Nations Environment Programme, including a call for countries to step up their efforts to contribute at the level of the UN assessed rate.

Conclusions on the Commission's evaluation of the Pesticides Authorisation Directive (91/414 EC) broadly supported the Commission's approach. Council recognised that the review of existing active substances could not be completed within the current timetable of end of 2003. It therefore extended the period for the review to the end of 2008 but to only the end of 2005 for higher priority substances. Council also called on the Commission to cover a number of detailed issues in further work in this area including the proposed revision of the directive and a thematic strategy on pesticides.

The Commission presented a proposal for the revision of directive 96/82 (Seveso II), and a proposal for the revision of recovery and recycling targets in the directive on packaging and packaging waste. The Commission also gave progress reports on proposed directives on an EU chemicals strategy, recycling of batteries and accumulators and air quality limits for heavy metals in ambient air. The UK drew members states' attention to the problems for air quality posed by rising background levels of ozone precursors, and asked the Commissioner to consider what action was necessary.

Council also heard progress reports on a thematic strategy for the sustainable use of pesticides and on the revision of Regulation 2455/92 (trade in certain dangerous chemicals) which is necessary to enable the EC to become a Party to the Rotterdam Convention. There were also progress reports on the ratification of the Rotterdam Convention and the IMO Convention on TBT, and on Community implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The Commission also briefed Council on the progress of accession negotiations on the environment with the candidate countries.

Over lunch Ministers held a discussion on Global Environmental Governance and the outcome of the recent WTO negotiations in Doha. Ministers agreed to press Heads of Government to attend the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, and to include a commitment to that effect in the Laeken European Council conclusions.

Liquid Refrigerants

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost per unit for the disposal of the liquid refrigerant in *(a)* refrigerators, *(b)* deep-freezers, *(c)* fridge-freezers and *(d)* air conditioning units. [24169]

Mr. Meacher: It is estimated that the disposal of liquid refrigerants, through high temperature incineration, costs approximately £1–2/kg. The cost will vary with the type of container and the size of the consignment. The volume of refrigerant is usually between 70–300 grams depending on the size of appliance, although large air conditioning units can contain rather more refrigerant. This would result in a cost of between seven and 60p per unit.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to ensure the separation of different types of refrigerant liquids extracted from waste appliances. [24167]

Mr. Meacher: Under EC Regulation No. 2037/2000 all CFCs removed from waste appliances must be destroyed. The effect of Articles 9 and 10 of the waste framework directive is to require the disposal or recovery of waste to be carried out under the terms of a permit issued by the Environment Agency. The conditions set by the agency in these permits control matters such as the separation of different types of liquid extracted from waste appliances.

Waste Refrigeration Equipment

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding options she is considering to assist local authorities in the storage and processing of waste refrigeration equipment. [24165]

Mr. Meacher: The Department recently announced a payment of £6 million to English local authorities to cover their costs of handling fridges and freezers until March 2002. We shall urgently assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the capability of UK high temperature incinerator facilities to deal with the ozone depleting substances from refrigerators. [23952]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The UK's high temperature incinerator facilities have sufficient capacity to deal with all ozone depleting substances from waste refrigerators arising in the UK. In addition I understand that up to 8,000 fridges per week can be disposed of via high temperature incineration in the UK.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she makes available on the safe disposal of commercial refrigerators containing CFCs under EC Regulation 2037/2000. [25726]

Mr. Meacher: The Department issued guidance on the storage of all waste refrigeration equipment, including commercial refrigerators, prior to CFC extraction at the beginning of December 2001. Draft guidance on the extraction of CFCs from fridges and freezers has also been issued and is now being finalised by the Environment Agency.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects plans for recycling plants for refrigerators to be finalised; and when she expects local authorities to be informed. [25713]

Mr. Meacher: I understand that a number of commercial companies are investing in plant in the UK and that some plant may be in operation from spring 2002. My Department will host a progress meeting between investors in recycling plant and representatives from local authorities shortly.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what precautions have been taken to ensure that there are alternative recycling routes for used commercial refrigerators and freezers. [25818]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has worked closely with the waste management industry and other stakeholders to identify a range of recycling and disposal routes for used commercial refrigerators and freezers. These include refurbishment of working units, disposal via high temperature incineration, export for recycling in other member states or storage in the UK pending treatment. Work is continuing on finalising standards for treatment centres which will inform investment decisions on new facilities.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* representations he has received from and *(b)* guidance has been issued to (i) retailers, (ii) pub owners, (iii) caterers, (iv) hoteliers, (v) restaurateurs and (vi) vending machine operators about the disposal of commercial refrigerators. [25720]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has received a number of such representations from retailers, pub owners, caterers, hoteliers and restauranteurs and vending machine operators, in particular through their trade associations, via stakeholder meetings, and letters and telephone calls.

Guidance on the collection, storage and the safe disposal of commercial refrigerators has been disseminated via trade associations at meetings regarding the management of waste commercial refrigeration equipment. This guidance has also been published on my Department's website www.defra.gov.uk.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) whether there is an available mobile technology capable of removing CFCs from refrigerators and freezers; [25718]

(2) what attempt there has been to import mobile technology capable of removing CFCs from refrigerators and freezers into the UK; and when such technology can be expected to be in operation. [25719]

Mr. Meacher: Mobile plant capable of removing CFCs from refrigerators and freezers is available from suppliers in Germany. I understand that a number of companies are intending to import this technology for use in the UK. Mobile plant is expected to be in operation from spring 2002.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of whether *(a)* retailers, *(b)* pub owners, *(c)* caterers, *(d)* hoteliers, *(e)* restauranteurs and *(f)* vending machine operators will refrain from refurbishing existing commercial refrigeration systems until guidance is available for their safe disposal. [25721]

Mr. Meacher: There is no reason why commercial operators should refrain from refurbishing commercial refrigeration equipment. Waste refrigeration equipment may be disposed of via high temperature incineration, exported for recycling in other member states, or stored pending treatment in the UK. Guidance on the storage of waste refrigeration equipment, including commercial refrigerators was issued in early December 2001. Officials have met with representatives of the food and drink industry to discuss the disposal routes for commercial refrigeration equipment. Draft guidance on the extraction of CFCs from fridges and freezers has been issued and is now being finalised by the Environment Agency.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimate she has made of the final capacity of the plants capable of removing CFCs from fridges and freezers under EC Regulation 2037/2000; [25724]

(2) how many plants will be needed to meet the United Kingdom's requirements for removing CFCs from refrigerators and freezers. [25717]

Mr. Meacher: The number of plants required to recycle waste fridges and freezers in the UK will depend on a number of factors including: the capacity of individual plant (technology used), and the scale of exports of fridges and freezers to other member states for treatment. Following discussions with industry it is anticipated that sufficient capacity for removing CFCs from fridges and freezers will be available to meet UK demand.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the distribution of funding to local authorities for the collection and storage of refrigerators; and what further amounts are expected to be required until recycling plants are in operation. [25714]

Mr. Meacher: £6 million has been added to the provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–03 for the costs of implementing the ozone depleting substances regulation relating to the period 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2002. This will be distributed to local authorities using Standard Spending Assessments (SSA). We are continuing to assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she expects that the first plants capable of removing CFCs from refrigerators and freezers under EC Regulation 2037/2000 will be open in the UK; [25725]

(2) where the first plant capable of removing CFCs from refrigerators and freezers under EC Regulation 2037/2000 will be located; and what its capacity will be. [25723]

Mr. Meacher: It is expected that the first plant capable of removing CFCs from refrigerators and freezers may be in operation from spring 2002. In the meantime I understand that up to 8,000 refrigerators per week can be disposed of via high temperature incineration.

Decisions regarding the location and capacity of plant are matters for companies investing in these facilities.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Environment Agency concerning the arrangements for the *(a)* storage and *(b)* disposal of fridges in advance of the development of purpose-built infrastructure in the UK. [25712]

Mr. Meacher: The Department is working very closely with the Environment Agency on the development and finalisation of guidance on the storage and disposal of fridges and more generally on the implementation and enforcement of the ozone depleting substances regulations.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with local authorities concerning the allocation of resources to meet the costs of *(a)* domestic, *(b)* commercial and *(c)* industrial refrigerators and air conditioning units (i) disposal and (ii) recycling in the next financial year; and when sufficient local recycling plants for them are expected to be operational. [25716]

Mr. Meacher: Representatives of local authorities have attended a number of meetings regarding the disposal and recycling of refrigeration equipment. My officials are working closely with them to assess the impacts.

Local authorities can charge businesses for the disposal and recycling of commercial and industrial refrigeration equipment or air conditioning units.

Rural Work Force

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* farm workers, *(b)* ancillary workers and *(c)* other employees, by category, there were in rural areas by (i) constituency and (ii) local authority for each year since 1990. [24899]

Mr. Morley: Figures showing the number of farm workers by constituency and by local authority for 1990, 1995 and 2000 are being made available in the Library of the House. Figures are not readily available for the years in between. Employment figures in the non-agricultural sector are available from the Office for National Statistics. The ONS Local Area Database, which is also available in the House of Commons Library, can provide employment data for local authorities for the period 1994–1999. There are no employment figures for the non-agricultural sector by constituency.

Domestic Gas

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average cost of fuel required to heat a home to a reasonable level of warmth is for properties that are *(a)* connected to the gas network and *(b)* not connected to the gas network. [25281]

Mr. Meacher: The table sets out the average heating and hot water costs for a typical semi-detached house. The data are derived using the BRE Domestic Energy Model with average fuel costs from SAP 2001 and is based on:

Property with a floor area of 89 sq. metres.

Home heated to a temperature of 21 degrees C in the main living area, whole house heated.

Loft insulation installed.

Standard heating pattern of two hours in the morning and seven hours in the evening during weekdays, and 16 hours/day at weekends.

The actual costs incurred by householders can vary greatly according to the construction of the property, the age and type of heating systems and occupation patterns. A discussion of these varying costs for fuel poor households is provided at Annexe D of the consultation paper, "Fuel Poverty: The New HEES" published in May 1999.

£ per year

	Heating and hot water cost for home		
Heating system	*With cavity wall insulation*	*With uninsulated cavity walls*	*With solid walls*
Connected to the mains gas network			
Using high-efficiency gas-fired central heating system	200	270	310
Not connected to the mains gas network			
Using an oil-fired central heating systems	210	290	340
Using an electric storage heating system	495	675	785

Fixed Penalty Litter Notices

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many fixed penalty litter notices were issued in each year since 1995. [25447]

Mr. Meacher: Details of the number of fixed penalty litter notices issued since 1997 in England and Wales are given in the table. Figures for 1995–96 and 2000–01 are not available.

	Penalties issued	*Penalties paid to local authorities*	*Total of fines received by local authority and being forwarded to DEFRA (£)*
1997–98	727	660	16,505.00
1998–99	4,778	2,532	63,240.00
1999–2000	2,970	1,563	39,075.00

Micro-CHP

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policies are for encouraging the use of micro-CHP; and if she will make a statement on their impact. [25622]

Mr. Meacher: Micro-CHP is a technology which offers great potential for energy efficiency improvements, and reduced energy costs for both homes and small businesses. This Department and the Department of Trade and Industry are carrying out work to investigate the benefits of, and possible barriers to, introducing micro-CHP, through the Government/Industry Distributed Generation Co-ordinating Group.

As part of its fuel poverty strategy, the Government intend to invite micro-CHP manufacturers to take part in a £10 million large-scale pilot to test the suitability of the technology for fuel poor households. If successful, the intention is to include micro-CHP in the main fuel poverty programmes for those homes that are hard to heat with conventional heating systems.

Bushmeat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to tackle the trade in bushmeat *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* internationally. [25811]

Mr. Morley: In the UK our concern about the effects of the bushmeat trade on endangered species led in early 1999 to our drawing the issue to the attention of the UK's Tropical Forest Forum, encouraging it to establish a UK Bushmeat Working Group. The group, supported with funding from the Department, brings together all those in the UK with an interest (Government Departments, conservation NGOs, the timber trade and others) and ensures that information on actions and opportunities for addressing the bushmeat problem is pooled and disseminated as widely as possible. We shall continue to support this initiative.

Internationally, many animals hunted and traded as bushmeat are listed in the appendices to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Any international trade in these animals, their parts or derivatives is therefore either banned completely or controlled by means of a permitting system. Due to increasing international trade in bushmeat and its impact on listed species, the Department raised the issue within CITES in April 2000. We were successful in our proposal that a CITES Bushmeat Working Group be established, and the Department provided £55,000 towards this. To support the group's work we have commissioned research to analyse existing knowledge and expertise on the bushmeat trade in west and central Africa, highlight gaps in data and understanding, and make recommendations for further action. We intend presenting the results of this research to the next meeting of the working group. The CITES conference taking place in November 2002 will assess the group's progress and consider any further action required.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the extent of the trade of bushmeat into the United Kingdom. [25810]

Mr. Morley: Many animals hunted and traded as bushmeat are listed in the Appendices to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Any international trade in these animals, their parts or derivatives is therefore either banned completely or controlled by means of a permitting system. Other animals which may be defined as bushmeat, such as small game animals, may be traded legally under Community rules. Since April last year 1,136 seizures of illegally imported animal products have been made of which 55 have been identified as bushmeat.

British Waterways

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to transfer inland waterway and navigation management from the Environment Agency to British Waterways. [25380]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 193W, which explains why we decided that current responsibilities should continue.

Recycled Waste

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has collated for each London borough on the proportion of waste that is recycled; and if she will provide information on the proportion of *(a)* glass, *(b)* wood, *(c)* cloth and *(d)* paper that is recycled. [25822]

Mr. Meacher: The latest data available (for 1999–2000) on the percentage of household waste recycled in each London borough, and in each of the four Joint Waste Disposal Authorities in London, are given in the table. This table also gives the statutory performance standards for the recycling and composting of household waste for each borough.

Data for 2000–01 are currently being collated from local authorities. The Government do not hold this information broken down by material.

Local authority standards and performance data

	Household waste recycling (including composting)			
Authority	*1998–99 Recycling rate*[1,2]	*1999–2000 Recycling rate*[1,3]	*2003–04 BV standard*[2]	*2005–06 BV standard*[2]
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	3	3	10	18
London Borough of Barnet	9	8	18	27
London Borough of Bexley	18	18	33	36
London Borough of Brent	5	6	10	18
London Borough of Bromley	7	13	14	21
London Borough of Camden	11	13	22	33
London Borough of Croydon	14	13	28	36
London Borough of Ealing	10	12	20	30
London Borough of Enfield	9	9	18	27
London Borough of Greenwich	4	4	10	18
London Borough of Hackney	2	2	10	18
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham	8	7	16	24
London Borough of Haringey	5	5	10	18
London Borough of Harrow	8	10	16	24
London Borough of Havering	9	[4]n/a	18	27
London Borough of Hillingdon	7	11	14	21
London Borough of Hounslow	14	14	28	36
London Borough of Islington	3	2	10	18
London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	11	13	22	33
London Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames	15	18	30	36
London Borough of Lambeth	7	8	14	21
London Borough of Lewisham	4	4	10	18
London Borough of Merton	9	11	18	27
London Borough of Newham	2	3	10	18
London Borough of Redbridge	7	8	14	21
London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames	14	[4]n/a	28	36
London Borough of Southwark	3	3	10	18
London Borough of Sutton	16	[5]—	33	36
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	3	3	10	18
London Borough of Waltham Forest	6	9	12	18
London Borough of Wandsworth	8	7	16	24
North London Waste Authority	6	7	12	18
East London Waste authority	4	3	10	18
West London Waste Authority	9	9	18	27
Western Riverside Waste Authority	8	12	16	24

[1] Household waste recycling (including composting) rates are based on data from the DEFRA Municipal Waste Management Survey.

[2] The best value statutory performance standards for 2003–04 and 2005–06 and baseline recycling/composting rates for 1989–99 were published in "Guidance in Municipal Waste Management Strategies" published by DETR in March 2001.

[3] Local authority recycling rates for 1999–2000 are provisional.

[4] N/a not available, authority did not respond to 1999–2000 Municipal Waste Management Survey.

[5] Estimates under review.

Woodland

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of land in the UK is covered by woodland; what measures are in place to increase the planting of trees and woodland in the UK; and if she will make a statement on the use of sink holes to absorb carbon dioxide and reduce emissions. [26578]

Mr. Morley: Woodland cover in the UK stands at 11.5 per cent. We provide financial incentives to landowners to plant new woodland through the woodland grant scheme and the farm woodland premium scheme. These incentives and others, such as challenge funds, are targeted to meet our priorities and programmes for forestry.

Increasing the areas of sustainably managed forest and agriculture often has environmental benefits in removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The contributions that these will make to meeting our 12.5 per cent. emissions reduction commitment under the Kyoto protocol and to our domestic goal to reduce CO_2 emissions by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010, are described in "Climate Change—the UK Programme" and in the "UK's Third National Communication" under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, published in November 2000 and 2001 respectively.

Asbestos

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with EU officials about reclassification of asbestos cement as special waste; and how this relates to use of white asbestos as opposed to *(a)* blue and *(b)* brown asbestos. [25761]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 January 2002]:* All types of asbestos waste, including asbestos cement, have been classified as special waste in Great Britain since 1996 and in Northern Ireland since 1998. However there have been recent changes to the hazardous waste list, including the addition of asbestos cement on to the list. These were discussed between EU officials and my officials. We recognise the dangers posed by asbestos cement waste if it is not properly managed and supported the decision to reclassify it as hazardous waste.

England Rural Development Programme

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if appeals against a decision of a regional appraisal panel on an application for a processing and marketing grant under the England Rural Development Programme are considered by the panel making the original decision. [26418]

Alun Michael: No. The processing and marketing grant is a competitive and discretionary scheme administered regionally by DEFRA through the offices of the Rural Development Service (RDS). Appeals against non-selection for an award of grant are considered by the regional manager of another RDS region unconnected with the application.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria are used to assess applications for processing and marketing grants under the England Rural Development Programme. [26417]

Alun Michael: Applications for the processing and marketing grant, rural enterprise scheme and vocational training scheme under the England Rural Development Programme are all subject to detailed technical assessment to determine the quality and value for money of the proposed project. The assessment covers: the need for the project; project objectives, performance indicators and milestones; sustainability (economic, environmental and social); relevance to key policy themes and national and regional priorities; financial viability; the requirement for public funds; the quality of plans for project management and delivery and the management of key risk and variables associated with the project. The size of the project determines the depth of the assessment.

Fuel Poverty

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 999–1000, on fuel poverty, which section of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy confirms a commitment to end fuel poverty using a definition which excludes housing benefit and income support and mortgage interest; and if she will make a statement on how this relates to paragraph 4.6 of the strategy. [25771]

Mr. Meacher: *[holding answer 10 January 2002]:* The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy sets out the goal of the Government and the devolved Administrations to seek an end to the problem of fuel poverty with the first target being to seek an end to the blight of fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010.

In the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, the introduction to Chapter 4 (paragraphs 4.1 to 4.6) sets out the target for England and the definition to be used in England.

The number of households in fuel poverty in England is displayed on the basis of the two main definitions as follows:

> a household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, it would be required to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (including housing benefit or income support for mortgage interest (ISMI) on all household fuel use;
>
> a household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, it would be required to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (excluding housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest (ISMI) on all household fuel use.

Paragraph 9.4 sets out our intention to move to a single UK-wide definition of fuel poverty once the separate consultations have been completed in the devolved Administrations.

Until then, the nature of our programmes means that it is likely that the targets will be met on both definitions as set out in paragraph 4.6 of the strategy.

Foot and Mouth

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average cost of decontamination and cleansing of farms was following foot and mouth infections. [26026]

Mr. Morley: On premises where secondary cleansing and disinfection has been completed, the average cost per farm is about £39,000.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the change in animal welfare and costs arising from the closure of livestock markets as a result of the foot and mouth epidemic and their replacement by sales via other means. [26035]

Mr. Morley: Livestock markets were closed to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease. Markets will be reopened as soon as the disease risk assessment allows. In the meantime, livestock producers have found other means of selling their stock and it will be for them and their organisations to decide on how they should best proceed when markets are again available. The costs and benefits of livestock markets is one of the issues we will be considering post-FMD and in the light of the inquiry reports.

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much compensation was paid to farmers in Cumbria as a result of foot and mouth. [26048]

Mr. Morley: To date the total compensation paid to farmers in Cumbria, as a result of foot and mouth, is £421.8 million. This includes all compensation paid for animals slaughtered (including those slaughtered under the 3km cull) and for seized and destroyed items.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which date her Department will use to consider when exports and livestock markets may resume following the foot and mouth disease crisis; and if she will make a statement. [27624]

Mr. Morley: On 18 December, the Government announced changes to the livestock movement controls which we intend to introduce in February 2002 provided there is continued progress in eradicating FMD.

From the start of these arrangements, cattle markets will be allowed to resume, but for sheep and pigs, slaughter markets only will be allowed initially. The question of whether to allow other sheep and pig markets will be kept under review in the light of veterinary and scientific advice.

When markets do re-open, they will be subject to strict conditions to ensure that an appropriate level of biosecurity is maintained.

Exports of meat from FMD-free counties in Great Britain to EU countries resumed towards the end of last year but at this stage it is not possible to give a firm date for the removal of all remaining FMD restrictions on intra-community trade. The EU Standing Veterinary Committee will meet on 15 January to consider further proposals to relax the export restrictions, imposed on animals and animal products of species susceptible to FMD, introduced to prevent the spread of the virus.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of blood tests taken from *(a)* sheep, *(b)* cattle and *(c)* other livestock during the foot and mouth outbreak tested positively for the FMD virus. [27025]

Mr. Morley: Information on blood tests taken by species is not available. However, of the 2,372 premises from which samples were taken, 56 per cent. returned positive results.

Details of numbers of premises sampled, by county and by premises status, along with the numbers returning positive results, are available in the Library of the House.

Note:

A negative lab result does not mean that infection was absent. Each case is confirmed on the basis of a clinical diagnosis of foot and mouth disease by the vet on the farm, supported by convincing clinical evidence.

Source:

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 4 December 2001. These figures may be subject to change while the data validation exercise is being carried out.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many appeals against valuations for FMD compensation were outstanding on 8 January. [27027]

Mr. Morley: On 8 January 2002 there were 1,293 unresolved cases as a result of owners appealing against the valuations of livestock compulsorily slaughtered as a result of foot and mouth disease. Of these, 150 are in Scotland.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the recommendations made by each of the working groups at the International Conference on Control and Prevention of Foot and Mouth Disease held in Brussels in December 2001; what plans she has to implement those recommendations in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [27656]

Mr. Morley: The Conference's working groups usefully highlighted some of the key areas the European Union needs to address and we will be working with our European partners in due course on a Commission proposal for a replacement European Council Directive concerning the prevention and control of foot and mouth disease. The outcome from the UK's own independent inquiries into the foot and mouth outbreak will also inform these deliberations.

The conference identified the need to develop a broad range of disease control options, based on science and including emergency vaccination, to meet particular circumstances. It was agreed that flexibility in the choice of methods of controlling and eradicating the disease and improved communications are required and that there is an urgent need for tests to differentiate between infected and vaccinated animals. The conference also considered ways of preventing future outbreaks, including tightening import controls at the European border.

Copies of the final conference report have been placed in the House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries. It can also be viewed on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth.

Farming

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what contribution farming made to English GDP in each of the years 1998 to 2001, after the deduction of all *(a)* subsidies and *(b)* foot and mouth costs. [26027]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the contribution after removing all subsidies that the agricultural industry made to English GDP in 1998, 1999 and 2000. Statistics on agriculture's contribution in 2001 will not be published until 31 January 2002. The Government are spending an additional £2.7 billion to tackle foot and mouth disease and its implications for the rural economy.

Agriculture's contribution to English GDP after removing subsidies[1]

	Contribution (£ billion)	*Contribution as a percentage*
1998	3.6	0.56
1999	3.4	0.51
2000	2.9	0.41

[1] Subsidies paid directly to farmers and the cost to the exchequer of indirect support of market prices.

Bird Populations

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the change in the number and percentage of British birds from 1990 to 2000 was. [26060]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's Quality of Life Counts indicator of wild birds uses an index of bird populations set at 100 for 1970. Actual population numbers are not calculated. The values of the index for 1990 and 2000 are presented in the table for all 105 bird species included. Further information on these statistics is published in the DEFRA News Release No. 303/01.

Bird population index

	All birds
1970	100
1990	102
2000	107

Agricultural Bureaucracy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many full-time equivalent staff of her Department are engaged in the administration of area and headage payments; and how much time she estimates is required of people outside her Department. [26649]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The number of full-time equivalent staff engaged in the administration of area and headage payments is 1,520. The amount of time required of people outside the Department engaged on this work is very limited and relates exclusively to contracted-out work on remote sensing.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many full-time equivalent staff of her Department are engaged in the administration of quotas; and how much time she estimates is required of people outside her Department. [26650]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The number of full-time equivalent staff engaged in the administration of quotas is 100. There are no people engaged in quota work outside of the Department on its behalf.

Agricultural Quotas

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what agricultural products are the subject of quotas; how many holdings are in possession of each quota; and what is the average size of each quota per holding in possession of that quota. [26651]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Milk and sugar from sugar beet are the two agricultural products subject to quotas. At the end of the 2000–01 quota year there were some 33,000 holders of milk quota in the UK, with an average quota holding of about 429,000 litres. The UK has a quota for 1.14 million tonnes of sugar held by British Sugar, who draw up individual supply contracts with growers. In the marketing year 2001–02 around 8,300 sugar beet farmers are contracted to supply British Sugar with sugar beet.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many paper mills invested in combined heat and power plants in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2001–02 to date. [26126]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The following number of paper mills invested in new CHP capacity between 1997–98 and 2000–01:

	Number
1997–98	0
1998–99	1
1999–2000	3
2000–01	2

This information is taken from the Digest of UK Energy Statistics. Data for 2001–02 are not currently available.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions she has calculated will be saved by the United Kingdom paper industry investing in combined heat and power plants, and over what period, under the Government's targets for climate change. [26125]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The latest figures in the DTI published Digest of UK Energy Statistics are for the year 2000 and show the paper industry (including publishing and printing) to be saving approximately 500,000 tonnes of carbon annually through its use of combined heat and power (CHP). In addition, our best estimate of the savings stimulated by the climate change agreements for the paper industry are 140,000 tonnes of carbon annually by 2010 from CHP.

IACS Payments

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of IACS payments will have been made to farmers by 31 January. [26087]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* At 30 December 20001, 68 per cent. of AAPS applications had been passed for payment.

The performance this year was initially affected by foot and mouth disease and more particularly lately by industrial action. The union suspended its industrial action on 11 January and the Rural Payments Agency, which is responsible for the administration of the scheme, is making every possible effort to ensure that as many payments as possible are made by 31 January.

Livestock Markets

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when livestock markets in England and Wales will reopen. [26725]

Mr. Morley: On 18 December 2001, the Government announced changes to the livestock movement controls which we intend to introduce in February 2002 provided there is continued progress in eradicating foot and mouth disease.

From the start of these arrangements, cattle markets will be allowed to resume, but for sheep and pigs, slaughter markets only will be allowed initially. The question of whether to allow other sheep and pig markets will be kept under review in the light of veterinary and scientific advice.

When markets do reopen, they will be subject to strict construction and operating conditions to ensure that an appropriate level of biosecurity is maintained.

Apples and Pears

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to protect United Kingdom crop fruit growers from the effects of EU proposals to amend the marketing standard for apples and pears. [26776]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The EU marketing standard for apples and pears is currently under review, proposals having been made to bring variety lists up to date and to separate the standards for apples and pears. Last year the EU Commission also published an informal paper on the possible future amendment of the sizing requirements. Our horticultural marketing inspectorate has consulted widely on this matter with growers' representatives and other interested parties. We will ensure that the views expressed by all stakeholders are taken into consideration in any future discussions.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to answer the question tabled on 27 November 2001 by the right hon. Member for Fylde (ref 17652) on payments to farmers. [26779]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him on 11 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1040–41W.

Flood Prevention

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the impact of water companies ending agency working with local authorities and other external agencies for the purpose of flood prevention. [27006]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* I am aware of no significant impact of any such action. The primary responsibility for flood defence rests with the operating authorities, i.e. the Environment Agency, local authorities and, where they exist, internal drainage boards.

Rural Affairs Forum

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those organisations that have been asked to participate in the Rural Affairs Forum, and give the names of the nominees. [27657]

Alun Michael: The organisations and names of the nominees asked to participate in the Rural Affairs Forum are as shown in the table.

Organisations	*Name of nominees*
Chair	Alun Michael
Vice-Chair	Elliot Morley
Rural Advocate	Ewen Cameron
Association of National Park Authorities	Martin Fitton
Council for the Protection of Rural England	Gregor Hutcheon
National Trust	Tony Burton
Ramblers Association	Nick Barrett
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Phil Rothwell
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals	Peter Davies
Country Land and Business Association	Sir Edward Greenwell
British Horse Society	Kay Driver
British Chambers of Commerce	Viv Dodd
National Farmers Union	John Seymour
Countryside Alliance	Richard Burge
Trades Union Congress	Barry Leathwood
Co-operative Union	Pauline Green
Action with Communities in Rural England	Sylvia Brown
Churches Together in England	Canon Jeremy Martineau
National Council for Voluntary Organisations	Holly Yates
National Federation of Women's Institutes	Jill Cobley
National Youth Agency	Dave Phillips
Age Concern England	Gordon Lishman
East of England Development Agency	Marie Skinner
Local Government Association	Councillor Christine Reid
National Association of Local Councils	Councillor Brian Kerr
English Nature	David Arnold-Forster
English Tourism Council	Mary Lynch
Environment Agency	Andrew Dare
Forestry Commission	Paul Hill-Tout
Housing Corporation	Fiona Cruickshank
Countryside Agency	Richard Cameron

The Secretary to the Forum will be Chris Dunabin.

A representative of every Regional Forum will attend each meeting of the Rural Affairs Forum for England.

Other Government Departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies will have an interest in the work of the Forum and will be invited to attend individual meetings as necessary.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish *(a)* minutes from and *(b)* reports to the Rural Affairs Forum. [27313]

Alun Michael: We will be publishing the minutes from and reports to the Rural Affairs Forum on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk.

River Severn (Flooding Model)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the model on flooding on the River Severn being prepared by the Environment Agency. [27005]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Operational responsibility for flood management measures rests with the local operating authorities, normally the Environment Agency (EA) and local councils, who decide which projects to promote and their timing.

I understand that the EA's model for the Tidal River Severn downstream of Gloucester has been completed recently. It will be used to develop the Tidal Severn Strategy which the EA plan to publish in summer 2003. The Fluvial River Severn model is being used to develop the Fluvial Severn Strategy which the EA plan to publish in spring 2003.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 16 January 2002

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what body formally employs the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [27002]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is an Officer of the House. Her employer is the House of Commons Commission.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what arrangements are in place for monitoring the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [27003]

Mr. Kirkwood: Since the appointment of the first Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in 1995 it has been recognised that the formal appraisal arrangements for senior Officers of the House are not appropriate for the special circumstances of the post. Both Commissioners have discussed their work from time to time with the Speaker and the Clerk of the House. In addition, Standing Order No. 149 (1)(b) provides that the Committee on Standards and Privileges shall oversee the work of the Commissioner.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when *(a)* the Commission and *(b)* the Chairman last held a formal meeting with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [25691]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission has not held a formal meeting with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. The Speaker last held a meeting with the Commissioner on 14 January 2002.

Euro

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the Commission will ensure that the House canteens, refreshment outlets and gift shops will accept euros from 1 January 2002, and that those Members who wish it will be entitled to be paid in euros from 1 January 2002. [24957]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* With regard to the acceptance of euros by the House of Commons Refreshment Department, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 876W. As for the question of paying Members' salaries in euros, this is a matter for the President of the Council.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Returners' Bonus

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers were paid the returners' bonus by 31 October. [24889]

Mr. Timms: None. Up to 31 December, 17 local education authorities and one non-maintained special school had submitted claims in respect of payments made to 36 teachers. The bulk of claims will not be made until later this year.

Teacher Vacancies (Kirklees)

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in Kirklees metropolitan council area each month from January 1997 to December 2001 in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [26245]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the form requested.

Vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in Kirklees local authority, in January of each year from 1997, were as follows:

	Nursery and primary	*Secondary*
1997	1	1
1998	0	6
1999	2	1
2000	0	3
2001	5	5

Special Educational Needs

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils there are with SEN statements at each of the secondary schools in *(a)* Teesside area and *(b)* the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [26736]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Maintained secondary schools: Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN), as at January 2001

School name	*LEA name*	*Parliamentary constituency*	*Number of pupils with statements of SEN*
Brierton School	Hartlepool	Hartlepool	24
Dyke House Comprehensive School	Hartlepool	Hartlepool	26
High Tunstall Comprehensive School	Hartlepool	Hartlepool	13
Manor College of Technology	Hartlepool	Hartlepool	15
The English Martyrs School and Sixth Form College	Hartlepool	Hartlepool	17

Maintained secondary schools: Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN), as at January 2001

School name	*LEA name*	*Parliamentary constituency*	*Number of pupils with statements of SEN*
Hall Garth School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	32
King's Manor School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	17
Langbaurgh School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	14
Ormesby School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	69
Coulby Newham School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland	46
Keldholme School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	21
Acklam Grange School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	10
Brackenhoe School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland	19
St. Anthony's RC School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	15
The Newlands Catholic School FCJ	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland	3
St. David's Roman Catholic School	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	5
Eston Park School	Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar	42
Laurence Jackson School	Redcar and Cleveland	Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland	24
Huntcliff School	Redcar and Cleveland	Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland	10
Bydales School	Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar	23
Gillbrook Technology College	Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar	15
Nunthorpe School	Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar	13
Rye Hills School	Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar	13
West Redcar Community School	Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar	23
Saint Peter's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School, South Bank	Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar	8
Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Comprehensive School	Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar	4
Thornaby Community School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton South	55
Egglescliffe School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton South	8
Conyers School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton South	8
Northfield School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton North	6
The Norton School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton North	30
Bishopsgarth School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton South	55
Blakeston Community School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton North	50
Grangefield School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton South	16
Billingham Campus School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton North	30
St. Michael's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton North	5
Our Lady and St. Bede RC School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton South	15
St. Patrick's RC Comprehensive School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton South	2
Ian Ramsey Church of England Aided Comprehensive School	Stockton on Tees	Stockton South	14

Source:

DfES 2001 Secondary school performance tables.

Teacher Vacancies (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in the London borough of Hillingdon local education authority at *(a)* January 2001, *(b)* September 2001 and *(c)* January 2002 in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools. [26943]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of full-time vacancies for teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in Hillingdon in January 2001 were as follows:

	Number of vacancies
Nursery and primary	16
Secondary	30

The sample survey conducted by my Department in September 2001 did not collect vacancy data by local education authority. The results of the January 2002 survey of teacher numbers and vacancies will be published in April, in the normal way.

Overseas Teachers (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many overseas teachers were working in the London borough of Hillingdon local education authority at December 2001 in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools, broken down by country of origin. [26944]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Teacher Vacancies (Chesham and Amersham)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there are in local education authority schools in Chesham and Amersham. [27123]

Mr. Timms: My Department only collects teacher vacancies at local education authority level. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 59–60W.

Revenue Funding

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total amount of revenue funding per pupil available for children in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) Staffordshire, (ii) Hertfordshire and (iii) England has been in each of the last five years. [27259]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is contained in the table.

£ per pupil

	Primary			*Secondary*		
Cash	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total*	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total*
Staffordshire						
1997–98	1,930	30	1,970	2,530	30	2,560
1998–99	2,040	40	2,070	2,650	30	2,680
1999–2000	2,150	90	2,250	2,760	60	2,820
2000–01	2,240	250	2,490	2,880	200	3,080
2001–02	2,330	410	2,740	3,000	310	3,310
Change[1]	390	380	770	470	280	750

£ per pupil

	Primary			Secondary		
Cash	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total*	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total*
Real						
1997–98	2,070	30	2,110	2,710	30	2,740
1998–99	2,120	40	2,160	2,760	30	2,800
1999–2000	2,190	100	2,290	2,810	60	2,870
2000–01	2,240	250	2,490	2,880	200	3,080
2001–02	2,270	400	2,670	2,930	300	3,230
Change[1]	200	370	570	210	270	480
Hertfordshire						
1997–98	2,130	30	2,170	2,790	30	2,810
1998–99	2,260	40	2,300	2,930	30	2,960
1999–2000	2,370	100	2,470	3,020	70	3,090
2000–01	2,240	250	2,720	3,170	190	3,360
2001–02	2,610	430	3,030	3,330	310	3,640
Change[1]	470	390	860	540	280	830
Real						
1997–98	2,290	30	2,320	2,990	30	3,010
1998–99	2,350	40	2,390	3,050	40	3,090
1999–2000	2,410	100	2,510	3,080	70	3,140
2000–01	2,470	250	2,720	3,170	190	3,360
2001–02	2,540	420	2,960	3,250	300	3,550
Change[1]	250	380	640	260	270	540
England						
1997–98	2,130	30	2,160	2,780	30	2,810
1998–99	2,250	40	2,290	2,920	40	2,960
1999–2000	2,370	110	2,490	3,030	80	3,110
2000–01	2,470	290	2,760	3,180	230	3,410
2001–02	2,590	500	3,090	3,310	380	2,690
Change[1]	460	470	930	530	350	880
Real						
1997–98	2,280	30	2,320	2,980	30	3,010
1998–99	2,340	50	2,390	3,040	40	3,080
1999–2000	2,410	120	2,530	3,080	80	3,170
2000–01	2,470	290	2,760	3,180	230	3,410
2001–02	2,520	490	3,010	3,230	370	3,600
Change[1]	240	450	700	250	340	590

[1] Change since 1997–98

Notes:

1. The figures reflect Education SSA (primary and secondary blocks respectively) plus all school related revenue grants in DfES's DEL relevant to pupils aged 5–10 (primary) and 11–15 (secondary).
2. The primary and secondary grant figures include notional allocations for those grants in support of more than one sector.
3. Pupil numbers underlying the £ per pupil figures are those underlying the SSA calculations (primary and secondary sub-blocks respectively).
4. Real terms figures are calculated using GDP deflators published by the Treasury 20 December 2001.
5. 2001–02 figures are provisional as decisions on some funding allocations have yet to be finalised. The figures are thus liable to be revised later on in the year.
6. Figures rounded to the £10. Difference figures may not sum due to funding.

Teacher Training

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure a percentage of teacher training places are available to schools and graduates in North Staffordshire. [27380]

Mr. Timms: In allocating college-based and employment-based initial teacher training places, the Teacher Training Agency gives priority to high-quality provision. In allocating college-based places the agency also has regard wherever possible to the need for a balanced geographical distribution.

Graduate Trainee Programme

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria are set for *(a)* schools and *(b)* graduate applicants in respect of a successful application to the Graduate Trainee Programme. [27381]

Mr. Timms: All entrants to the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) must meet the general requirements both for admission to postgraduate courses of initial teacher training laid down in my Department's Circular 4/98 and for admission to employment-based teacher training prescribed by the Education (Teachers' Qualifications and Health Standards) (England) Regulations 1999, as amended. Decisions on which applications to approve are taken by the Teacher Training Agency, which administers the programme on my Department's behalf. The criteria which the agency applies to reach those decisions are published in the booklet "How to Apply for the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes in England", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Ofsted

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Ofsted inspections have been carried out in schools in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [27768]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools and I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Early Years Excellence

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 934W, on Early Years Excellence, (1) when she expects to announce the results of the assessment of the interests of Somerford Infant School; [27726]

(2) by what means her Department plans to follow up interest in Somerford Infant School; [27727]

(3) whether the further guidance issued on 5 October 1991 was sent direct to Somerford Infant School; and if she will make a statement. [27728]

Margaret Hodge: The additional guidance issued on 5 October 2001 was not sent to Somerford Infant School, but to Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, local authorities and others who received the February 2001 guidance, in response to which the school submitted its expression of interest in joining the programme.

Officials provided feedback to Somerford on their proposals in June 2001, and will shortly further follow up Somerford's interest in the programme by contacting the headteacher of the school in the first instance.

Following expressions of interest, the Department announces only the names of newly designated Early Excellence Centres. Such announcements are made periodically.

School Meals

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the funding for the national food in schools programme has been allocated; and if she will make a statement. [20501]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The majority of funding for the food in schools programme has not yet been allocated. We are working with the Department for Education and Skills to develop proposals that cover the breadth of opportunities for food in schools. The programme will aim to bring together all food related initiatives in schools and after-school clubs to improve both health and learning, and ensure consistent information is given about health and nutrition. Following an advisory forum meeting in the summer, proposals are being put together into a series of pilot schemes that can be tested throughout the country. This includes assessing existing initiatives as well as new ones to ensure that the programme builds on and supports existing work in schools by a number of organisations.

TREASURY

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the level of contingency reserves in *(a)* departmental expenditure limits and *(b)* annually managed expenditure in (i) 2002–03, (ii) 2003–04 and (iii) 2004–05. [26994]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's latest view of the planned DEL Reserve and the forecast AME Margin are given in tables B16 and B13 respectively of the pre-Budget report (Cm 5318), up to the final year for which public spending plans have been published (2003–04).

Local Authorities' Capital Receipts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statistical assessment he has made of the effect of the release of local authorities' capital receipts on the public sector borrowing requirement. [27449]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The release of local authorities' capital receipts is taken into account in the published forecasts of public borrowing.

All-party Parliamentary Groups

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many all-party Parliamentary groups have received funding in each of the last four years; and how much was received in each year by each group. [27478]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Four all-party parliamentary groups have received funding from the Treasury in the last four years. They are the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the British American Parliamentary Group (BAPG) and the British-Irish Parliamentary Group (BIPG).

The amount of grant in aid paid to each of the groups in each of the last four years is set out in the table.

£

	IPU	*CPA*	*BIIP*	*BAPG*
1998–99	785,000	888,750	149,000	82,124
1999–2000	785,000	868,300	201,700	73,350
2000–01	853,000	2,498,683	218,000	84,600
2001–02	0	93,750	95,000	85,420

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the criteria which his Department applies in awarding grants to all-party parliamentary groups. [27479]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There are no fixed criteria. Grants in aid for all-party parliamentary groups are financed from the Treasury's Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit, on the basis of an assessment of competing pressures.

Public Services Productivity

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 769W, on public services productivity, how many seminars have been held on the paper; on which dates these seminars have occurred; who attended the seminars; and if he will make a statement. [27615]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No seminars have been held on the paper.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the increase in public expenditure in real terms in each of the last three years. [27467]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The increases in total public spending (Total Managed Expenditure—TME) and Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) after inflation for each of the last three years on the previous year are given in the table. These figures are consistent with figures published in the pre-Budget report 2001.

Financial year	*Percentage real increase in DEL on previous year*	*Percentage real increase in TME on previous year*
2000–01	3.4	3.7
1999–2000	3.2	0.8
1998–99	2.8	0.2

Tax Evasion

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was lost to the Inland Revenue in each of the last 10 years as a result of tax evasion. [27926]

Dawn Primarolo: No such figures are available.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each local authority in East Lancashire the most recent take-up rates for working families tax credit and the last available take-up rates for family credit. [28180]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to produce reliable estimates of take-up rates for each local authority.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households in South Tyneside have benefited from the working families tax credit. [28064]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of recipients of working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit in each local authority and in each constituency are shown in "Working Families' and Disabled Person's Tax Credit Statistics. Geographical analyses", copies of which are in the Library and on the Inland Revenue website, www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk, under "Statistics".

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employers have been *(a)* fined and *(b)* prosecuted for wrongly calculating employees' entitlement to working families tax credit. [27466]

Dawn Primarolo: None.

Tax and Underwriting Commission

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the proceeds were from the tax and underwriting commission in each of the last four years. [26233]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available.

Tax Forms

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax forms have been sent to pensioners in *(a)* this financial year and *(b)* 2000–01; how many forms have been incorrectly sent; and what is the estimated cost of sending one million tax forms. [26283]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue holds no details of the number of ITSA Returns sent to pensioners.

The estimated cost if one million pensioner style ITSA Returns were sent is £300,000.00.

Independent Taxation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the reduction in income tax liability has been as a result of the introduction of independent taxation over the last 12 years for *(a)* higher rate taxpayers, *(b)* basic rate taxpayers and *(c)* the bottom 10 per cent. of earners. [26267]

Dawn Primarolo: It would be possible to provide an answer only at disproportionate cost.

Maintenance Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many divorced and separated partners there are where the partner in receipt of maintenance payments has an income that falls below the tax threshold and where the partner making the payments pays tax at the *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher rate; and what the total amount was of tax relief at present granted on maintenance payments made by separated or divorced partners at basic rates and higher rates. [26205]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost of administering the national insurance contributions system in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1990, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2000–01 in (i) current prices and (ii) historic prices, broken down by (A) the cost of collecting contributions, (B) the cost of paying contributory benefits and pensions and (C) all other costs of recording and administering the national insurance system. [26863]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost incurred in administering the national insurance scheme in 1980, 1990 and 2000 is detailed in the National Insurance Fund Accounts for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

These are published in White Paper Accounts and are available from the House of Commons Library.

The 2000–01 accounts are currently being audited by the National Audit Office.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the estimated full year revenue effect of abolishing the upper earnings limit for employees' national insurance contributions. [26228]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 135W.

Higher Rate Taxpayers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many higher rate taxpayers there are in 2001–02. [26264]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to "Inland Revenue Statistics" table 2.1, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/it_t01-1.htm.

Dividend Income

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in each of the last four years reported dividend income to the Inland Revenue. [26232]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of taxpayers who reported dividend income to the Inland Revenue, between 1997–98 and 2000–01, are shown in the table.

Number of taxpayers who reported dividend income to the Inland Revenue

	Number (millions)
1997–98	2.6
1998–99	3.0
1999–2000	3.1
2000–01	3.2

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the pre-Budget report 2001.

Incomes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax units will be on incomes, including unearned income, in excess of *(a)* £30,000 *(b)* £50,000, *(c)* £75,000 and *(d)* £100,000 in 2001–02. [26203]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of taxpayers by range of total income in 2001–02 is shown in the table.

Range of total income—lower limit	*Number (millions)*
£30,000	2.9
£50,000	0.7
£75,000	0.2
£100,000	0.3

These estimates are based on the 1999–2000 Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax units will be on income in excess of *(a)* £100,000, *(b)* £250,000, *(c)* £500,000 and *(d)* £1 million in 2001–02. [26210]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of taxpayers in 2001–02 with income in excess of *(a)* £100,000, *(b)* £250,000, *(c)* £500,000 and *(d)* £1 million are estimated in the table.

Income in excess of:	*Number of taxpayers (thousand)*
£100,000	301
£250,000	61
£500,000	18
£1,000,000	5

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the pre-Budget report 2001.

Income Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide an estimate of the number of those who will pay income tax in 2001–02; and how many people paid income tax in each of the last four years. [24815]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to Table 2.1 of Inland Revenue Statistics. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/it_t01–1.htm.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the planned expenditure on transport as a percentage of gross domestic product in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [26213]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In 2001–02, total transport expenditure is estimated to be 0.91 per cent. of GDP. In 2002–03, it is estimated to be 1.02 per cent. In 2003–04, it is estimated to be 1.14 per cent.

Contingency Reserve

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by department the sums of money that have been allocated in this financial year from the contingency reserve. [26271]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 524W.

Definitions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the Government adhere to the national accounts definitions of capital and current expenditure except in respect of the treatment of depreciation; [26135]

(2) what the Treasury definition of capital expenditure is for the purposes of the golden rule. [26099]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's fiscal rules are defined in terms of statistics from national accounts. Performance against the golden rule is measured against the surplus on the current budget which is equal to public sector current receipts less public sector current expenditure including depreciation, all as measured in national accounts. Total managed expenditure (TME)—the Government's measure of total public expenditure—is public sector current expenditure plus capital expenditure as recorded in national accounts.

At present for national accounts, ONS estimate depreciation for the whole of Government using an economic model. As part of the introduction of resource accounting, each central Government Department now calculates its own depreciation directly. ONS plan to start using this new data source for most of central Government in national accounts later this year.

Geoffrey Spence

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what role he has given to Geoffrey Spence relating to PPPs; and if he will make a statement. [17674]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Geoffrey Spence's role at Partnerships UK is to provide the Treasury with a dedicated senior professional resource to advise on the development and implementation of PPPs.

European Accounts System

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the changes in the national accounts resulting from the new European system of accounts which will affect general Government expenditure; [27448]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of changes in the national accounts resulting from the European system of accounts on general Government expenditure. [27446]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 15 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions concerning the list of changes in the national accounts resulting in the new European System of Accounts which will effect general government expenditure and what assessment has been made of the effect of these changes. I am replying in his absence. (27446, 27448).

These questions cannot be answered fully, partly because general government expenditure is not defined in the European System of Accounts (ESA) and is no longer published and partly because differences between the old and latest versions of the ESA are no longer estimated.

Several publications in 1998, when the UK introduced the 1995 version of ESA, documented the changes made to the national accounts. One of these was the November 1998 Pre-Budget Report (pages 123 to 125) which gave a full quantified description of the effect of introducing ESA on some of the common measures of public expenditure. Details were also given in the Office for National Statistics Blue Book and other publications published on 24 September 1998 and in an article in the July 1998 edition of Economic Trends. All these publications are available through the Library of the House.

Prospectus Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he proposes to the draft European Union Prospectus Directive. [27487]

Ruth Kelly: The most important areas where we are proposing changes can be listed as follows:

More appropriate definitions of "home state", "qualified investor", and "public offer";

Clarification of the scope for private and institutional placements under the directive;

Voluntary shelf registration and annual updating;

More appropriate disclosure requirements for professional products, SME issued securities, and third country based issuers;

An expanded list of exemptions; and

A more effective passport for pan-European issuers.

Public Service Agreement Target

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission independent research into the appropriateness of his Department's chosen public service agreement target. [27468]

Ruth Kelly: No.

Euro

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assistance has been made available to local authorities to issue the payment of bills or services in euros; and what plans he has to review the limit set for local authorities regarding collection of their income in non-sterling. [27664]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the Government's preparations for the introduction of euro cash in the euro area from 1 January 2002 are contained in the Fifth Report on Euro Preparations. There are no plans to issue additional guidance to local authorities at this stage.

PRIME MINISTER

Terrorism

Q11. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with President Bush concerning the campaign against terrorism. [25667]

The Prime Minister: I am in regular contact with President Bush on a wide range of issues.

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the projects worked upon by Lord Birt, pursuant to his recent appointment. [27534]

The Prime Minister: Lord Birt provides me and other Cabinet Ministers with long-term internal strategic analysis and policy thinking.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 819W, what qualities he identified in Lord Birt that led him to appoint him to analyse the country's transport problems. [27524]

The Prime Minister: As I said in my earlier answer, I appointed Lord Birt as unpaid strategy adviser because of his extensive experience of strategy formulation in both the public and private sectors.

Overseas Visits

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister on how many days in each month in 2001 he was out of the country other than on holiday; and on how many days he indicated to the Deputy Prime Minister that he would be abroad. [27525]

The Prime Minister: In 2001, I made the following overseas visits:

29 January—Germany
9 February—Anglo-French Summit, France
21–22 February—Canada
22–24 February—USA
22–24 March—European Council, Sweden
13 June NATO summit, Belgium
14–16 June—European Council, Sweden
20–22 July—G8 Summit, Italy
29 July-3 August—Jamaica, Brazil, Argentina and Mexico.

For overseas visits since 11 September, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on 14 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 87–89W.

It is my practice to inform Cabinet colleagues about my overseas engagements.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Violence

4. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many punishment beatings, shootings and expulsions have been administered by the Provisional IRA over the last six months; and if he will make a statement. [25594]

Jane Kennedy: In the period 1 July to 31 December 2001 there were 146 paramilitary style attacks. Loyalist groups were responsible for 96 of these attacks (41 assaults and 55 shootings) and Republican groups for 50 attacks (15 assaults and 35 shootings). It is not always possible to attribute these attacks to any specific groupings.

18. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of terrorist incidents and beatings in the last six months. [25647]

Jane Kennedy: Terrorist activity during the past six months has remained at a significant level. The table provides a breakdown of the security related incidents during the last six months compared to the same period in 2000.

Security situation statistics—number of terrorist incidents July-December 2001

	July-December 2000	*July-December 2001*
Number of deaths as a result of the security situation	13	9
Number of shooting incidents	188	186
Number of bombing incidents	95	229
Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style assaults	64	55
Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings	74	90

Police Co-operation

5. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the co-operation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána. [25595]

Dr. John Reid: On 13 December, the Government issued a timetable for the implementation of Patten's recommendations on north/south policing co-operation. The British and Irish Governments have been working closely together to make progress, building on the existing good co-operation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána. The practical benefits of joint operations can be seen in a recent example of co-operation between law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border which resulted in nine people being charged with offences relating to the smuggling and laundering of fuel.

Security Situation

6. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he plans to meet Sinn Fein's hon. Members to discuss the security situation. [25596]

Jane Kennedy: We hold regular meetings with all the political parties in Northern Ireland in which a range of issues including security matters are discussed. Any request for a meeting from Sinn Fein will be considered like any other request received from a political party.

Police Ombudsman

7. **Mr. Donaldson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many investigators employed by the police ombudsman have experience in the investigation of terrorist-related crime. [25599]

Dr. John Reid: The police ombudsman has advised that 17 of the investigators employed by her office have experience in the investigation of terrorist-related crime.

Golden Jubilee Medal

8. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many serving police officers in Northern Ireland will be entitled to receive the Golden Jubilee medal. [25600]

Dr. John Reid: It is estimated that 9,423 police officers will have completed five years' service on 6 February 2002 and will be eligible to receive the Golden Jubilee medal.

Policing

9. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Assembly in respect of policing. [25601]

Dr. John Reid: I have not held any discussions with the NI Assembly on policing, which at present remains a reserved matter.

The policing situation in Northern Ireland is a tri-partite arrangement involving the Northern Ireland Policing Board, the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and myself under detailed provisions set out in the Police (NI) Act 2000.

As Secretary of State, I am responsible for setting the statutory framework for policing and the long-term objectives for policing in Northern Ireland. The Policing Board, which is made up of democratically elected Assembly Members chosen by three of the parties and independents appointed by myself, has responsibility for holding the police to account and for monitoring and evaluating the service provided. The Chief Constable is responsible for the operational direction and control of the police service in Northern Ireland.

Belfast Agreement

10. **Lady Hermon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what definition he uses of the phrase parity of esteem in the Belfast agreement. [25602]

Dr. John Reid: I define the phrase parity of esteem with reference to its meaning in the Belfast agreement—which is of equal respect for the identity and ethos and aspirations of both communities in Northern Ireland.

19. **Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the Belfast agreement to be implemented in full. [25648]

Dr. John Reid: We have already made significant progress in implementing all aspects of the Belfast agreement. However, it is neither possible, nor helpful, to speculate about when this process will be completed. The agreement itself represents a process, not an event, and the British Government will continue to work with all the parties to ensure that the implementation process continues.

24. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the Belfast agreement. [25653]

Dr. John Reid: Much has been achieved since April 1998. Progress has been made on all elements within the Belfast agreement including human rights and equality of opportunity, normalisation, the reviews of policing and criminal justice, decommissioning and the establishment of the devolved institutions. We still have some way to go before the agreement is implemented in full and the British Government are committed to working with the political parties to ensure that progress continues on all fronts.

Fireworks

11. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the sale and use of fireworks in Northern Ireland. [25603]

Jane Kennedy: Having become increasingly aware of the many problems associated with the misuse of fireworks, not least in public order situations, I announced on 12 October 2001 that my officials, working closely with the police, prosecuting authorities and other interested bodies, would be undertaking a review of the situation to see if these problems could be resolved by strengthening the existing law.

That review should be completed within the next two months and it is my intention to produce proposals for public consultation.

Decommissioning

12. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the terrorist weapons which have been decommissioned. [25604]

13. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what reports he has received from the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning on the level of arms and explosives put permanently beyond use. [25605]

Jane Kennedy: The IICD reported on 23 October 2001 that it had witnessed an event, which it regarded as significant, in which the IRA had put a quantity of arms completely beyond use.

Also, on 18 December 1998, the Loyalist Volunteer Force decommissioned what the IICD described as a "small but significant" consignment of weaponry.

The Commission listed the arms as follows:

2 Madsen 9 mm sub-machine guns
1 Sten 9 mm Mark 2 sub-machine gun
1 modified Lanchester 9 mm Mark 1 sub-machine gun
1 Steyr 7 mm rifle (1904)
1 homemade .22 calibre rifle
1 sawn-off double-barrelled 12 gauge shotgun
1 FN Browning 9 mm semi automatic pistol
1 FN 7.65 mm semi-automatic pistol
31 12 gauge magnum 00 buckshot shotgun shells
23 .38 calibre semi wad-cutter cartridges
45 .556 calibre cartridges
280 9 mm cartridges
5 electrical detonators
2 pipe bombs
2 weapons stocks
5 assorted magazines.

15. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date he expects the decommissioning of illegally held arms and explosives to be completed. [25608]

Jane Kennedy: Future decommissioning events are a matter for the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and the representatives of the various paramilitary organisations.

Decommissioning is only one part of the Good Friday agreement of which we can now say that implementation of every aspect is under way. Full implementation of the Good Friday agreement in all its aspects is a task that will take some time to accomplish.

21. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in decommissioning; and if he will make a statement. [25650]

Jane Kennedy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) today, *Official Report*, columns 281-82W.

Electoral Fraud

14. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what use is made of national insurance numbers to combat electoral fraud. [25606]

Mr. Browne: National insurance numbers are not currently used to combat electoral fraud in Northern Ireland.

I am looking carefully at the arguments which have been made for the inclusion of a person's national insurance number as one of the items of personal information required on an application to the electoral register in Northern Ireland. I am discussing with the Department for Work and Pensions how national insurance numbers might be used effectively in the electoral process and whether their use would help to combat electoral fraud.

17. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent assessment he has made of the level of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland; and what measures are being taken to reduce it. [25646]

Mr. Browne: Following the 7 June elections, an independent research company was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Office to investigate all aspects of elections in Northern Ireland. The research findings were placed in the Library of the House on 16 October 2001.

The measures contained in the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill will tackle electoral abuse in Northern Ireland effectively without disadvantaging honest voters.

Police Recruitment and Retention

16. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask t[illegible]ecretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on police recruitment and retention. [25609]

Jane Kennedy: Two recruitment competitions have now been launched for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which together have attracted over 12,000 applicants, of whom over 36 per cent. were Catholic. Recruitment competitions to the Royal Ulster Constabulary which were held on an approximately annual basis attracted on average 3,000 applicants; the highest proportion of Catholic applicants in any single competition was 22.3 per cent.

During the period January to December 2000, 208 Regular and 166 Full-Time Reserve officers left the RUC under natural wastage.

The voluntary severance came into operation in January 2001 and in the period January to December 2001, a total of 1,069 Regular officers and 129 Full-Time Reserve officers left under the terms of the scheme. In the same period, a further 149 Regular and 166 Full-Time Reserve officers left under natural wastage.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

22. **David Burnside:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve will receive priority in applying for full-time employment in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [25651]

Jane Kennedy: All those who apply to join the Police Service of Northern Ireland are required to achieve a fixed standard of merit when tested in nine separate policing competencies. Candidates are thereafter selected on a 50 per cent. Catholic, 50 per cent. non-Catholic basis. No priority is given to members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve or any other police service.

Saville Inquiry

23. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost to date is of the Saville inquiry. [25652]

Jane Kennedy: The cost of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry to the Northern Ireland Office, as at 7 January 2002, is £52 million. This does not include costs to other Departments such as the Ministry of Defence.

Terrorist Crime

25. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to tackle the financing of terrorist crime in Northern Ireland. [25654]

Jane Kennedy: The Government's strategy for tackling terrorist crime in Northern Ireland is two-fold. First, the police must have available to them robust legislative powers. The Terrorism Act 2000 contains a number of financial provisions for seeking information and restraining assets. These powers were supplemented by the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, passed in the wake of the events on 11 September.

Second, in September 2000, the Government established an Organised Crime Taskforce for Northern Ireland. The taskforce brings together the agencies operating in Northern Ireland to agree crime types for concerted [illegible]-agency action. The taskforce has published an assessment of the threat to Northern Ireland society from serious and organised crime, which assesses that approximately half of the organised crime gangs in Northern Ireland have links with the paramilitaries.

Real IRA

26. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the sources of *(a)* political and *(b)* financial support for the Real IRA. [25656]

Jane Kennedy: A clear distinction needs to be made between the expression of political attitudes, opinions and beliefs and the actual commission or instigation of terrorist crime. The Real IRA remains a proscribed organisation. The Government believe that the Real IRA and the 32 County Sovereignty Movement are inextricably linked. However, on the basis of the evidence currently available, the Government assess that the 32 County Sovereignty Movement is not concerned in terrorism.

Any assessment of the financial support for the Real IRA would inevitably rely on intelligence. It is the Government's policy not to comment on such matters.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Bangladesh

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Bangladesh regarding the policy towards people trafficking. [24269]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 3 December 2001, our high commissioner in Dhaka encouraged the Bangladeshi Home Minister to pursue Bangladeshi signature of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and its associated protocols on human trafficking and people smuggling. We raise wider human rights concerns with the Bangladesh authorities on a regular basis. When Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed human rights with the then Bangladeshi Home Minister during a visit to Dhaka in September 2000.

British Deaths Abroad

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens have been murdered abroad in each year since 1995; in which countries; and in how many cases the perpetrator has been brought to justice. [25882]

Mr. Bradshaw: The table gives details of where and how many British nationals were murdered overseas since 1996 when we started collating this data. The cost of producing the information requested about the number of perpetrators brought to justice would be disproportionate.

Murders of British nationals overseas: 1996–2001

Country	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2000'*
Angola	1	—	3	1	—	—
Antigua and Barbuda	—	1	1	—	1	—
Argentina	—	—	—	—	1	—
Australia	5	3	2	1	—	—
Austria	1	—	—	—	—	1
Bahamas	—	2	1	—	—	—
Bahrain	—	1	—	—	—	—
Bangladesh	1	—	—	—	2	—
Belgium	2	—	—	—	—	—
Belize	1	—	1	—	1	—
Botswana	1	—	—	—	—	—
Brazil	1	—	—	—	—	—
Cambodia	1	—	—	—	—	—
Canada	—	1	—	1	1	—
China	1	1	1	—	—	—
Colombia	—	—	3	—	—	—
Comoros	7	—	—	—	—	—
Congo	—	1	—	—	—	—
Cyprus	—	—	—	—	2	—
Czech Republic	—	1	—	—	—	1
Denmark	1	—	—	—	1	—
Egypt	—	7	—	—	—	—
France	1	1	1	4	1	3
Germany	1	—	—	2	2	1
Gibraltar	1	—	—	—	—	—
Greece	1	—	3	—	—	—
Guatemala	—	1	—	—	—	—
Guyana	1	—	—	—	—	—
Honduras	1	—	—	—	—	—
India	2	1	1	1	2	2
Indonesia	—	—	1	—	—	—
Iraq	—	1	—	—	—	—

Murders of British nationals overseas: 1996–2001

Country	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2000*[1]
Israel	—	1	—	—	—	—
Italy	—	—	1	—	1	1
Jamaica	1	—	2	2	3	2
Kazakhstan	—	—	—	—	—	1
Kenya	2	—	3	—	—	2
Kuwait	—	1	—	—	—	—
Madagascar	—	—	—	1	—	—
Malawi	—	1	—	—	—	—
Malaysia	—	—	1	1	—	—
Mexico	—	2	1	—	—	—
Mongolia	—	1	—	—	—	—
Mozambique	—	2	—	—	—	—
Nepal	—	—	—	—	1	—
Netherlands	1	3	2	—	1	1
New Zealand	—	—	—	1	—	—
Nigeria	—	—	1	1	—	2
Pakistan	1	1	1	9	—	—
Panama	—	—	—	1	—	—
Papua New Guinea	1	—	—	—	—	—
Philippines	2	1	—	3	1	—
Poland	1	—	—	—	—	—
Portugal	—	1	—	—	—	—
Russia	1	—	3	1	1	—
Rwanda	—	1	—	—	—	—
Saudi Arabia	—	—	—	—	1	—
Somalia	—	—	—	1	—	—
South Africa	8	8	3	3	8	4
Spain	4	2	1	4	7	6
Sweden	1	—	—	—	—	—
Tajikistan	—	—	—	1	—	—
Tanzania	—	—	1	1	—	—
Thailand	2	1	2	1	3	—
Togo	1	—	—	—	—	—
Turkey	—	—	2	1	2	1
Uganda	—	—	—	4	—	—
Ukraine	—	—	—	1	—	—
USA	7	2	8	7	5	[2]67
Uzbekistan	—	—	—	—	—	1
Vietnam	1	—	—	—	—	—
Yemen	—	—	3	—	—	—
Zambia	—	—	—	1	1	—
Zimbabwe	—	—	1	1	2	—
Total	65	50	54	56	51	[1]96

[1] Final figures for 2001 for all countries are still in the process of being collated. This figure may therefore increase.

[2] This figure includes those British passport holders who were killed/reported "missing presumed dead" as a result of the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protocols are in place to help relations of British citizens killed abroad; and if he will make a statement. [25881]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO does all it can to help the families of British nationals murdered overseas. There are no specific protocols—the needs of each family are different. We also give families leaflets published by the FCO on "Victims of Crime Abroad" and "Death Overseas" and put them in touch with relevant agencies in the UK who may be able to help them.

Terrorism (Subcontinent)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received linking the Lashkar-e-Toiba group to the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament building on 13 December. [25682]

Mr. Straw: The Indian Government have made public information which points to the involvement of Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed in the attack on the Indian Parliament. As Home Secretary, I proscribed both these groups in February 2001 because of their clear involvement in terrorist activities.

Colombia

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in raising concerns about the situation in Barrancabermeja, and Magdalena Medio with the Colombian Government. [25906]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 921W.

British Prisoners Overseas

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals, domiciled in Scotland, are held in prison in foreign countries, broken down by *(a)* country of imprisonment, *(b)* gender of prisoner and *(c)* nature of the offence. [25911]

Mr. Bradshaw: Figures for the numbers of British nationals in prison overseas are compiled quarterly. These were last compiled as at 1 November 2001, when there were 3,485 British nationals in prison overseas. The next quarterly figures will be available at the end of January 2002.

We do not routinely compile data on UK prisoners overseas' according to their domicile in the UK or by gender, nor by nature of offence. Gathering the requested data in this format would incur disproportionate costs.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last spoke to the President of Botswana concerning the situation in Zimbabwe. [26619]

Mr. Straw: My noble Friend, Baroness Amos, discussed Zimbabwe with President Mogae on 10 January. I discussed the situation in Zimbabwe with the Botswana Foreign Minister, Mompati Merafhe, on 20 December 2001.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the number of Zimbabwean residents who are planning to leave that country for refuge in the UK. [27427]

Mr. Bradshaw: We cannot be certain how many Zimbabwean residents may wish to seek refuge in the UK. As at 14 January 2002, there were 25,054 British nationals registered with the British high commission in Zimbabwe. There is no requirement for British nationals to inform our high commission if they plan to leave Zimbabwe, when they actually leave, or their destination.

Kashmir

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy objectives are in respect of Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [27375]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are very concerned over the current tensions between India and Pakistan. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has spoken frequently to his Indian and Pakistani counterparts in recent weeks, and has secured close co-operation between international partners. We continue to press India and Pakistan to resolve the issues between them through dialogue.

EU Events

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for January and also the major European Union events for the period between 31 January and June 2002. [28333]

Peter Hain: Following is the information:

January

10—Brussels—Fisheries Council

17—Brussels—Budget Council (evening)

21—Brussels—Eurogroup (evening)

21-22—Brussels—Agriculture Council

22—Brussels—ECOFIN

25-26—Brussels—Meeting of Employment Ministers (ministerial informal)

28-29—Brussels—General Affairs Council.

The following are the principle events in the EU between 1 February and June 2002 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
February		
6–7	Valladolid	Ministerial Seminar on Democracy and Development
9–10	Brussels	Gymnich[1]
11	Brussels	Eurogroup[2]
14	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
14–15	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council[1]
18–19	Brussels	General Affairs Council
18–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
22–23	Brussels	Telecoms and Information Society Council[1]
28	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
March		
1	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council[2]
1	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
4	Brussels	Eurogroup[2]
5	Brussels	ECOFIN
7	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
11	Brussels	Research Council
11–12	Brussels	General Affairs Council
15–16	Barcelona	European Council
18–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
21	Brussels	Environment
23–24	Brussels	Defence Ministers Meeting[1]
25–26	Brussels	Transport and Telecom Council
27–28	Monterrey, Mexico	Financing and Development Conference
April		
5–6	Luxembourg	Migrations Council[3]
8	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
13–14	Luxembourg	ECOFIN[1]
15–16	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
22–23	Valencia	Euromed Conference
22–23	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
25–26	Luxembourg	Justice and Home Affairs Council
27–30	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council[1]
May		
3–4	Brussels	Tourism Council[1]
6	Brussels	Eurogroup[2]
7	Brussels	ECOFIN
9	—	Europe Day
13	Brussels	General Affairs Council with Defence Ministers
17–18	Madrid	EU-LAC Summit
21	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
23	Brussels	Culture and Audio-visual Council
24–26	Brussels	Environment Council[1]
27–28	Brussels	Agriculture Council
30	Brussels	Development Council
30	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
31–1 June	Brussels	Transport Council[1]

Date	Venue	Event
June		
3	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
3	Brussels	Eurogroup[2]
4	Brussels	ECOFIN
6–8	Brussels	Foreign Affairs Council[4]
6–7	Brussels	Industry and Energy Council
10–11	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10–11	Brussels	Agriculture Council
11	Brussels	Fisheries Council
13–14	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
17–18	Brussels	Transport and Telecom Council
17–18	Brussels	General Affairs Council
21–22	Seville	European Council
24	Brussels	General Affairs Council[5]
24–25	Brussels	Environment Council
25	Brussels	ECOFIN
26	Brussels	Health Council

[1] Ministerial informal
[2] Evening
[3] ASEM ministerial informal
[4] ASEM Ministers
[5] Possible

China

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the question of human rights abuses in Tibet on the occasion of the forthcoming visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister. [27519]

Mr. MacShane: We continue to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in China, including Tibet. I take every opportunity to raise these with the Chinese authorities and will seek to do so with the Chinese Foreign Minister.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in *(a)* Tibet and *(b)* China. [27528]

Mr. MacShane: The human rights situation in Tibet shows no signs of improvement. We are concerned in particular about reports of arbitrary detention, torture and the "re-education" of monks and nuns. We raise Tibet with the Chinese authorities at every suitable opportunity.

The overall human rights situation in China continues to be a matter of serious concern. There has been considerable progress in many aspects, for example in the ability of individual citizens to manage their own lives, engage in business, travel freely and own a home. China has also shown an increased willingness to engage with United Nations human rights mechanisms. But severe restrictions remain on the enjoyment of civil and political rights, especially the freedoms of expression, religion and association.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the reductions in human rights abuses in *(a)* Tibet and *(b)* China that have resulted from his policy of (i) constructive and (ii) critical engagement. [27529]

Mr. MacShane: The dialogue process has enabled us to raise our concerns direct with the Chinese Government at senior level, and to press for change. It has facilitated a programme of projects in China addressing such issues as the rule of law, legal and judicial independence, child rights and human rights awareness.

The dialogue is aimed at encouraging long-term, fundamental change in China. It has taken place in an increasingly open and frank atmosphere, and has been accompanied by increased co-operation with international human rights mechanisms, including ratification in February 2001 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and a programme of co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to determine the fate of the Panchen Lama; and what assessment he has made of the authenticity of the recent photo alleged to be of the Panchen Lama. [27530]

Mr. MacShane: We take every suitable opportunity to press the Chinese authorities to allow access to Gedhun Choekyi Nyima (the Dalai Lama's choice as Panchen Lama) by an independent and respected figure to assess his health and living conditions. It was last raised at the seventh round of the UK/China human rights dialogue held in London last November. The Chinese maintain that the parents of the boy do not want him exposed to international attention.

We have been unable to authenticate the photo released on the internet last October.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 206W, on China, what the purpose was of the proposed visit of the Chinese delegation to the BBC World Service; when this visit took place; and if he will make a statement. [27509]

Mr. MacShane: The visit to the BBC World Service by the Chinese delegation on 21 November 2001 took place in the margins of the seventh round of the biannual

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UK/China human rights dialogue: one of the themes of this round of the dialogue was "the role of the media". The programme was organised by the BBC.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Botswana

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the Botswanian Government regarding the Botswanian Government's plans to withdraw water from the Sanbushaman of the central Kalahari at the end of January. [26882]

Clare Short: Our high commissioner to Botswana has discussed issues relating to the San with the Government of Botswana at both ministerial and local authority level. In December 2001, together with two other EU heads of mission, he visited Ghanzi where the district council is responsible for the provision of basic services to the San living in the central Kalahari Game Reserve. The group had discussions with local officials and NGOs involved with the San and visited some San settlements. Our high commission continues to monitor the situation.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in her Department. [26968]

Clare Short: The average rate of sickness absence in DFID in 1999 (the latest year for which published figures are currently available) was 7.31 days per staff year. This compares with a civil service-wide average of 10.1 days.

The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

DEFENCE

Military Bases

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what environmental impact assessment he carries out when considering the closure, move or expansion of a military base. [26345]

Dr. Moonie: It is the Ministry of Defence's policy to carry out environmental policy appraisals of all new or revised policies and equipment acquisition programmes and environmental impact assessment of all new projects and training activities. The strategic environmental appraisal of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) was carried out to examine the potential environmental effects of the programmes and plans therein. High-level environmental assessments were also carried out on the SDR proposals for both the built and rural estate.

Environmental impact assessments are carried out when considering specific proposals for the closure, move or expansion of a military base. A wide range of factors are also taken into account including location, alternative uses and planning issues, land quality assessment, asset condition, historic buildings, legal constraints and non-MOD facility sharing. The scope of the assessment depends on the potential environmental impact of the proposal. Full Environmental Impact Assessment Reports and Environmental Statements are produced for developments that would fall under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations but for Crown exemption, and Appropriate Assessments carried out for developments and activities for sites designated under the Conversation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations.

Cyber Attacks

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the protection of MOD defence computer networks from potential cyber attacks since 11 September. [26634]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Manual of Security mandates the baseline security requirements which must be met before Communications and Information Systems (CIS) are allowed to handle official information: these requirements have already been framed with the protection of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) computer networks from potential cyber attacks in mind.

The MOD is continuously reviewing and seeking ways to improve the security of CIS. Since 11 September, MOD has:

Instituted a review of all its systems to ensure compliance with security regulations;

Speeded up the existing programme for deployment of Intrusion Detection Systems on key elements of the CIS infrastructure; and

Established the Joint Security Co-ordination Centre as a 24-hour focal point for MOD's alert, warning and response capability.

International Security Assistance Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-EU troops have been committed to the International Security Assistance Force; and if he will make a statement. [26643]

Mr. Hoon: The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been authorised by the United Nations, and enjoys wide support among the international community. In addition to the UK, which has agreed to serve as lead nation for the ISAF's initial three months, some 17 countries are contributing assets to the force. The ISAF will be about 5,000 strong, with the UK contributing around 1,800 personnel (together with an additional 300 airfield enablers to assist in activating and running Kabul international airport). Although separate from operations being conducted in support of the campaign against international terrorism, it deploys with the full support of the United States and enjoys very close relationships with US Central Command (which has deployed a liaison team to Major General McColl's headquarters).

In addition to the substantial contribution being made by European Union nations, ISAF will comprise troops from New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. It is too early to be specific about precise numbers, since national contingents are still being finalised.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the nations which have offered to contribute to the International Security Assistance Force; and if he will make a statement. [26644]

Mr. Hoon: The international community responded swiftly and generously to our request for contributions to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), with over 20 nations initially expressing an interest in contributing. In the event, following detailed discussions and planning, we have been able to take up offers from 17 nations: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. 15 of these have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to participate in the ISAF, and we expect Belgium and Bulgaria to do so shortly. In addition, the US have provided a liaison team.

Warships

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work has been carried out on HMS Ocean at Devonport Dockyard; if there has been work additional to that set out before its arrival at Devonport; how much the work will cost in total; and if he will make a statement. [26710]

Mr. Ingram: Details of the work planned to be undertaken during HMS Ocean's Assisted Maintenance Period (AMP), and the estimated cost, were provided in the answer I gave the hon. Gentleman on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 433W.

The opportunity has been taken to undertake some limited additional work during the AMP, although some of the work originally planned will now be undertaken during the reprogrammed Docking Period. The total cost of the AMP will remain within the limits previously stated.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects HMS Invincible to be surplus to Royal Navy requirements; and if he will make a statement. [26709]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 342W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on *(a)* the overhaul of HMS Invincible to prepare her for the new Merlin helicopters and *(b)* other work on HMS Invincible; and if he will make a statement. [26713]

Mr. Ingram: The refit of HMS Invincible is expected to cost in the order of £70 million with approximately £9 million of this required to prepare her for Merlin. These figures excluded Ministry supplied equipment, and associated naval staff training and trials costs.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the work being carried out on HMS Ocean at Devonport Dockyard to be completed; when he expects it to return to service; and if he will make a statement. [26712]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Ocean is currently undergoing an Assisted Maintenance Period (AMP) at Devonport. The AMP is scheduled to complete in early February following which she will be available for operational tasks.

Iraq

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have been killed and injured as a result of bombing raids on Iraq since 1991 and what discussions have been held with the UN co-ordinator in Iraq about the documentation and verification of the casualty figures. [27174]

Mr. Ingram: The coalition only ever targets, in self-defence, Iraqi military facilities that pose a threat to its forces carrying out legitimate patrols of the no-fly zones. The coalition goes to exceptional lengths to ensure civilian casualties are kept to the absolute minimum possible, including the employment of very carefully controlled targeting procedures and precision guided munitions.

In practice, it is extremely difficult to give estimates of civilian casualties, despite the painstaking battle-damage assessment (BDA) that the coalition routinely carries out every time ordnance is released. The Ministry of Defence has no objective means of verifying Iraqi claims of civilian casualties; I am not therefore in a position to provide the information requested by my hon. Friend. However, we can demonstrate categorically that many of the Iraqi claims of civilian casualties are either exaggerated or wholly untrue.

On a number of occasions the Iraqis have claimed that coalition aircraft have caused civilian casualties when allied aircraft have not released any munitions, or even been flying. On 19 June 2001, for example, it seems very probable that the civilian casualties, which the Iraqis claimed were caused by coalition activities, were in fact caused by an Iraqi munition. No ordnance was dropped by the coalition on 19 June. There have also been many instances when the Iraqis claimed civilians have been killed, where our BDA has clearly indicated that only military facilities were attacked.

There have been no discussions with the UN Co-ordinator in Iraq about the documentation or verification of civilian casualties. The UN Co-ordinator in Iraq is responsible for implementing the humanitarian programme under the UN Oil for Food arrangements. He has no role in the no-fly zones.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions during 2001 the UK was involved in missions that involved *(a)* bombing and *(b)* firing into Iraq. [27173]

Mr. Ingram: During 2001, the coalition responded in self-defence against the Iraqi air defence system on 44 occasions. Of these, UK aircraft released precision guided munitions on 14 occasions. In the majority of the remaining 30, UK aircraft provided indirect support to other coalition aircraft but did not release weapons.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of enforcing the no fly zones in Iraq since the war officially ceased. [27172]

Mr. Ingram: Information is not recorded separately that identifies expenditure incurred in maintaining the no fly zones. However, the table sets out the overall additional expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Defence as a direct result of operations in the Gulf from 1992–93 onwards.

	£ million
1992–93	551
1993–94	179
1994–95	58
1995–96	14
1996–97	6
1997–98	16
1998–99	35
1999–2000	28
2000–01	25
2001–02[1]	[2]22

[1] Estimate

[2] Calculated on a Resource Accounting basis; all previous figures are cash-based

Wind Turbines

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of *(a)* the potential and actual interference of radar by wind turbines and *(b)* the obstruction that wind turbines represent to low-flying aircraft; how long the assessment has taken; and when the results will be published. [27275]

Dr. Moonie: The RAF has carried out two trials, one in 1994 and one in 1997, both of which found that if a wind farm is in direct line of sight to radar it can have an extremely detrimental effect upon radar performance as the rotating blades can be a source of interference. The turbines can appear as genuine aircraft targets that could either mask aircraft responses or desensitise the radar within the sector containing the wind farm. Shadowing of aircraft at similar radar to target elevation angles as the wind farm may degrade radar performance even further which could be potentially hazardous to air traffic and impede an air defence control situation.

The Ministry of Defence recognised the need for further research and is currently assisting with a DTI sponsored study that is being undertaken by QinetiQ into the effects of turbines on radar systems. This study began in September 2001 and is due to be completed in September 2002.

Military low flying training takes place within the UK Low Flying System below 2,000 ft for fixed wing aircraft and 500 ft for helicopters. Fixed wing aircraft are permitted to fly down to within a Minimum Separation Distance of 250 ft from the ground or any other obstacle, and helicopters are permitted to fly down to ground level. The presence of wind turbines in most areas of the UK would present no difficulty to low flying aircraft and these and other naturally tall structures are taken into account as part of route planning.

In some circumstances, the presence or proliferation of wind turbines may pose a hazard to, or interfere with, military low flying training to such an extent that the training value is negated. The height of the turbines is often in excess of 70 m (approximately 220 ft) to turbine tip. Within the Tactical Training Areas aircraft can be flown at 100 ft above ground level, which is significantly lower than the 250 ft minimum that applies to the rest of the UK low flying system. Therefore, for the safety of members of the public and aircrew it is imperative that any hazards to low flying aircraft are minimised, especially those that exceed 100 ft in height.

RAF Menwith Hill

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the SBIRS radomes at RAF Menwith Hill are expected to come on line. [27532]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 6W.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the purpose is of the further radome at RAF Menwith Hill for which a planning application has been made. [27531]

Mr. Ingram: The proposed new antenna and radome at RAF Menwith Hill would update equipment currently in use at the base.

Low Flying

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received on the implications for low flying on wind power developments within designated training areas; and if he will make a statement. [27729]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence regularly receives queries from the wind energy industry, members of the public and Members of Parliament regarding the siting of wind power developments within the Tactical Training Areas.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 296, to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) which states the MOD's policy towards wind turbines in areas where operational low flying takes place.

Expenditure (Dumfries and Galloway)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much MOD expenditure there was in Dumfries and Galloway region; and what his assessment is of the spin-off benefit to the regional economy in the last 12 months. [27731]

Dr. Moonie: I regret that data on defence expenditure as a whole are not available by region and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I draw the hon. Member's attention to the recently published document, "Defence Statistics 2001", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Table 1.9 contains data on defence expenditure on equipment by region and nation.

Service Deployment

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what United Kingdom forces are deployed abroad, giving in each case *(a)* location, *(b)* nature of operation, *(c)* the end date for the deployment and *(d)* a statement of Government policy on the deployment. [24989]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Nancekuke

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 11 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 518W, what was the origin of the substance pralidoxime mesylate which was deposited into the sea off the north Cornish coast when Chemical Defence Establishment Nancekuke was decommissioned. [26628]

Dr. Moonie: Pralidoxime mesylate is used to treat individuals who have been exposed to a range of organophosphorous materials, including nerve agents.

Between the years 1972 and 1997, 54.36 tonnes of pralidoxime mesylate were manufactured on site at CDE Nancekuke. Most of this was supplied to a pharmaceutical company for formulation into standard therapeutic tablets for issue to the services. Any reject or shelf-expired tablets were subsequently returned to Nancekuke for recovery or destruction.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records there are of the origin of chemicals used at the chemical defence establishment, Nancekuke. [26199]

Dr. Moonie: There are no surviving records which detail the origin of the chemicals used at the chemical defence establishment, nancekuke.

However, the records of the technical programme undertaken at Nancekuke indicate that many chemical compounds were manufactured on site from chemicals which would have been purchased from commercial suppliers.

Additionally, it is known that some chemicals were transferred to Nancekuke from the Ministry of Defence facilities at Sutton Oak, which closed in 1953, and the War Department factories which were situated at Randle, Valley and Springfields. Also chemicals, such as CS, would have been transferred to Nancekuke from other military establishments for destruction.

RAF Bases

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints he has received from local residents about *(a)* low flying, *(b)* aircraft noise and *(c)* night flying at (i) RAF Brize Norton and (ii) RAF Lyneham in the last five years. [26342]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what penalty would be payable on the cancellation of the Armington Homes 100 year contract for married quarters at RAF Lyneham. [26344]

Dr. Moonie: Current Government policy does not envisage repurchasing the properties sold to Annington Homes Ltd. (AHL) in 1996 and underleased back to the Ministry of Defence. Properties are initially underleased for 200 years and any that are identified as surplus to service requirements are released to AHL in accordance with the sale agreement.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from his Canadian counterpart regarding the deployment of Canadian troops in Afghanistan; and if Canadian troops will be deployed as a part of the International Security Assistance Force. [26645]

Mr. Hoon: We have been in close political, diplomatic and military contact with Canada throughout our operations in Afghanistan. I spoke to my Canadian counterpart on 21 December about the possibility of Canadian troops participating in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). We were keen for a company of Canadian engineers to participate from the beginning and hoped that these might be augmented by an infantry battalion to replace 2 Battalion the Parachute Regiment in due course. In the event, the Canadian Government have decided not to contribute to the ISAF, but will instead support operations around Kandahar. We welcome Canada's contribution. Canada may wish to participate in the ISAF at a later date.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his *(a)* NATO, *(b)* EU and *(c)* US and *(d)* Canadian counterparts regarding the deployment of armed forces to Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [26642]

Mr. Hoon: I have been in regular contact with my EU and NATO colleagues concerning the deployment of forces to Afghanistan.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role international peacekeepers will have in securing routes for aid convoys and deliveries within Afghanistan. [26877]

Mr. Ingram: The role of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is to help the Afghan Interim Administration provide security and stability only in and around Kabul; it will therefore not be involved in providing security for aid convoys. The responsibility for establishing and maintaining security across all of Afghanistan lies with the Interim Administration.

Essential to the building of peace and stability and the securing of aid routes is the defeat of the remnants of the al-Qaeda and Taliban. The international coalition against terrorism's operations against these groups, while distinct from the ISAF, will help ensure humanitarian aid is delivered where it is needed in Afghanistan.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26973]

Dr. Moonie: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of sickness absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

RAF Shawbury

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1141W, on RAF Shawbury, if he will make a statement on the success of achieving alternative employment for staff made redundant by FB Heliservices Ltd. [27286]

Mr. Ingram: As a result of the planned closure of the Wessex helicopter repair line at RAF Shawbury, near Shrewsbury, the contractor, FB Heliservices Ltd. issued formal dismissal notices to 26 staff on 10 January 2002. FBS continue to seek employment for these staff and some may be able to take up alternative posts with the contractor.

In their pursuit of alternative employment for the staff involved, the company is continuing discussions with the Ministry of Defence about the possibility of transferring work from other locations to Shawbury to alleviate the situation.

Reconnaissance Regiment

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the reconnaissance regiment will move in to Bovington; [27723]

(2) what plans he has to base a reconnaissance regiment at Bovington; and if he will make a statement; [27719]

(3) when building work will commence at Bovington in pursuit of his proposals to base a reconnaissance regiment there; [27721]

(4) what the cost is of his proposals to base a reconnaissance regiment at Bovington. [27722]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Missile Defence

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will submit requests from the US authorities to use RAF bases for the purpose of national missile defence to the House for prior approval. [27533]

Mr. Hoon: President Bush has made it clear that he has not yet decided what sort of missile defence system he will ultimately seek to deploy. We have received no request from the US for the use of sites in the UK for missile defence purposes, and it remains premature to indicate how we would respond to any specific request.

Service Personnel

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel working in the armed forces are married to other persons serving in the armed forces. [26128]

Mr. Ingram: The total number of service personnel currently recorded as married to other service personnel is 6,270.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Staff (Benefits)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the number of individuals in *(a)* her Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26324]

Ms Hewitt: The number of individuals whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded either £100,000 or £200,000 in each of the last four years are estimated for *(a)* the Department and *(b)* related Agencies in the tables:

As at 1 April	*(i) More than £100,000*	*(ii) More than £200,000*
(a)		
1998	4	0
1999	4	0
2000	5	0
2001	8	0
(b)		
1998	0	0
1999	0	0
2000	1	0
2001	1	0

With regard to estimations for related non-departmental public bodies, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 253W.

Annual remuneration including benefits in kind covers basic salary, allowances and bonuses. It does not include overtime payments or pension contributions.

Euro

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she will take to ensure that retail outlets accepting euro-denominated notes and coins offer customers fair exchange rates. [26007]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Consumers should not be misled about additional costs imposed for paying in euros. Consumers are protected by price marking legislation which requires prices to be clear and legible—including exchange rates and any commission charged for using foreign currencies.

It is a commercial judgment for those retail outlets which accept euro-denominated notes and coins what exchange rate they charge.

While we recognise that there are some costs involved in handling foreign currencies, retailers who do not offer customers a fair deal should remember that consumers have long memories. Consumers will vote with their feet and the contents of their wallets.

Catering-ware Exports

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what negotiations are under way in the WTO to reduce the tariff on catering-ware exports to the USA; and if she will make a statement. [27374]

Ms Hewitt: On 14 November 2001 at Doha the members of the World Trade Organisation launched a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. This will include negotiations aimed at reducing and where appropriate eliminating tariffs on industrial products. A reduction in the peak US tariffs on catering ware will be a priority for the UK in those negotiations.

Mail Deliveries

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of Christmas post, posted on or before the last posting date announced by Royal Mail, failed to be delivered before Christmas Day. [26564]

Mr. Alexander: This is an operational matter for the company subject to the regulatory powers and duties of the Postal Services Commission in respect of service standards.

I am advised by the company that statistics on quality of service for the Christmas period, when Royal Mail handled around 2.1 million items, will not be published until later this month.

Acquired Rights Directive

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government intend to take action to ensure recompense for those affected by the UK breach of its Community obligations under the 1977 acquired rights directive. [27273]

Alan Johnson: The Government have admitted that, until the TUPE Regulations were amended in 1993, the acquired rights directive was not implemented correctly, and that this was a sufficiently serious breach of the UK's EC obligations to give rise to a liability for damages, where anyone suffered losses as a result. The Government are therefore prepared to compensate anyone affected provided that they can show that they suffered loss as a result of that breach. At present, a number of claims have been brought in the courts, but without the cause and amount of the claimed losses having been established.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to offer payments to sub-postmasters in compensation for giving up the right to offer post office services. [27630]

Mr. Alexander: In line with the Performance and Innovation Unit's report, my Department has agreed in principle to support the compensation package, negotiated between Post Office Ltd. and the National Federation of Subpostmasters, for sub-postmasters affected by Post Office Ltd.'s proposed restructuring programme for the urban network. Discussions on the overall funding of the restructuring programme are continuing.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of sub-post offices which are economically viable. [27631]

Mr. Alexander: These matters were addressed in the PIU report in 2000, and in line with its recommendations, the Government are working on a range of measures with Post Office Ltd. and the National Federation of Subpostmasters to modernise and strengthen the viability of the network.

Petroleum Licensing

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 609–10W, what decisions she has made on Out-of-Round Offshore Licence awards. [28191]

Mr. Wilson: I will offer licences to Tuscan Energy (Scotland) Ltd. and Acorn North Sea Ltd. for Block 30/24, which includes the former Argyll, Duncan and Innes fields, and to ATP Oil and Gas (UK) Ltd. and CalEnergy Gas (UK) Ltd. for Part-Blocks 42/25a and 43/21a.

These awards, in their different ways, are good signs for the future of the United Kingdom Continental Shelf. They demonstrate some of the new approaches and working arrangements that PILOT has been pressing for over the past three years.

Argyll was the UK's first producing offshore field, but it was abandoned as uneconomic back in 1992 when less than 40 per cent. of the oil had been recovered. Tuscan/Acorn now hope to use the latest technology to reopen it and extract more of the oil left behind. Subsequently they should be able to reopen the old Duncan and Innes fields too, both of which were abandoned at the same time as Argyll. Tuscan and Acorn are two small new British companies, taking a fresh and imaginative look at the opportunities in the North sea and introducing a productive new alliance with the North sea's supply chain in the shape of Schlumberger and ABB.

ATP is one of the new entrants that DTI has been working hard to attract to the UK to bring work to our Fallow Discoveries. Their focused, high-efficiency approach, developed in the Gulf of Mexico, will allow them to develop the 43/21a discovery and other Fallow Discoveries, which others may not see as economic.

However, I do not intend to allow any of this valuable acreage to run to fallow. Accordingly the licences will be individually tailored to match the companies' plans. Tuscan/Acorn will receive four licences, three of which each cover one of the former fields while the fourth covers the rest of the block. Each licence will expire at an early date if the companies fail to meet their work commitments, so that if necessary each asset will individually be made available for relicensing. ATP's licence also has an early expiry date in the event that it is not progressed by then.

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what opportunities there are for companies to acquire petroleum licences over unlicensed acreage in the North sea. [28192]

Mr. Wilson: I am today inviting applications for petroleum licences over a large number of blocks in the southern, central and northern North sea which will form the 20th round of offshore petroleum licensing. The blocks made available for licensing are close to existing petroleum developments and infrastructure.

This is the first North sea licensing round since blocks were awarded in the 18th round in December 1998. As such, I anticipate that there will be significant demand for licences from companies keen to acquire exploration opportunities in proven petroleum play areas. While there has been a great deal of oil and gas exploration on the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) since North sea drilling started in 1964, there are still many geological horizons that have yet to be fully tested. The recent 'Buzzard' discovery is evidence that there is still significant potential for further large discoveries in the North sea.

In deciding which blocks to make available for licensing, I have considered the results of the Strategic Environmental Assessment covering a large swathe of the North sea undertaken by my Department on which consultation closed in December. After considering the assessment and the responses to the consultation, I have decided to take a precautionary approach and not offer for licence parts of four blocks in the central North sea because of the need to undertake further scientific analysis of a number of 'pock mark' features which were highlighted by the environmental assessment.

Any licences awarded in the round will contain conditions to protect environmental interests and the interests of other sea users. In addition, activities carried out under the licences will be subject to a range of legislation which is designed to protect the marine environment, including regulations which apply the Environmental Impact Assessment and Habitats directives to offshore oil and gas activities.

The licences will also contain provisions to ensure that licensees either undertake exploration work within a relatively short timescale or relinquish the licence at the earliest possible opportunity so that other companies are able to take forward exploration of the area. These requirements support PILOT initiatives to remove barriers to activity on the UKCS.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the public service agreement target on the overall international ranking of the science and engineering company base in terms of quality, relevance and cost-efficiency. [23171]

Ms Hewitt: The most recent measurements of the international ranking of the Science and Engineering Base (SEB) in terms of quality, relevance and cost-effectiveness indicate that the UK continues to maintain its position relative to other G7 nations. The details are as follows:

> The quality of the science and engineering base is measured by the UK's world ranking in terms of citations of published papers. Over the period 1981–2000 the UK received a 9.1 per cent. share of the citations in the international Science Citation Index, second only to the US. The UK was second in 'citation shares' for 15 out of 20 scientific fields with the lowest placing being fifth.
>
> One measure of relevance is the UK's world ranking in terms of the proportion of university research funding from non-governmental sources. For the latest year for which data are available (1997), the UK was again ranked first among the G7 countries.
>
> Cost-effectiveness is measured by the UK's world ranking in terms of the number of papers published per £1 million of public expenditure on science. In 1990, 1993, 1996 and 1999, the UK was the leading country in the G7. For the latest year (2000) the UK was again ranked first.

These measures were put in place at the time of the Comprehensive Spending Review and were continued for the period of the 2000 Spending Review (2001–02 to 2003–04).

While the public service agreement targets described here provide a valuable indication of the strength of the UK science base relative to our competitors, other indications are also available. The results of the latest Research Assessment Exercise were published on 14 December and show that, since 1996 when the last study was carried out, many university research groups have significantly improved their performance.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in her Department. [26995]

Ms Hewitt: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Boroughs (Funding)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the category and amount of each item of funding outside the revenue support grant which his Department made available to *(a)* Westminster city council and *(b)* Kensington and Chelsea in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [26248]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is, as far as possible, given in the table:

£ million

Type of grant	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea		
Income from non-domestic rates	47.167	48.566
Housing Investment Programme[1]	16.305	12.855
Housing Revenue Account	20.212	26.195
Neighbourhood Renewal	n/a	0.054
Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval	1.521	[2]—
Disabled Facilities Grant	0.090	0.055
Invest to Save	0.225	[3]—
London Borough of Westminster		
Income from non-domestic rates	61.301	62.783
Housing Investment Programme[1]	25.499	17.107
Housing Revenue Account	31.149	46.109
Neighbourhood Renewal	n/a	0.748
ERDF Funding	0.173	[4]0.451
Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval	2.221	[2]—
Estate Action	2.687	3.828
Disabled Facilities Grant	0.114	0.239

[1] Basic Housing ACG

[2] Now administered by Transport for London

[3] Figure supplied represents Invest to Save grant available for drawing down during 2000–01 or 2001–02.

[4] Figure supplied represents payments thus far in 2001–02. Another claim is forecast for March although the grant amount is as yet unknown.

Housing

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many development schemes have been funded by English Partnerships and have secured redevelopment on sites formerly occupied by sub-standard housing in each of the last five years; and at what locations. [26747]

Ms Keeble: During the five years to 31 March 2001:

(a) the CNT (Commission for the New Towns) side of English Partnerships funded no such schemes.

(b) the URA (Urban Regeneration Agency) side of English Partnerships does not record "sub-standard" housing in the form requested.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress being made in *(a)* house clearance and *(b)* redevelopment through the Housing Corporation pilot grant scheme. [27115]

Ms Keeble: The Housing Corporation's "New Tools" pilot is currently operating in six areas across the north-west and north-east. The pilot programme is investigating housing associations' contribution to the redevelopment of low demand areas.

Progress on funding the pilot acquisition and demolitions in 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 are as follows:

	North-west	*North-east*
1999–2000	0	£2,107,000
	—	130 units cleared
2000–01	£610,000	£156,000
	27 units cleared	11 units cleared
2001–02	£820,000	0
	to clear 40 units	—

The 2002–03 allocation is currently being finalised and will include allocations in three additional pilot areas in Merseyside.

The programme is being evaluated by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham, and the final report is due this summer.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many English Partnerships funded projects have involved housing development in the last five years in *(a)* Telford and *(b)* the west midlands. [26749]

Ms Keeble: During the five years to 31 March 2001:

(a) the CNT side of English Partnerships spent £12.3 million on site infrastructure in Telford, predominantly to promote housing development. In the same five year period, 125 hectares of land in Telford was sold to the private sector for housing development. In the wider west midlands area, CNT spent around £1 million on site infrastructure, some of which went towards promoting housing development. 7.4 hectares of land was sold for this purpose.

(b) the URA side of English Partnerships approved no projects in Telford during these five years. In the wider west midlands, 12 projects were approved under the Partnership Investment Programme, committing £16.6 million towards

projects facilitating the provision of housing. (Since 1999–2000, such projects were approved in conjunction with Advantage West Midlands).

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what policy was adopted in publicising and disseminating the consultation document: "Change to the Decent Home Definition"; what agencies other than local authorities were invited to comment; from which of these agencies responses have been received; and if he will make a statement. [26129]

Ms Keeble: The consultation document was disseminated widely using the usual mechanisms—through placement on the Department's website and through direct mailing. All English and Welsh local authority chief executives and housing directors received copies directly, as did chief executives of Registered Social Landlords with more than 250 units of housing stock. Copies were also sent to a number of national organisations such as umbrella housing organisations and academic organisations. Bodies with a specific interest in energy efficiency issues were alerted to the consultation.

We received 140 responses to the consultation. The table shows the number of responses received from the different types of organisations:

Organisation	*Number of responses*
Local authorities	82
Registered Social Landlords	34
Housing Umbrella organisations	8
Building surveyors	4
Energy efficiency organisations	9
Other	3
Total	140

An announcement regarding the outcome of the consultation will be made later this month.

English Partnerships

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total annual budget is for English Partnerships' investment activity; and what proportion is allocated in *(a)* Telford and *(b)* the west midlands in the current financial year. [26748]

Ms Keeble: In line with all my Department's non-departmental public bodies, English Partnerships is controlled by net expenditure limits in accordance with the principles of resource accounting and budgeting. These are divided into separate limits for the Commission for the New Towns and Urban Regeneration Agency to reflect EP's twin statutory base. In 2001–02, the net Capital Expenditure Limit for the URA is £112.6 million and that for the CNT is –£80.5 million.

However, in cash terms, EP's total budgeted capital expenditure in 2001–02 is £203 million. Of that, £4.3 million (2 per cent.) is allocated to Telford and £16 million (8 per cent.) to the wider west midlands.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many trains run on the busiest sections of each line of the London Underground during *(a)* the busiest hour and *(b)* the busiest quarter hour during weekdays. [27662]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information:

(a) For the busiest hour, I refer the hon. Member to the figures for 2001 in the answer I gave him on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 505W. However, on the Central Line, the new timetable introduced on 13 January 2002 will mean an increase in peak frequencies in the morning peak hour to 30 trains per hour westbound and to 24 trains per hour eastbound.

(b) The number of trains currently scheduled to run in the busiest quarter hour in the morning peak for each line is set out in the following table.

London Underground—Numbers of trains scheduled in the busiest quarter hour in the morning peak, by line

Line	*Number of trains per quarter hour*
Bakerloo (measured at Oxford Circus)	Sevenin each direction
Central Line (measured at Liverpool Street)	Eight westbound and six eastbound (from 13 October 2002)
District and Circle (measured at South Kensington)	Eight in each direction
East London Line (measured at Rotherhithe)	Three in each direction
Jubilee (measured at Waterloo)	Five westbound and six eastbound
Metropolitan, Hammersmith & City and Circle (measured at King's Cross)	Eight in each direction
Metropolitan (measured at Finchley Road)	Seven in each direction
Northern (measured at Charing Cross)	Five in each direction
Northern (measured at Moorgate)	Five in each direction
Piccadilly (measured at Hyde Park Corner)	Seven in each direction
Victoria (measured at Oxford Circus)	Seven in each direction
Waterloo & City (measured at Waterloo)	Five in each direction

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the latest date is by which he estimates that the modernisation investment programme for London Underground will have begun. [26294]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground is responsible for managing the competition for the contracts to modernise the tube infrastructure. I understand that, subject to bids representing value for money and to consultation with the Mayor and Transport for London, London Underground expects to be able to sign contracts before the end of the financial year. Provided the safety arrangements are accepted by the Health and Safety Executive, the contracts would take effect, and the modernisation programme commence, as soon as possible thereafter.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future funding plans for the London Underground. [27836]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 11 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 379W.

Planning Appeals (Listed Buildings)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met the Chief Executive of English Heritage to discuss the planning appeal system involving listed buildings. [25964]

Ms Keeble: My right hon. Friend has not met the Chief Executive of English Heritage to discuss this issue.

Driving Tests (West Yorkshire)

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the *(a)* number of driving tests taken per year conducted at each centre in west Yorkshire over the last 10 years, *(b)* pass rates for written and practical tests at each of these test centres in the last three years and *(c)* waiting time for each practical test at each centre in the last three years. [26241]

Mr. Spellar: The number of car and motorcycle practical tests conducted, and the associated pass rates, at test centres in west Yorkshire for each of the last three years are shown in the tables. These data are not available for previous years.

	Conducted			*Pass rate (percentage)*		
	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Car						
Bradford (Eccleshill)	3,380	3,569	3,444	43.7	44.6	45.0
Bradford (Heaton)	5,736	5,302	5,591	41.8	39.7	39.4
Halifax	3,551	3,144	3,197	47.8	43.2	43.3
Heckmondwike	5,007	5,346	5,248	32.6	31.5	31.6
Huddersfield	5,974	5,536	5,445	35.8	31.9	34.5
Keighley	965	1,812	1,710	50.3	50.2	51.2
Leeds (Horsforth)	5,568	4,785	4,608	37.9	36.1	36.5
Leeds (Harehills)	7,190	7,472	7,599	31.3	28.1	30.4
Wakefield	4,756	4,519	4,142	31.4	32.4	32.5
Motorcycle						
Bradford (Eccleshill)	616	526	323	58.6	54.0	62.3
Halifax	816	853	772	67.0	64.6	57.2
Leeds (Horsforth)	922	939	842	54.4	49.8	54.6

Note:

Wakefield has recently become a testing centre for motorcyclists, but there is no data series.

The number of car and motorcycle theory tests conducted, and the associated pass rates, at test centres in west Yorkshire for the same period are shown in the tables.

	Conducted			*Pass rate (percentage)*		
	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Car						
Bradford	11,778	11,389	11,585	57.08%	55.12%	56.66%
Huddersfield	5,766	5,947	6,736	61.78%	61.89%	64.39%
Leeds	18,383	17,720	17,072	64.48%	63.92%	65.54%
Motorcycle						
Bradford	69	75	137	63.73	54.50	75.29
Huddersfield	38	46	131	60.19	65.97	68.34
Leeds	159	174	395	65.06	62.63	67.67

The average waiting times at the practical driving test centres in west Yorkshire for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are shown in the tables. These data are not available for 1998–99.

Waiting time for practical tests

Weeks

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
Cars		
Bradford (Eccleshill)	5	6.08
Bradford (Heaton)	8.82	5.58
Halifax	2	3.67
Heckmondwike	7	6.33
Huddersfield	4.36	4.25
Keighley	1.82	4
Leeds (Horsforth)	7	6.17
Leeds (Harehills)	6.91	6.75
Wakefield	5.45	4.33
Motorcycles		
Bradford (Eccleshill)	4.91	2.5
Halifax	2.82	2.5
Leeds (Horsforth)	3.18	2.33

Note:

Wakefield has recently become a testing centre for motorcyclists, but there is no data series.

Powering Future Vehicles

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will give details of the Government's consultation on "Powering Future Vehicles", referred to on page 124 of the pre-Budget report. [26430]

Mr. Spellar: The consultation draft "Powering Future Vehicles" strategy was published on the 3 December. Copies of the consultation were placed in the House Library. Responses to the consultation were invited to be submitted by 1 March.

The Government will publish the final strategy taking account of the responses received.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the total Government spending to date on the upgrade of the West Coast Main Line. [26723]

Mr. Spellar: The Government have not incurred any expenditure directly on the West Coast Main Line modernisation. However, to date Railtrack has spent around £1.8 billion on the project.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the projected total Government spending is on the upgrade of the West Coast Main Line. [26722]

Mr. Spellar: The scope and options for taking forward the project, if powers are granted under the TWA (Transport and Works Act 1992) Order, are currently being considered with Railtrack, the Strategic Rail Authority, Virgin and the other passenger and freight operators on the route. Until the final outputs are agreed, a meaningful estimate of the full cost of the upgrade cannot be given.

Starter Home Initiative

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assistance is available to key workers who are unable to top up their maximum borrowing potential to an amount sufficient to obtain a mortgage for a property in London under the Starter Home Initiative; and if he will make a statement. [26917]

Ms Keeble: The Starter Home Initiative will supplement the amount which key workers are able to borrow in order to help them purchase a home. In their bids for SHI funding, scheme managers set out the household incomes they will be targeting for SHI assistance, the range of property prices to be purchased and the amount of SHI funding required. SHI will be provided only to potential purchasers who can demonstrate that they can sustain the long term costs of home ownership. SHI will not benefit those who are unable to raise the other resources necessary for house purchase.

Planning Applications

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement in respect of third-party rights of appeal in relation to planning applications. [26937]

Ms Keeble: As indicated in our Planning Green Paper, published on 12 December, a third-party right of appeal against the grant of planning permission could add to the costs and uncertainties of planning, which we could not accept. We believe that the right way forward is to make the planning system more accessible and transparent and to strengthen the opportunities for community involvement throughout this process. Proposals to achieve this were set out in the Green Paper.

Social Landlords

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will bring forward legislation for a register of social landlords to be held and administered by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [26769]

Ms Keeble: No. The Housing Corporation has a statutory duty, under section 1 of the Housing Act 1996, to maintain a register of social landlords. This is open to inspection at all reasonable times at the head office of the Housing Corporation and is also available on its website http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/index.htm.

M5 Avonmouth Bridge Road

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who approved the employment of the road surfacing contractor in the recently completed road surfacing of the M5 Avonmouth Bridge Road; and what their previous record of experience was with this type of work. [27228]

Mr. Spellar: The specialist subcontractor who carried out the surfacing and waterproofing of the Avonmouth Bridge was employed by the main contractor for the strengthening works.

The main contractor has a contractual responsibility to the Highways Agency for the quality of its works and it is for it to decide which subcontractors are appropriate for the job.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which local authorities are subject to a ceiling in the local government finance settlement; how much money is forgone by each of these authorities; what the average reduction to all local authorities would be if the ceiling had not been introduced; and if he will make a statement. [27453]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the local authorities subject to ceilings, together with the difference between the increase produced by the standard spending assessment formula and the increase payable at the ceiling, for each of these authorities:

Local authority	£ *Difference*
Bedfordshire	33,103
Bexley	145,509
Camden	1,224,637
Enfield	848,239
Hertfordshire	3,333,544
Hillingdon	1,666,837
Kensington and Chelsea	8,596,545
Kingston upon Thames	593,416

Local authority	£ *Difference*
Sutton	441,053
Westminster	3,986,471
Derbyshire Police Authority	355,410
South Hams	47,845
South Somerset	134,073

Figures quoted in the table are based on data provided to local authorities on 28 December 2001. These are subject to change, and the final data will be announced with our final settlement proposals in late January or early February.The money raised through the ceiling helps to finance the cost of the floor. The average reduction to each authority is therefore not relevant.

Contract Letting

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which division in his Department is responsible for ensuring compliance with regulations to the letting of controls; and what information they hold on contracts let by other divisions in his Department. [27326]

Mr. Byers: The Department has within its Commercial Directorate the Procurement Services Division which is responsible for purchasing procedures.

The Procurement Services Division maintains details of contracts that it has let on behalf of Directorates who do not hold a delegation to award contracts. Other Directorates that have a delegation to award contracts are expected to maintain their own records. There is currently no central record of all contracts let by the Department.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council houses in Buckinghamshire have smoke alarms that are *(a)* mains powered and *(b)* battery powered; and in the case of battery powered alarms how many are powered by (i) a one-year life replaceable PP3 battery and (ii) a 10-year life sealed unit lithium battery. [27776]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Planning and Transportation Initiatives

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those policy initiatives his Department or its predecessor Departments have made in the field of planning and transportation since 1997 which have affected parish and town councils. [R] [27654]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Planning Policy Guidance note 12: Development Plans (1999) states that local authorities should consult parish councils about development plans. Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans (2000) states that local authorities should work closely with parish councils in drawing up and implementing their local transport plans.

The 2000 Rural White Paper "Our Countryside: the future" announced measures to strengthen the role of town and parish councils, including the establishment of Quality Town and Parish councils, about which we have issued a consultation paper. The Rural White Paper also set out proposals for supporting the preparation of town and village plans, the design and land-use aspects of which can be adopted by the local planning authority as supplementary planning guidance.

The Planning Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change", issued in December 2001, proposes that local authorities' existing development plans should be replaced by local development frameworks which would include action plans, principally for areas undergoing change. Action plans may include neighbourhood, village or parish plans.

M5

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the latest forecast of the Highways Agency is of the future congestion levels around junction 25 of the M5 in *(a)* one year, *(b)* three years, *(c)* five years and *(d)* 10 years; and what plans he has to implement a separate junction on the M5 between junction 24 and junction 25. [27493]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* There are no current predictions of future congestion on either the M5 at junction 25 or on the local roads, but the Highways Agency is developing, with Somerset county council, a traffic model for the Taunton area. This will include this junction and the surrounding roads which are the responsibility of the county council. I shall let the hon. Member know when the work is complete.

There are no current plans for an additional junction on the M5 motorway between junctions 24 and 25 but the London to South Wales and the South West Multi-Modal Study is looking at problems on the main transportation corridors in the study area, including the M5 at Taunton. I cannot speculate on the conclusions of the study, which is due to report in the spring.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason a TR110 statutory notice has been served on Taunton Deane borough council by the Highways Agency in connection with a planning proposal near junction 26 of the M5. [27491]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* A direction, under Article 14 of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995, was served by the Highways Agency on Taunton Deane borough council to allow the agency time to assess the traffic impact on junction 26 of the M5 of a proposal to erect industrial units on land adjoining Chelston Business Park.

The direction was withdrawn on 3 January this year after the developers had demonstrated that the proposal would not adversely affect the junction.

External Advisers and Consultants

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the budget of his Department is for the current financial year for the use of external advisers and consultants. [27327]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Expenditure on external advisers and consultants is monitored at a local level. The Department does not have a single budget for this type of expenditure.

Village Shops

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from Tandridge district council concerning the Department's Consultation Paper on Changes to the Designation of Rural Areas for purposes of the Village Shop Rate Relief Scheme; and what response his Department has made. [27838]

Dr. Whitehead: Tandridge district council responded to the consultation paper on 29 November 2001 expressing concern that three rural settlements in their area would lose their designated status if what was proposed was implemented. A significant number of other local authorities expressed similar concerns about settlements in their areas.

We had proposed that the current designations based on listed parishes be replaced by one based on maps. But in response to the concerns expressed by councils in their reply to the consultation paper, we have maintained the existing designations in addition to the new maps, to ensure that all areas previously designated continue to be so, while we review the reasons for the discrepancies between the previous list and the new maps. Officials have discussed Tandridge's concerns with the council. All councils were informed of our decision to have a dual system in response to consultation in our business rates information letter 13/2001 of 10 December.

Roads (South-East)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if she will set out traffic levels on *(a)* British roads, *(b)* roads within the Government office for the south east region and (b) roads within East Sussex for each year from 1997 taking the 1997 levels as 100. [27522]

Mr. Spellar: The available road traffic figures are shown in the table. Estimates prior to 1999 are on a different basis from more recent data.

Road traffic

Billion vehicle kilometres

	Great Britain	*GOSE region*	*East Sussex*[1]
1997	452.5	—	—
1998	459.2	79.9	—
1999	467.0	82.1	—
1999	466.0	82.6	2.62
2000	467.7	83.3	2.58

[1] Major roads only

Local Councils

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government are taking to make local councils more autonomous. [27828]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government set out our new vision for local government in the recently published White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services." It contains a range of proposals to give local councils greater freedom to enable them to innovate and respond to the needs of their communities.

M6/M74

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the M6 motorway extension to the M74 will be completed. [27428]

Mr. Spellar: Proposals to upgrade the A74 to motorway standard between Carlisle and Guardsmill were added to the Government's targeted programme of improvements in March 2000.

Following the completion of surveys and economic and environmental assessments, the public were consulted last autumn on the options and we hope to announce a preferred route this spring. Progress thereafter will depend on how swiftly we can complete the necessary statutory procedures. The aim is to complete the scheme within the next five to six years, although we will better that if we can.

Local Strategic Plans

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance the Government office for the south-east has given to county councils concerning their *(a)* participation in and *(b)* initiation of local strategic plans. [27680]

Dr. Whitehead: National Guidance to local authorities on preparing community strategies under the Local Government Act 2000 was issued in December 2000. No additional Guidance has been issued by the Government office for the south-east but GOSE has been involved in discussions with individual local authorities on the setting up of community strategies. For example, GOSE attended a meeting with Hampshire county council to discuss how the county intended to take forward a county-wide local strategic partnership and a county-wide community strategy.

In respect of plans prepared by local planning authorities under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, no specific guidance has been given by GOSE to county councils concerning their participation in or initiation of local plans. In addition, guidance has been published by central Government on local transport plans which are prepared by highways authorities under the provisions of the Transport Act 2000, but no separate advice has been issued by GOSE.

Train Services (Punctuality)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will continue publication of monthly train punctuality figures. [27037]

Mr. Spellar: Train operating companies will continue to publish four-weekly Passenger's Charter performance statistics.

Air Travellers (Deep Vein Thrombosis)

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the need for an inquiry into air travellers' thrombosis with specific reference to the death of Alayne Wake during a return flight from Singapore on 20 December 2001. [26896]

Mr. Spellar: The Government are aware of the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Alayne Wake and agree that there is a need to investigate the incidence, extent and causation of deep vein thrombosis among air travellers. The Government are planning to participate in the study being set up by the World Health Organisation that will cover these issues, which also will consider interventions that reduce the risk of a DVT.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set up an inquiry into the incidence, extent and causation of deep vein thrombosis among air travellers. [26895]

Mr. Spellar: The Government are planning to participate in a study of the incidence, extent and causation of deep vein thrombosis among air travellers currently being set up by the World Health Organisation. The Government therefore see no need to set up a separate inquiry.

Government Grants (Rochford)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he advised Rochford council that its grants were to be increased by 5.5 per cent.; and what is the actual percentage increase. [27505]

Dr. Whitehead: The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement data for 2002–03 were notified to all local authorities on 4 December 2001. Revised information, to take account of basic credit approvals, which were issued on 13 December, and updates to some supplementary credit approvals, final council tax base figures, revised Learning and Skills Council allocations and updated domestic visitor nights, was issued on 28 December.

The final data will be notified to local authorities immediately after the draft Local Government Finance report has been laid in the House for debate. This is expected to be around the same time as last year, that is late January or early February.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce the allocations to local authorities for disabled facilities grants in 2002–03. [28375]

Ms Keeble: My Department is today announcing an £88 million programme of support for the payment of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), by local authorities in 2002–03. This programme pays for 60 per cent. of all DFG expenditure with the remainder being found from the local authorities' own resources. We will shortly be writing to each local authority in England to inform them of their allocation.

I have today placed tables showing the DFG allocation nationally, regionally and for each local authority in the House of Commons Library.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the allocation of housing revenue account subsidy for housing authorities in England for 2002–03. [28374]

Ms Keeble: Further to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 621–22W, I can confirm that, in the light of responses received to consultation, we decided to confirm our proposals for Housing Revenue Account subsidy for 2002–03, subject to incorporating later data where necessary. The HRA subsidy and Item 8 determinations were issued to authorities on 21 December. Copies of the determinations and supporting material were placed in the Library of the House, and are available on my Department's website.

Railtrack

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate has been made of the total amount owed to *(a)* creditors and *(b)* the Government by Railtrack plc on (i) 7 October and (ii) 7 December; and what the projected figures are to the end of March 2002. [25743]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the administrator.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 496W, if the reference to Railtrack being unable to meet its debt liabilities refers to debt due to be raised under its business plan. [26440]

Mr. Spellar: No.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

South East Arts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the policy is of South East Arts for making grants to small theatre companies promoting greater understanding of Shakespeare for young people. [25770]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 January 2002]:* South East Arts funds a wide range of theatre projects involving young people through its open application grants schemes. All applications are assessed against published criteria which include a clear commitment to education and promoting greater access to and involvement in the arts.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the grants of £50,000 or less paid out by South East Arts to organisations in the South East in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2000. [25769]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 January 2002]:* Information supplied by South East Arts for the financial years to 31 March 2000 and 2001 will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

National Anthem

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to encourage the British Broadcasting Corporation to reinstate the playing of the National Anthem at the end of the day. [26457]

Dr. Howells: It is not the role of Government to intervene in detailed issues of programme content and scheduling. The BBC's governing instruments, the Royal Charter and Agreement, place broad obligations on the corporation in respect of the number of its television and radio services and objectives. Within this framework, detailed decisions on programming and scheduling are a matter for the BBC, reflecting its editorial independence.

Libraries

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Heritage Lottery Fund's policy is on *(a)* funding retrospective conversion projects and *(b)* providing information on and increasing access to British cultural heritage in UK libraries. [26577]

Dr. Howells: The Heritage Lottery Fund's policy is that *(a)* where a project involves conversion of information about collections into electronic forms, the Fund expects applicants to address the conversion of catalogues and other finding aids before digital imaging of collections and *(b)* to support documentary heritage projects from libraries of historical importance which run programmes of public benefit, and to support projects to widen access to collections, particularly those of non-national institutions. There is a separate policy for support of library and archive acquisitions; the Heritage Lottery Fund does not fund public lending library services.

ENSEMBLE

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for what reason funding for the ENSEMBLE retrospective conversion bid has been made dependent on the development of the BiP web interface. [26576]

Dr. Howells: The ENSEMBLE bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a programme of retrospective conversion of holdings of printed music to electronic format has been withdrawn on advice from HLF. HLF has decided to put off further decisions on bids from the Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL), of which ENSEMBLE is a sub-set, until the educational objectives for the website have been achieved through the Britain in Print project. The proposed website will be the foundation for delivering future CURL projects to the public. The decision rests with the Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, which administers the HLF, as Ministers do not intervene in Lottery applications.

Channel 5

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to extend the Channel 5 signal to all parts of the UK. [27113]

Dr. Howells: Channel 5 services are available on all television platforms: terrestrial, satellite and cable. I do not expect the availability of analogue terrestrial Channel 5 services to be increased because the priority is to use available spectrum for developing digital terrestrial television (DTT). As part of the Digital TV Action Plan, Government and industry are considering the extension of DTT coverage. We commenced a three-month consultation on 11 December, inviting views on the basis on which we should plan the use of spectrum for DTT, including the level of coverage required for public service broadcasting and for pay-TV services.

Analogue Switch-Off

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the proposed date is for the total analogue switch off. [26705]

Dr. Howells: The Government are committed to ensuring that terrestrial analogue broadcasting signals are maintained until: everyone who can currently get the main public service broadcasting channels in analogue form can receive them on digital systems; switching to digital is an affordable option for the vast majority of people; as a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers have access to digital equipment. Our target is to complete digital switchover by 2010.

Television Licences

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria sheltered housing complexes must meet to be exempt from payment of a television licence. [27167]

Dr. Howells: No sheltered housing schemes are exempt from payment of the television licence fee. However, under the Accommodation for Residential Care concessionary licence scheme, a special licence, at a fee of £5 per unit of accommodation, is available for residents in sheltered housing schemes which:

(a) form part of a group of at least four dwellings within a common and exclusive boundary (though up to 25 per cent. of units in a scheme can be properties purchased under the 'right to buy' legislation);

(b) are provided for occupation by disabled persons, mentally disordered persons or retired persons aged 60 years or more;

(c) are provided or managed by a local authority, a housing association or a development corporation; and

(d) have a person (for example a warden) whose function is to care for the needs of the residents and who either lives on site or works there for at least 30 hours a week.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many households in Angus *(a)* pay the full television licence, *(b)* pay a reduced licence fee and *(c)* receive a free television licence. [27168]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers for the BBC as Licensing Authority the concessionary arrangements, including the free licence scheme for the over-75s, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that, out of approximately 76,000 people living in the Angus constituency, about 5,700 were aged 75 or over.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many households in the Uxbridge constituency *(a)* pay for a television licence and *(b)* receive a free licence. [27264]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers for the BBC as Licensing Authority the free television licence concession for the over-75s, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that, out of approximately 76,100 people living in the Uxbridge constituency, about 4,800 were aged 75 or over.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many residents of the London borough of Havering are in receipt of free television licences. [27222]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers for the BBC as Licensing Authority the free television licence concession for the over-75s, is not able to provide details of the number of free licences issued by local authority area. However, 1991 Census figures indicate that there were approximately 14,200 residents of the London borough of Havering aged 75 years or over.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many households in Chesham and Amersham *(a)* pay a television licence and *(b)* receive a free licence. [27121]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers for the BBC as Licensing Authority the free television licence concession for the over-75s, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that, out of approximately 88,900 people living in the Chesham and Amersham constituency, about 5,900 were aged 75 or over.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many households in south Tyneside *(a)* pay for a television licence and *(b)* receive a free licence. [25924]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers for the BBC as Licensing Authority the free television licence concession for the over-75s, is not able to provide details of the number of licences issued by local authority area. However, 1991 Census figures record 64,173 households in the metropolitan borough of south Tyneside, of which 8,199 included a person aged 75 years or over.

Children's Hospices

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what level of funding was given to each children's hospice in the last year by the New Opportunities Fund. [27250]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 170–71W. We expect the first New Opportunities Fund awards for palliative care for children to be made in spring of this year.

Gambling

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects to implement the recommendations of the committee headed by Sir Alan Budd on gambling. [27591]

Mr. Caborn: We published the report of the independent Gambling Review Body in July last year. We are now considering all the comments which we have received on it since then, and we will announce our conclusions within the next few months. I cannot at this stage forecast an implementation timetable.

Lottery Grants

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what her Department is doing to ensure a more equitable regional distribution of Lottery grants; [27282]

(2) what her Department is doing to encourage applications for Lottery grants from economically deprived areas; [27283]

(3) what action her Department will take to improve Lottery funding allocations in constituencies, in the bottom 25 constituencies in terms of value of awards. [27284]

Mr. Caborn: The Government were keen to see all areas receive a fair share of funding. Reforms introduced under the National Lottery Act 1998, the revised policy directions issued to Lottery distributors in the same year, and targeted programmes introduced by distributors are designed to reduce disparities between the regions and there has been some improvement.

We recognise, however, that there is still more to be done and that is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 27 June 2001 a new £150 million initiative to target funds at some 50 areas which are both deprived and have received less Lottery funding than other parts of the country. The scheme, which is UK wide, will begin later this year.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will reply to the letter of 19 October 2001 from the hon. Member for Totnes enclosing one from Mrs. Christine Ashworth of Rattery, South Devon, which was acknowledged by her Parliamentary Correspondence Unit on 1 November 2001. [27040]

Dr. Howells: I replied to the hon. Gentleman on 16 January 2002.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Escapes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for low level escapes from prison and Prison Service escorts. [17072]

Beverley Hughes: The Public Service Agreement target on escapes was published in "Public Services for the Future: Modernisation, Reform, Accountability". The target was to maintain existing performance of no escapes by high risk (category A) prisoners; and the overall rate of escapes from prison to be no higher than 0.17 per cent. of average prison population; and to establish a baseline for the rate of escapes from prison escorts and set a target for contracted-out escorts by April 1999.

Performance on escapes from prison and Prison Service escorts for the period 1999–02 is listed in the table.

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*[1]2001–02*
Escapes from prisons and Prison Service escorts expressed as a proportion of the average population (percentage)	0.06	0.03	0.02
Number of escapes from prisons and Prison Service escorts	38	19	14

[1] Performance for the year 2001–02 is for the period April 2001 to October 2001. These data are provisional and subject to change.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued to date. [27642]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* A recent review of the total number of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) issued up until the end of September 2001 (latest available) was 466. Further work is being undertaken to rectify the under-reporting that has occurred based on the results from magistrates courts committees.

Child Curfew Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child curfew orders have been issued to date; and if he will make a statement. [27641]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* No applications have been received to impose child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which took effect on 1 August 2001, extended the upper age limit to 15 and allowed the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes. Local areas are assessing the implications of these changes.

Unenforced Deportation Orders

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the number of persons resident in the United Kingdom who are the subject of an unenforced deportation order; and if he will make a statement. [27032]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I regret that there is no estimate of the number of persons resident in the United Kingdom who are the subject of an unenforced deportation order. This is because it is not possible to determine the number of persons who leave voluntarily without informing the Home Office of their departure.

Prison Education

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of funding for prison education is provided from *(a)* Department for Education and Skills budgets and *(b)* Home Office budgets; what proportion of funding (i) goes directly to prisons from Government Departments and (ii) goes to prisons from the Prison Service; what proportion of funding is ring-fenced; what plans he has to change arrangements for prison education funding further; and if he will make a statement. [27638]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Prison education funding is now entirely ring-fenced and administered jointly by the Home Office and Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Resources are transferred from DfES to the Prison Service via the Home Office, or in the case of juvenile establishments via the Youth Justice Board. Once transferred, the budget cannot be spent on other services. However, governors may direct resources for other activities towards education at their own discretion.

The Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit based in DfES will be conducting a review of the funding, delivery and procurement arrangements for prison education with a view to ensuring more equitable funding arrangements across the estate.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in the last year for which figures are available were studying Open university courses; and how many and what proportion of those prisoners were studying level 1 Open university courses. [27639]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The main thrust of education in prisons is to provide opportunities for offenders to attain a range of nationally recognised qualifications up to level 2, which will enhance their employability on release. The Prison Service supports provision which is also made for those with higher levels of ability, for example through distance learning and Open university.

However, information on take-up of Open university courses by prisoners is not held centrally.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 27 November 2001 from the hon. Member for Walsall, North regarding a constituent, Ref: 2123411. [27312]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 16 January 2002. I am sorry I was not able to reply sooner.

Asylum Seekers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of asylum seekers from Zimbabwe since 1 January 2000 *(a)* have been granted asylum, *(b)* have been deported and *(c)* are awaiting determination of their case. [27527]

Angela Eagle: The number of Zimbabwean nationals who have applied for asylum since January 2000 and have subsequently been granted asylum or removed is not readily available, and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

There were 2,235 applications for asylum from Zimbabwe nationals from 1 January 2000 to 30 September 2001, inclusive. The number of asylum and Exceptional

Leave to Remain (ELR) grants made in the same period is shown in the table. However these initial decisions do not all relate to applications made in the same period. A proportion of applications which received an initial refusal result in an appeal being lodged.

Initial decisions [1,2,3] *January 2000-September 2001, nationals of Zimbabwe*

	Number	*Percentage of decisions* [4]
Total initial decisions	2,035	—
Of which considered under normal procedures:		
Granted asylum	85	4
Granted ELR	40	2
Refused	1,865	94
Of which considered under Backlog Clearance Exercise[5]:		
Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria	35	89
Refused under backlog criteria	5	11

[1] Levels rounded to the nearest five, and are provisional. Excludes dependants.

[2] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

[3] Decisions figures do not necessarily relate to applications received in this period.

[4] Percentages for cases considered under normal procedures and those within the backlog clearance exercise are calculated separately.

[5] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre-1996 asylum application backlog.

Comparable information on the numbers of Zimbabwean asylum seekers removed over the same period is not available.

The number of Zimbabweans who have applied for asylum since 1 January 2000 and are currently awaiting an initial decision on their asylum application, and the number awaiting the outcome of appeal determinations, is not available, and would be available only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case files.

Information on asylum applications, initial decisions and removals are published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency plans are in place for accommodating future refugees from Zimbabwe. [27426]

Angela Eagle: Although an influx of individuals seeking asylum from Zimbabwe is not expected, contingency arrangements exist for responding to such a situation should it occur. These arrangements are being updated as necessary by the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate in liaison with relevant organisations.

Asylum and Immigration Policy

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that country assessments in relation to asylum and immigration policy are undertaken by an independent body; and if he will make a statement. [27843]

Angela Eagle: The country assessments are compiled from a wide variety of sources, including reports from media and non-governmental agencies, and advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, its high commissions and embassies. All the source material is cited throughout, and the vast majority is readily available in the public domain.

We have commissioned an evaluation of the contents and accessibility of country information in the asylum process. This work includes an assessment of whether the information provided by the Country Information and Policy Unit, including the country assessments, meets the needs of users. The finalised report will provide systematic, additional evidence on which to base decisions whether any further mechanisms might prove useful.

Firearm Officers (Suspension)

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firearm officers serving in police forces in England and Wales were suspended from duty in 2000; and what was the average length of time from suspension to re-instatement or discharge. [26961]

Mr. Denham: This information is not held centrally and it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he expects to meet his target that no immigration detainees will be held in prisons by the end of January 2000. [27732]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Martin Linton) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 97W.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will provide substantive answers to questions 14618, 14619 and 14622 following his holding answers on 14 November 2001. [27041]

Mr. Denham: I replied to the hon. Member on 15 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 178W.

Young Offenders

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the numbers of children aged 10 to 16 years in young offender institutions and secure units. [26859]

Beverley Hughes: The Government believe that juveniles should be sent to custody only as a last resort. That is why we have greatly strengthened and expanded the range of non-custodial sentencing options available to the courts. These include the Reparation Order, the Action Plan Order, the Parenting Order, the Supervision Order, and Curfew Orders with electronic monitoring for 10 to 15-year-olds.

In July last year the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales launched the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). This £45 million scheme provides courts with a robust alternative for 2,500 persistent juvenile offenders who would otherwise face a custodial sentence or remand. ISSP brings together intensive supervision with unprecedented levels of surveillance, aimed at protecting the community while tackling offending behaviour. Each juvenile has an individually tailored package of reparation, training and education measures and courses to tackle specific issues such as drug addiction or anger management, and may be electronically tagged or, in some cases, voice verified, as part of the intensive surveillance.

For some young people the seriousness and/or persistence of their offending may mean that a custodial sentence is the only appropriate response. We are therefore working with the Youth Justice Board to help ensure that custodial penalties are served in facilities which provide a positive and constructive regime focused on preventing re-offending.

People Trafficking

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the agencies *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* abroad involved in the interception and prosecution of people who traffic in human beings. [26906]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: People trafficking is recognised worldwide as a heinous crime which requires concerted national, European and international effort. Project Reflex is the multi-agency response to organised immigration crime, including people trafficking. Led by the National Crime Squad, Reflex brings together all the key agencies involved in the interception and prosecution of people who traffic in human beings into the United Kingdom. The main agencies are the Immigration Service, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the security and intelligence agencies, Europol, Customs and Excise and key police forces including the Metropolitan police, Kent and the British Transport police.

Under Reflex, the United Kingdom has co-operated with law enforcement agencies in several other European Union member states and countries further afield, such as the Balkans, Hong Kong and Australia, to intercept and prosecute traffickers. The UK law enforcement agencies have also worked with Europol on its Organised Crime Situation Report which makes reference to the problem of people trafficking across Europe.

We have established an international network of Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs) in the key countries through which the traffickers transit en-route to the United Kingdom. Their purpose is to encourage and support action to disrupt the activities of criminal gangs and develop a joint intelligence structure.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what relationship his Department has with Interpol; and what discussions have taken place in the past three months about the trafficking of human beings. [26905]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Home Office's relationship with the International Criminal Police Organisation—Interpol—is primarily through the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS), which is home to the London bureau of Interpol. Interpol has its headquarters in Lyon, France and has 179 member countries, each with a bureau in the capital city. The London bureau is one of the world's busiest with approximately 65 staff handling over 12,000 new cases each year. NCIS Director General John Abbott also sits on the Interpol Executive Committee.

NCIS has been a major contributor to a far-reaching project managed by Interpol HQ in Lyon concerning the illegal trafficking of human beings. This is a multi-national, multi-agency project aimed at improving the collection and sharing of information on organised crime groups involved in illegal immigration and the trafficking of people.

As Director General of NCIS, John Abbott is also a member of Project Reflex, a multi-agency task force which co-ordinates anti-trafficking operations and develops the intelligence and strategic planning to support them.

Visas

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were made for visa renewal in each year since 1997; and what was the *(a)* average and *(b)* upper decile time taken to determine applications in each year. [25997]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Statistics on the number of general and settlement applications for further leave to remain received and the upper decile time taken to determine applications are not available.

Information on the number of applications decided, 1997 to 2000 is given in the table.

The average time, in days, to decide applications for further leave to remain in the United Kingdom was 46 in 1997 and 49 in 1998. This includes applications decided on the day in the Public Enquiry Offices and excludes asylum-related decisions. Comparable data for later years are not available.

Decisions on applications for an extension of leave to remain[1] *in the United Kingdom and settlement*[2]*; excluding EEA nationals 1997–2000*

	Total decisions
1997	166,580
1998	160,080
1999	178,810
2000	249,920

[1] Excludes dependants of principal applicants, asylum related decisions, the outcome of appeals and withdrawn applications.

[2] Excludes 'in line' dependants and the outcome of appeals.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to investigate the delays in processing the visa application Ref. N1048443, date of birth 15 May 1972; if he will set up an inquiry into the reasons for the delay; and if he will make a statement. [25635]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 January 2002]:* This case has been reviewed by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), the result of which is set out in my reply of 16 January 2002 to the hon. Member's letter of 19 December 2001. I apologise to the hon. Member and his constituent for IND's mishandling of this case but as the circumstances have been established I see no grounds for setting up an inquiry.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the time span for visas for those studying in this country. [26783]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Students who have been accepted for a course of study will normally be granted leave to enter or remain to cover the whole duration of the course, unless there is any reason not to do so. Subject to the requirements of the Immigration Rules being met, students on courses of one year or more that finish in the summer will be granted leave until 31 October following the end of the course. For courses that do not follow the standard autumn to summer pattern, an additional two months leave is added to the end of course date. These extra months give students the opportunity to plan the next step of their career. Information regarding the length of leave to enter or remain to be granted to students may be found on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website in the Immigration Directorate Instructions (Chapter 3).

Family Visitor Appeals

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will respond to the Citizens Advice Bureaux service's response to the inter-departmental review team's discussion paper on family visitor appeals; and if he will make a statement. [26938]

Angela Eagle: The discussion paper on family visitor appeals forms part of the review of those appeals announced by the then Home Secretary in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on 11 January 2001, *Official Report,* columns 610–11W. As part of the consultation process I met representatives from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux to discuss their response to the paper. Their response and the other responses to the paper will be fed into the final report of the review team, together with the results of the independent research project commissioned by the team. We will consider all responses to the discussion paper in the context of the review as a whole and will publish a response.

Immigration

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to decide on the application of 29 September by Mr. Abdul Majid of Westcliff-on-Sea, Home Office reference M 612263, seeking leave to remain in the United Kingdom. [24285]

Angela Eagle: Mr. Majid and his family already have leave to remain in the United Kingdom. A further application is currently being considered and they will be informed of the outcome shortly.

Travellers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to prevent occupation of public parks, sports grounds and open spaces by travellers, and for their immediate eviction. [25917]

Mr. Denham: Legislation is already in place, under section 70 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which allows a council, on application from police and with the consent of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, to impose a banning order preventing trespassory assemblies on land to which the public have no, or limited access.

Under section 61 and section 77 of the same Act police and local authorities have discretionary powers to evict travellers from land when the appropriate statutory requirements are met.

The effectiveness of legislation is kept under regular review.

Anti-terrorism Arrests

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [25824]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 483–84W.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the names of those detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; and if he will make a statement; [25789]

(2) if he will list the names of those he has detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; and if he will make a statement. [25209]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer my hon Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 483–84W.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further action he proposes to take in respect of Abu Hamza al-Masri and the two other men arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. [25208]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The individuals in question were released without charge from detention under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 in March 1999.

The police are constantly investigating matters of alleged terrorism, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been detained under the provisions of Part IV of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; how many have subsequently been released; when he expects SIAC to complete its review of those detained; and if he will list the names of those in custody. [26119]

Mr. Blunkett: Eight people have so far been detained under these provisions. None have been released, but one of those detained has left the United Kingdom voluntarily. The conduct of the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) proceedings is a matter for the commission itself. As I made clear on 19 December, I shall not disclose the names of those detained unless they or their authorised representatives first do so.

Hertfordshire Constabulary

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the recruitment of police officers to the Hertfordshire Constabulary. [25304]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruitment initiative, Hertfordshire Constabulary has been allocated a total of 107 additional officers, over and above the force's previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003.

The force was unable to recruit any of its CFF allocation of 40 officers in 2000–01, but was allowed to carry-over the allocation into 2001–02. This carry-over brought the force's total allocation from the CFF for 2001–02 up to 70 officers. The force has asked to defer just five of its allocation for this year into 2002–03.

Hertfordshire officers appointed since 1 September 1994 and not in receipt of housing allowance benefit from an allowance made to officers serving in a number of forces in the south-east. This allowance is £2,000 per annum and has been payable since 1 April 2001.

All police forces, including Hertfordshire, benefit from the national recruitment advertising campaign. The campaign was launched in August 2000 and the latest phase began on 1 January 2002.

Phone Tapping

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether hon. Members and peers have their office and home telephone conversations *(a)* recorded and *(b)* listened to on the instruction of the Home Office. [25006]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 366W.

Dual Criminality

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will define the test of dual criminality. [26604]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The issue of dual criminality arises mainly in the context of extradition. Under the Extradition Act 1989, dual criminality will ordinarily be established where the fugitive's alleged conduct discloses an equivalent offence under United Kingdom law which would be punishable in both countries with a prison sentence of 12 months or more. For cases arising under schedule 1 to this Act where the request is made under a bilateral treaty, the conduct must also be found on a list of offences set out in the treaty. In the case of the backing of warrants scheme which governs our extradition relations with the Republic of Ireland, the conduct must be punishable in both countries with a prison sentence of six months or more.

If the appropriate test for dual criminality is not satisfied, the extradition fugitive must be discharged under existing legislation.

There is also a test for dual criminality in respect of a limited number of requests for mutual legal assistance. This is where an incoming request involves the exercise of search and seizure powers or the special investigation powers of the Serious Fraud Squad in cases of serious or complex fraud. Again, if the crime alleged on the request is not a crime in the United Kingdom, there is no dual criminality, and the request cannot proceed.

Medical Pensions

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been awarded medical pensions, and what these figures are as a percentage of their local force broken down by *(a)* each year since 1997 and *(b)* force, giving the average age of those receiving such a pension in each force for each year. [25441]

Mr. Denham: The figures on numbers of medical pensions are given in the tables. Ages of retiring officers are not centrally available.

MIC matrix of indicators 1997–98

	Average police strength	*Police medical retirements*	*Medical retirements (Percentage of force)*
England and Wales	125,950	1,811	1.4
Avon and Somerset	2,976	66	2.2
Bedfordshire	1,086	23	2.1
Cambridgeshire	1,297	12	0.9
Cheshire	2,078	21	1.0
City of London	869	6	0.7
Cleveland	1,494	8	0.5
Cumbria	1,166	20	1.7
Derbyshire	1,772	51	2.9
Devon and Cornwall	2,929	22	0.8
Dorset	1,287	10	0.8
Durham	1,486	17	1.1
Dyfed-Powys	1,007	11	1.1
Essex	2,959	29	1.0
Gloucestershire	1,123	9	0.8
Greater Manchester	6,930	199	2.9
Gwent	1,245	15	1.2
Hampshire	3,471	30	0.9
Hertfordshire	1,750	17	1.0
Humberside	2,056	27	1.3
Kent	3,285	18	0.5
Lancashire	3,344	27	0.8
Leicestershire	2,020	25	1.2
Lincolnshire	1,194	28	2.3
Merseyside	4,322	80	1.9
Metropolitan police	27,028	406	1.5
Norfolk	1,451	15	1.0
Northamptonshire	1,182	18	1.5
Northumbria	3,437	95	2.8
North Wales	1,396	11	0.8
North Yorkshire	1,375	22	1.6
Nottinghamshire	2,341	40	1.7
South Wales	2,884	69	2.4
South Yorkshire	3,194	29	0.9
Staffordshire	2,258	66	2.9
Suffolk	1,189	20	1.7
Surrey	1,642	10	0.6
Sussex	3,063	23	0.8
Thames Valley	3,820	40	1.0
Warwickshire	933	18	1.9
West Mercia	2,036	27	1.3
West Midlands	7,194	81	1.1
West Yorkshire	5,215	41	0.8
Wiltshire	1,167	9	0.8

1998–99

	Average police strength	*Police medical retirements*	*Medical retirements (Percentage of force)*
England and Wales	125,695	1,642	1.3
Avon and Somerset	3,012	24	0.8
Bedfordshire	1,041	27	2.6
Cambridgeshire	1,295	17	1.3
Cheshire	2,111	22	1.0

1998–99

	Average police strength	Police medical retirements	Medical retirements (Percentage of force)
City of London	790	6	0.8
Cleveland	1,471	14	1.0
Cumbria	1,160	18	1.6
Derbyshire	1,777	21	1.2
Devon and Cornwall	2,946	20	0.7
Dorset	1,303	16	1.2
Durham	1,552	15	1.0
Dyfed-Powys	1,044	8	0.8
Essex	2,936	35	1.2
Gloucestershire	1,113	14	1.3
Greater Manchester	6,913	179	2.6
Gwent	1,250	13	1.0
Hampshire	3,470	26	0.7
Hertfordshire	1,752	8	0.5
Humberside	2,021	15	0.7
Kent	3,269	16	0.5
Lancashire	3,331	18	0.5
Leicestershire	2,037	24	1.2
Lincolnshire	1,171	20	1.7
Merseyside	4,373	42	1.0
Metropolitan police	26,566	510	1.9
Norfolk	1,426	13	0.9
Northamptonshire	1,167	17	1.5
Northumbria	3,854	52	1.3
North Wales	1,416	20	1.4
North Yorkshire	1,360	18	1.3
Nottinghamshire	2,248	48	2.1
South Wales	2,989	64	2.1
South Yorkshire	3,165	19	0.6
Staffordshire	2,279	18	0.8
Suffolk	1,195	29	2.4
Surrey	1,680	9	0.5
Sussex	2,962	21	0.7
Thames Valley	3,822	40	1.0
Warwickshire	925	24	2.6
West Mercia	2,033	24	1.2
West Midlands	7,250	37	0.5
West Yorkshire	5,053	49	1.0
Wiltshire	1,169	12	1.0

1999–2000

	Average police strength	Police medical retirements	Medical retirements (Percentage of force)
England and Wales	119,570	1,232	1.0
Avon and Somerset	2,992	40	1.3
Bedfordshire	1,040	18	1.7
Cambridgeshire	1,271	10	0.8
Cheshire	2,101	17	0.8
City of London	766	11	1.4
Cleveland	1,449	15	1.0
Cumbria	1,116	20	1.8
Derbyshire	1,783	12	0.7
Devon and Cornwall	2,896	20	0.7
Dorset	1,306	10	0.8
Durham	1,579	8	0.5
Dyfed-Powys	1,047	12	1.1
Essex	2,877	51	1.8
Gloucestershire	1,128	8	0.7
Greater Manchester	6,853	132	1.9
Gwent	1,277	25	2.0
Hampshire	3,479	20	0.6
Hertfordshire	1,772	10	0.6
Humberside	1,979	11	0.6
Kent	3,236	18	0.6
Lancashire	3,249	17	0.5
Leicestershire	2,006	22	1.1
Lincolnshire	1,131	10	0.9
Merseyside	4,175	45	1.1
Metropolitan police	26,566	289	1.1
Norfolk	1,403	12	0.9
Northamptonshire	1,140	5	0.4
Northumbria	3,832	43	1.1
North Wales	1,366	15	1.1
North Yorkshire	1,319	25	1.9
Nottinghamshire	2,252	21	0.9
South Wales	2,972	52	1.7
South Yorkshire	3,183	24	0.8
Staffordshire	—	3	—
Suffolk	1,177	15	1.3
Surrey	1,782	14	0.8
Sussex	—	16	—
Thames Valley	3,784	19	0.5
Warwickshire	912	9	1.0
West Mercia	1,982	27	1.4
West Midlands	7,402	28	0.4
West Yorkshire	4,916	45	0.9
Wiltshire	1,078	8	0.7

2000–01

	Average police strength	Police medical retirements	Medical retirements (Percentage of force)
England and Wales	123,476	1,209	1%
Avon and Somerset	2,994	42	1%
Bedfordshire	1,034	18	2%
Cambridgeshire	1,296	11	1%
Cheshire	2,011	22	1%
City of London	703	9	1%
Cleveland	1,424	9	1%
Cumbria	1,048	24	2%
Derbyshire	1,823	12	1%
Devon and Cornwall	2,934	15	1%
Dorset	1,354	12	1%
Durham	1,595	8	1%
Dyfed-Powys	1,057	14	1%
Essex	2,894	34	1%
Gloucestershire	1,170	7	1%
Greater Manchester	6,910	110	2%
Gwent	1,274	16	1%
Hampshire	3,435	17	0%
Hertfordshire	1,922	13	1%
Humberside	1,911	20	1%
Kent	3,318	29	1%
Lancashire	3,255	30	1%
Leicestershire	2,033	28	1%
Lincolnshire	1,202	4	0%
Merseyside	4,081	47	1%
Metropolitan police	24,935	225	1%
Norfolk	1,419	10	1%
Northamptonshire	1,159	8	1%
Northumbria	3,857	28	1%
North Wales	1,444	31	2%
North Yorkshire	1,312	37	3%
Nottinghamshire	2,276	16	1%
South Wales	3,108	76	2%
South Yorkshire	3,175	30	1%
Staffordshire	2,120	9	0%
Suffolk	1,133	14	1%
Surrey	2,066	18	1%
Sussex	2,855	16	1%
Thames Valley	3,706	20	1%
Warwickshire	925	15	2%
West Mercia	1,951	28	1%
West Midlands	7,420	29	0%
West Yorkshire	4,815	44	1%
Wiltshire	1,120	5	0%

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Police Conduct

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he is proposing to the procedure whereby officers can resign when they are subject to sentence for criminal offences. [25442]

Mr. Denham: Conviction for a criminal offence is a breach of the police code of conduct. Where there is reason to believe that a police officer has breached the code, the chief officer of the force concerned may suspend the officer where it is in the public interest to do so. An officer who is suspended may not resign unless the chief officer agrees. Current procedures therefore enable chief officers to ensure that, in appropriate cases, officers do not resign to avoid misconduct proceedings. It is for the chief officer to determine whether a officer should be suspended.

Where an officer is awaiting sentence for criminal offences and offers his resignation the resignation may be accepted because the maximum penalty a Chief Constable can impose is dismissal. That is a matter for the Chief Constable to decide.

In relation to officers seeking medical retirement, the Government set out its position in paragraph 6.46 of the White Paper "Policing a New Century: A Blueprint for Reform" (CM 5326). That paragraph said:

> Regulations now allow for disciplinary hearings to go ahead in the absence of the accused, although the power is not used very frequently. The Government believe that it is wholly unacceptable for sickness or medical retirement to be used as a means of avoiding discipline. This requires strong support from the centre—which we will provide—and firm management action in using the existing power to proceed with hearings in all but the most exceptional cases. We will amend the central guidance and, if necessary, the statutory regulations to achieve this. Where medical retirement is at issue, the police authority should consider whether it would be right to exercise its discretion not to retire the officer where the public interest in completing the proceedings in a misconduct case outweighs the medical condition.

We are still considering recommendation 56 of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry concerning the availability of disciplinary action after retirement.

Brixton Police

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Brixton police were accepting reports of minor crime over the telephone between 24 December 2001 and 11 January 2002. [25939]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that Brixton police were accepting reports of minor crime over the telephone between 24 December 2001 and 2 January 2002 and between 8 January 2002 and 11 January 2002. For operational reasons, Brixton police were unable to accept such reports between the dates of 2 January 2002 and 8 January 2002.

However, throughout this period the Borough Control Room, through which all allegations of crime are initially directed, was functioning as normal.

Illegal Raves

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to police regarding illegal raves involving trespass; and if he will make a statement. [25937]

Mr. Denham: Guidance was issued to police on illegal raves in November 1994 and was contained in Home Office Circular 45/94. This Circular contained an introductory guide to provisions in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers are available to police to take action against owners of generator vehicles used in illegal raves on private property involving trespass. [25938]

Mr. Denham: Powers available to police to deal with raves are found in sections 63–67 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

These powers allow a police superintendent to direct those attending a rave to leave and take with them any vehicles or other property. If a person fails to comply with this direction or returns to the site within seven days, a constable may seize and remove their vehicle.

Police Deployments

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics he collates on the number of *(a)* police officers on the beat and *(b)* police officers in administration jobs per 100,000 population in each police authority area. [24935]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary annually collects information from each police force on the numbers of officers deployed to different areas of police activity. The latest data available are for the position on 31 March 2001.

The table sets out the number of officers deployed to foot/car/beat patrol and the number of officers in organisational support jobs (that is, members of staff whose primary role is to service the internal needs of the organisation) per 100,000 of population for each force in England and Wales.

Number of officers on patrol and in organisational support jobs

Force	*Number of foot/car/beat patrol officers*	*Number per 100,000 population*	*Number in organisational support roles*	*Number per 100,000 population*
Avon and Somerset	1,604	106.8	35	2.3
Bedfordshire	419	74.5	18	3.2
Cambridgeshire	516	71.2	40	5.5
Cheshire	944	96.1	54	5.5
Cleveland	612	110.1	46	8.3
Cumbria	584	118.8	18	3.7
Derbyshire	826	84.8	74	7.6
Devon and Cornwall	1,266	80.6	51	3.3
Dorset	640	92.4	12	1.7

Number of officers on patrol and in organisational support jobs

Force	*Number of foot/car/beat patrol officers*	*Number per 100,000 population*	*Number in organisational support roles*	*Number per 100,000 population*
Durham	741	122.2	24	4.0
Dyfed-Powys	442	91.9	5	1.0
Essex	1,442	89.1	22	1.4
Gloucestershire	528	94.0	12	2.1
Greater Manchester	3,663	142.2	60	2.3
Gwent	619	111.2	12	2.2
Hampshire	1,966	110.4	43	2.4
Hertfordshire	1,043	100.0	18	1.7
Humberside	1,040	117.9	48	5.4
Kent	1,139	71.7	83	5.2
Lancashire	1,528	107.2	68	4.7
Leicestershire	923	98.7	20	2.1
Lincolnshire	711	113.2	18	2.8
Merseyside	2,109	150.3	84	6.0
Metropolitan police and City of London police	11,292	155.1	774	10.6
Norfolk	702	88.1	42	5.3
Northamptonshire	537	86.4	33	5.3
Northumbria	2,215	156.1	136	9.6
North Wales	662	100.6	39	5.9
North Yorkshire	705	94.3	22	2.9
Nottinghamshire	1,237	119.8	21	2.0
South Wales	1,659	133.6	67	5.4
South Yorkshire	1,487	114.1	131	10.0
Staffordshire	1,142	107.7	46	4.3
Suffolk	625	92.7	7	1.0
Surrey	872	80.9	48	4.4
Sussex	1,062	70.1	58	3.8
Thames Valley	1,681	79.4	48	2.2
Warwickshire	398	78.3	7	1.4
West Mercia	809	71.0	44	3.9
West Midlands	4,375	166.6	137	5.2
West Yorkshire	2,314	109.4	55	2.6
Wiltshire	529	86.7	25	4.1

Unlicensed Vehicles

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to police forces on the prosecution of individuals who do not have a current MOT certificate for their vehicles. [25136]

Mr. Denham: No specific guidance is given to the police. The requirement to have a current Ministry of Transport (MOT) certificate is backed up by some 320,000 roadside and other spot vehicle safety checks each year. The police work closely with the Vehicles Inspectorate in conducting these, and drivers or transport operators whose vehicles fail the most important standards are prosecuted as appropriate. In addition, the routine procedure of requiring drivers to produce their driving documents also identifies a large number of offences, including not having a valid MOT certificate. The police service is concerned for public safety in relation to this type of offence as many caught committing such an offence will be using unroadworthy and dangerous vehicles.

From January 2003, information from the computerised MOT database will begin to be available to the police via the Police National Computer. This will significantly improve the ability of the police to enforce the requirement for vehicles to be covered by a current MOT certificate.

Police (Sickness Absence)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the latest figures are for the number of sickness days lost in UK police forces; what the latest costs are for ill-health early retirements in each police force; and what the latest figures are for the number of police officers taking ill health early retirement. [25107]

Mr. Denham: Figures for police forces in England and Wales during 2000–01 are shown in the table. Figures for early ill-health retirements are not available as distinct from overall ill health retirements. Figures for the cost of ill-health early retirements in each police force are not available centrally.

Force	*Working days lost to sick leave*	*Ill-health retirements*
Avon and Somerset	40,147	42
Bedfordshire	13,544	18
Cambridgeshire	17,143	11
Cheshire	27,513	22
City of London	10,497	9
Cleveland	18,955	9
Cumbria	13,755	24
Derbyshire	21,022	12
Devon and Cornwall	33,034	15
Dorset	13,485	12
Durham	20,801	8
Dyfed-Powys	12,191	14
Essex	40,455	34
Gloucestershire	12,261	7
Greater Manchester	101,464	110
Gwent	19,569	16
Hampshire	42,184	17
Hertfordshire	22,847	13
Humberside	16,485	20

Force	*Working days lost to sick leave*	*Ill-health retirements*
Kent	38,148	29
Lancashire	40,858	30
Leicestershire	22,596	28
Lincolnshire	13,236	4
Merseyside	54,256	47
Metropolitan police	278,933	225
Norfolk	16,694	10
Northamptonshire	11,416	8
Northumbria	33,666	28
North Wales	16,234	31
North Yorkshire	17,000	37
Nottinghamshire	25,460	16
South Wales	49,043	76
South Yorkshire	39,232	30
Staffordshire	28,424	9
Suffolk	12,179	14
Surrey	24,715	18
Sussex	32,437	16
Thames Valley	53,659	20
Warwickshire	12,472	15
West Mercia	26,563	28
West Midlands	96,800	29
West Yorkshire	62,554	44
Wiltshire	12,219	5
England and Wales	1,516,146	1,209

Drug Offences (Immigration Control)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which countries refuse entry to those UK citizens who have a conviction for drug offences in the UK. [23305]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information is not available in the format requested. Decisions to refuse entry to United Kingdom (UK) Citizens may depend on the type and date of any conviction and the reason for entry. Normal refusal may be overturned for compassionate reasons. The recommended action for travellers who have a drug conviction would be to check their admissibility with the UK embassy or high commission of the country they are planning to visit.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rural Affairs Forum

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the terms of reference for the Rural Affairs Forum. [27658]

Alun Michael: The Rural Affairs Forum for England was set up to implement the Government's commitment in their Rural White Paper of December 2000 to establish a national sounding board so that Ministers "have regular and direct contact with the main rural groups so that they know what is going on and what countryside people think". It will be for the forum itself to define its priorities and agenda for action.

The forum met for the first time on 9 January. Following extensive consultation with rural stakeholders, its members were chosen to represent a wide range of rural organisations, people, and perspectives, including economic, social and environmental interests. Each regional rural affairs forum will be represented on the national forum.

The forum had a useful preliminary discussion of its work programme at its first meeting and it is clear that the forum will wish to identify issues of concern to rural people and businesses; to give views on proposed Government policies as they affect rural areas; to review the implementation of the Rural White Paper, and suggest where further policy development may be needed to deliver its objectives; and to review the quality of public services in rural areas and make recommendations for how they might be improved.

The forum has agreed to some regular items of business, including consideration of the Countryside Agency's annual State of the Countryside report on its overview of Government Departments' reports on "rural-proofing" of their policies. It will also consider other issues that its members, Ministers or the rural advocate may raise. These may include matters referred to it by a regional rural affairs forum or by the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) Consultation Group. Reports from the forum will go to Ministers and to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Rural Renewal.

Members agreed that the full forum should normally meet four times a year, and set up sub-groups as needed. These are likely to involve a wider range of stakeholders than those directly represented on the forum.

Flood Insurance (Lewes)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she is making in her discussions with the Association of British Insurers to ensure that residents of Lewes have access to flood insurance at reasonable cost. [27538]

Mr. Morley: The Government maintain close links with the insurance industry to help ensure continued availability of affordable flood cover. There is an agreement among Association of British Insurers (ABI) member companies that they will continue to provide flood cover, except in exceptional circumstances, for domestic properties and small businesses which they currently insure, during 2001 and 2002. Cases where there is an alleged breach of this agreement have been referred by the hon. Member to the ABI for investigation. However, it must be recognised that insurance companies need to take a commercial decision as to what risk they will cover and on what terms. Also, the insurance industry is a competitive one and customers may need to shop around to obtain the best deal.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and I met the ABI on 5 September to discuss our mutual aim of ensuring that affordable flood insurance cover continues to be generally available after December 2002. There have also been further meetings between officials and I expect to meet the ABI again reasonably soon.

Together with the flood defence operating authorities, we are reducing the risk of flooding and are communicating this to the insurance industry. We are reducing the risk through substantial increases in investment in flood and coastal defences (which now totals over £400 million a year). Flood defences are being repaired, renewed, maintained and improved. Flood warning arrangements are continually being improved. The Government have issued strengthened guidance to local planning authorities on control of development in flood risk areas, and are reviewing the financial and institutional arrangements under which the flood defence service is delivered.

Refrigerators

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements are in place to allocate the adjustment to the Environmental Protective and Cultural Services block announced in the provisional local government settlement to cover the costs of storage of used fridges in England. [25715]

Mr. Meacher: £6 million has been added to the provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–03 for the costs of implementing the ozone depleting substances regulation relating to the period 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2002. This will be distributed to local authorities using Standard Spending Assessments (SSA). The extra money has been added to the upper tier sub-block of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services SSA. We are considering urgently what sums may be necessary in the next financial year.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

British-Irish Council

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what was discussed at the recent meeting of the British-Irish Council; and if he will make a statement; [25597]

(2) what was discussed at the recent meeting of the British-Irish Council; and if he will make a statement. [25607]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The main focus of the summit, held on 30 November 2001, was a discussion on drug misuse and how co-operation in this area might be developed within the British-Irish Council.

In addition, each administration reported on progress that had been made in each sector of work.

I have placed a copy of the joint communiqué issued after the meeting in the House of Commons Library.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Post Offices

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the value of benefits paid through the post offices was in each year since 1995. [25359]

Malcolm Wicks: The value of benefits paid in real terms through the Post Office in each financial year since 1995 is shown in the following table:

£ billion

	Value
1995–96	64
1996–97	63
1997–98	60
1998–99	58
1999–2000	57
2000–01	54

The figures provided are in respect of customers paid by order book and girocheque.

Winter Fuel Payment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* Stoke-on-Trent, North, *(b)* Staffordshire and *(c)* England he expects to receive a guaranteed winter fuel payment of £200 this winter. [25527]

Mr. McCartney: Winter fuel payments are available to most people aged 60 and over. Those people who are entitled to winter fuel payments and are in receipt of State benefits are paid automatically; others have to claim. The rate is either £200 or £100, depending on whether the individual lives alone or with another eligible person. The information in respect of this winter is not yet available, but details for last winter are shown in the table. We expect the figures for this winter to be similar.

Number of people receiving a winter fuel payment in the Stoke-on-Trent, North constituency, the county of Staffordshire and England in 2000–01.

Thousand

	All winter fuel payments	*Winter fuel payment of £200*
Stoke on Trent, North	15.8	7.7
Staffordshire	160.9	74.5
England	9,526.3	4,742.0

Note:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to sampling error.

Source:

Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service Winter Fuels Payment 2000–01 exercise.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if a pensioner *(a)* in receipt and *(b)* not in receipt of income support in winter 2000 was eligible for the winter fuel payment in winter 2000; and if payment was automatic. [25259]

Mr. McCartney: Most people aged 60 and over in a specified qualifying week are entitled to a winter fuel payment. However, people living permanently in residential care homes or nursing homes who are receiving higher levels of income support are not entitled to winter fuel payments as they are already receiving public assistance with their care costs, which includes heating.

In winter 2000–01, eligible people receiving income support in the qualifying week received payments automatically, without the need to claim, as did those receiving state retirement pension or other social security benefits (excluding housing benefit, council tax benefit and child benefit). Other eligible people needed to make a claim.

Parliamentary Questions

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what has been the average time he has taken to answer written questions from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak over the past three months; and if he will make a statement. [25711]

Maria Eagle: The number of questions tabled has nearly doubled from the average for the period from October. It is not surprising, therefore, that the time to reply to inquiries has lengthened. The average time to answer questions from my hon. Friend is 17 working days.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of each quarterly cohort on the full-time education and training option in the new deal for young people left the new deal with the qualification for which they aimed in each quarter since the inception of the new deal. [25986]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on qualifications gained is not available.

Pensions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the single person's pension has been as a percentage of average earnings in each year since 1972. [26255]

Mr. McCartney: The information is contained in "The Abstract of Statistics for Social Security Benefits and Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings, 2000 Edition". The publication is available in the Library. The abstract is also available on the internet at www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how he proposes to assess pension credit for pensioners who receive a state pension based on contribution years that do not allow a full state pension. [27337]

Mr. McCartney: Our proposals for pension credit will ensure that all pensioners, including those with less than full basic state pension, will receive a guaranteed minimum income for single pensioners that will be around £100 a week and £154 for married couples.

The savings credit will reward income from second pensions and savings above the savings credit threshold. The illustrative figure for the threshold is 2003–04 is £77 for a single pensioner which is also the illustrative amount of the full basic state pension in 2003–04 and £123 for married couples.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will *(a)* estimate the numbers of women claiming a state pension on the basis of their own contributions in each of the last five years and *(b)* give this figure as a percentage of all women benefiting from a state pension; and if he will estimate the (i) number and (ii) percentage over the next five years. [27338]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the tables:

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Women receiving a state pension on the basis of their own contributions (millions)	3.62	3.76	3.89	4.03	4.15
Percentage as a proportion of all women in receipt of retirement pension	53	55	56	58	60

Notes:

Figures rounded to nearest 10,000 and nearest percentage point.

Source:

5 per cent. sample from the Pension Strategy Computer System at March of each year.

	2002–03	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*
Estimate of women likely to receive a state pension on the basis of their own contributions (million)	4.27	4.42	4.57	4.72	4.90
Percentage as a proportion of all women in receipt of retirement pension	62	63	65	66	68

Notes:

Forecast figures provided by Government Actuaries Department are for financial year.

Figures rounded to nearest 10,000 and nearest percentage point.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what mechanisms he has put in place to enable individuals to receive combined pension forecasts giving both state and private pension details. [15795]

Mr. McCartney: Combined pension forecasts are an important part of our commitment to provide individuals with better information about their pension position and the options available to them, in order to enable them to save for their retirement. Individuals are provided with a forecast of both their state and current private pension together for the first time. The statement is issued on a voluntary basis by the private sector provider, using state pension information supplied by the Department.

We have worked closely with a selection of private sector partners and conducted pilot exercises to inform the design and development of the service and learned valuable lessons on how best to present and support the service being offered to our mutual customer.

The service has been designed to ensure that it provides the right information in a way which individuals can easily interpret, is provided with their consent and that the data shared between the private/public sectors occurs in a controlled environment which does not add unnecessary overheads to the parties involved.

We have amended regulations to facilitate the transfer of data, agreed and designed the format of the information transfers, customer consent process and content of the new statement. The Department has also created dedicated roles to ensure that schemes and individual customers taking advantage of the service, receive the support required.

Recruitment of pension scheme providers and employers with occupational schemes began at the Pensions Show on 17 October 2001.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the percentage of employees in each decile of employee incomes who were not members of *(a)* occupational and *(b)* approved personal pension schemes as of 1 April. [20899]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. The latest available data, drawn from the Family Resources Survey 1999–2000, are set out in the table.

All employees earning above the lower earnings limit (£66 per week in 1999–2000) are members of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) unless they contract out into a personal or occupational pension. Therefore "all" full-time employees and part-time employees above earning over the lower earnings limit (above decile four) are accruing pension rights in the SERPS and/or are members of a private pension.

Furthermore, for 18 million low and moderate earners, carers and the disabled the introduction of the state second pension will significantly increase the amount of state pension they will become entitled to. This will boost the retirement income of approximately 65 per cent. of current full-time employees (those in deciles one to seven) and almost all current part-time employees above decile four.

	Percentage who are not contributing to:		
Decile	*occupational pension*	*personal pension*	*either personal or occupational pension*
Full-time workers			
Lowest	86	93	79
2	71	89	61
3	62	87	50
4	54	84	40
5	48	86	35
6	42	84	28
7	35	84	22
8	28	85	16
9	25	84	12
Highest	25	81	11
Part-time workers			
Lowest	90	98	88
2	93	95	89
3	91	95	87
4	86	95	81
5	78	94	72
6	74	94	68
7	64	92	57
8	51	91	43
9	46	92	40
Highest	39	90	31

Notes:

1. Information is not recorded by the Family Resources Survey on those who have a pension scheme which they are not currently contributing to, nor which personal pension schemes are approved schemes. Therefore the figures show those not contributing to occupational or personal pensions.

2. The deciles are calculated separately for full and part-time workers, and are of gross earnings. The separation between full-time and part-time workers is to make clear the behavioural similarities that exist between those in same deciles on the full-time and part-time scale, but who would be in different deciles were the data combined, due to their differing earning levels.

3. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for region, council tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response. The information covers Great Britain.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1999–2000

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees in the *(a)* public and *(b)* private sectors had access to a final salary occupational pension scheme in Scotland in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [24931]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available for 2001. The available information is in the table:

	April 2000
Number of public sector workers in Scotland with access to a final salary occupational scheme	480,000
Number of private sector workers in Scotland with access to a final salary occupational scheme	440,000

Notes:

1. The information is derived from the New Earnings Survey (NES) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The NES provides the percentage of employees with access to the final salary occupational pension schemes and the LFS provides information on the overall number of public and private sector employees. Due to its sampling frame, the NES pro[illegible] under represents relatively low paid and part-time staff. The LFS, like any sample survey, is subject to sampling error.

2. NES estimates are collected on a workplace basis, from the employer. The LFS collects information on a residence basis from individuals. Research into commuting patterns has indicated that net levels of commuting to and from Scotland are not significant.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the role of affinity groups in the promotion of stakeholder pensions; and if he will estimate the number of pensions sold through this route. [25320]

Mr. McCartney: Affinity groups perform an important and valued role in assisting the Government's aim to ensure that everyone has the chance to save for a decent income in retirement. Several affinity groups are registered as stakeholder pension providers. Around 173,000 stakeholder pensions have been sold by such groups.

Income Distribution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the income distribution was in each of the last five years in each region of Britain. [26275]

Malcolm Wicks: The latest such information available, relating to the financial year 1999–2000, can be found in the publication "Households Below Average Income 1994/5–1999/00", a copy of which is held in the Library. Results for earlier years are also in the Library. However, year on year comparisons of this information at a regional level are not advisable as any changes over time are likely to be small in relation to sampling variation.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ONE Pilot

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many working age clients have made a claim for a benefit other than jobseeker's allowance in the ONE Pilot areas since the introduction of compulsory work-focused interviews; and what percentage have failed to take part in the interview. [26480]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* For the period 3 April 2000 to 28 December 2001 a total of 261,742 claims for benefits other than jobseeker's allowance were received in ONE Pilot offices. In 1.1 per cent. of these cases the person claiming has failed to take part in a work-focused interview.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for the City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 180W, on the Child Support Agency, how much money is owed to parents with care by non-resident parents in the UK. [27004]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Frank Field, dated 14 January 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply.

Mr Smith is unavailable and therefore I am writing to you on his behalf.

You have asked pursuant to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Answer to the honourable Member for the City of Durham of 18th December 2001 Official Report column 180W on the Child Support Agency, how much money is owed to parents with care by non-resident parents in the UK.

The amount of maintenance which is owed by non-resident parents as at the 31st December 2001 was £584.56 million of which £317.39 million is considered to be collectable. Although we don't hold the information in the format you have requested, we can give you an approximation of the amount owed to the parents with care as being £192.90 million. The remainder is due to the Secretary of State in lieu of benefit payments made to parents with care.

I hope this is helpful.

Pensioner Poverty

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how the Government are helping pensioners who live in poverty; and what percentage of pensioners in the Midlothian constituency are living in poverty. [27175]

Mr. McCartney: The Government's first priority was to address the immediate problem of pensioner poverty today. That is why we introduced the minimum income guarantee (MIG) in April 1999 to provide money for the poorest pensioners as quickly as possible. We have made it easier for the poorest pensioners to claim MIG, by reducing the 40-page claim form down to just 10 pages, and by introducing a new telephone service.

The Government have also introduced measures to ensure that all pensioners share in rising prosperity. From April 2002 the basic state pension will rise by £3 a week for single pensioners and by £4.80 for couples, on top of above-inflation increases last year. This is in addition to the introduction of winter fuel payments, and free TV licences for the over-75s.

From 2003, the pension credit will reward those who have worked hard and saved hard by providing extra cash for those with savings, second pensions and earnings up to incomes of £135 a week for a single pensioner and £200 a week for couples.

The other information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows. As at August 2001 there were 1,600 customers in receipt of minimum income guarantee in the parliamentary constituency of Midlothian.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, August 2001.

Disability Benefits (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* Galloway and Upper Nithsdale and *(b)* Scotland are in receipt of (i) disability living allowance and (ii) disability vehicle subsidy. [27429]

Maria Eagle: There is no general subsidy on vehicles for disabled people. The table shows the total numbers of disability living allowance recipients, and how many of them use the higher rate mobility component of the benefit to obtain a vehicle on favourable terms through the motability scheme.

Disability living allowance recipients and number with a motability vehicle at 31 May 2001

Area	*Disability living allowance recipients*[1]	*Number with motability vehicles*
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	3,510	[2]583
Scotland	248,665	37,822

[1] Number of DLA recipients rounded to the nearest five.

[2] Includes some motability customers in the Dumfries constituency as postcodes DG2 and DG3 cover both constituencies and data cannot be separated.

Source:

ASD Information Centre: 100% data

Benefit Payments (Lewes)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of pensioners in the Lewes constituency this winter qualify for old age pension, but not for help with winter fuel payments. [27526]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available. However, generally pensioners who satisfy the entitlement conditions for winter fuel payments are either paid automatically or through the claims process.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28088]

Mr. Darling: I last used the railway on Monday, travelling from Gatwick to London Victoria. I endeavour to use the railway for official travel as appropriate.

Arrangements for official travel are made in line with the guidance set out in chapter 7 of the "Ministerial Code", and the accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers", using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations.

Unemployment (Telford)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the trends in unemployment among under 25-year-olds have been in Telford since 1997. [13461]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In November 2001 there were 401 unemployed claimants aged 18 to 24 in Telford, of whom 68 had been unemployed for six months or more. Total unemployment in this age group in Telford has fallen by 16 per cent. since November 1997 while six month plus unemployment has fallen by 40 per cent.

Fuel Direct

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures the Government take to promote fuel direct; and what the uptake of fuel direct has been. [13899]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* Tackling fuel poverty is one of this Government's key priorities. A number of measures have been put in place to ensure that by 2010, no vulnerable household will have to struggle to heat their home when it's cold. These measures include the £200 winter fuel payment for households that qualified, cold weather payments, a cut in the level of VAT on fuel and radical improvements to the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme.

The fuel direct scheme provides valuable, last-resort protection against the threat of disconnection for people in receipt of income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance who are in arrears with their utility bills. Fuel companies generally make customers who have fallen into arrears aware of the scheme.

The latest available figures show that in May 2001[1] the fuel direct scheme was helping 55,900 people.

[1] Data taken from the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Inquiry, (May 2001) and the Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Inquiry, (May 2001).

Social Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the costs in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of the Independent Review Service for the social fund. [19524]

Malcolm Wicks: The Independent Review Service provides an impartial, independent review for people who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their application to the discretionary Social Fund.

Expenditure on the Independent Review Service during 2000–01 was £3.2 million. The 2001–02 budget allocation is £3.7 million.

Means Testing

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people subject to means-testing in the *(a)* current and *(b)* 2002–03 financial years. [20996]

Malcolm Wicks: We estimate that there will be approximately 6.5 million people receiving an income-related benefit both this financial year and the next.

Third-age Apprenticeships

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to develop third-age apprenticeships in the Wirral. [22180]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 358W.

Age Diversity

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the Government will make a response to the evaluation of the code of practice on age diversity in employment; and if he will make a statement. [23127]

Mr. McCartney: The voluntary code of practice on age diversity in employment was launched in 1999 and the evaluation of its impact has now been completed. This evaluation will inform future plans for legislation in this area.

The report is the first comprehensive evaluation of employment-related age practices across Great Britain and the Government were pleased to publish it on 3 December 2001. Copies are available in the Library and have been made publicly available through the new website www.agepositve.gov.uk.

The report has identified that much progress has been made but that we must not be complacent in the lead up to legislation in 2006. We are continuing our ongoing work with individuals, employers and expert groups, and looking how to increase the impact of the code on encouraging age positive practices in the light of the report's findings.

Work-focused Interviews

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people attended work-focused interviews as a result of the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001 in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the constituency of Gordon in November. [23294]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: National roll-out of Jobcentre Plus will start next year. At present, only people of working age living within areas that are served by Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices or work-focused interview sites making new or repeat claims for benefit are required to attend a work-focused interview.

4,985[1] non-jobseeker's allowance customers attended a work-focused meeting at a Jobcentre Plus pathfinder site or Work-focused interview site in Great Britain between

27 October and 30 November 2001. Social Security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

[1] This figure may be subject to change on validation.

Bereavement Payments

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for bereavement payments have been refused in each year since 1995; and how many were refused because of late claims. [24062]

Malcolm Wicks: Our reforms of bereavement benefits introduced in April 2001 concentrate the help available where and when it is needed most—on immediate needs and on families with children. For the first time these benefits are available equally to both men and women. Immediate help with costs arising on bereavement is provided by a lump sum bereavement payment of £2,000—double the old widow's payment of £1,000.

Out of a total of 9,327 applications for a bereavement payment, 316[1] were refused during the period 9 April 2001 to 30 November 2001. Information is not collected separately on applications which do not succeed because of a late claim. Information on the number of applications for a widow's payment prior to 9 April 2001 which did not succeed was not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

[1] *Source:*

Pensions Strategy Computer System 100 per cent. bereavement benefit data.

Prince's Trust

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice is given to local jobcentres directing them to encourage young people seeking work to approach the Prince's Trust with a view to starting their own business. [24372]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Prince's Trust is one of a number of organisations with which the Employment Service (ES) contract to deliver business start-up help within the new deal for young people. The Department also supports the trust's youth enterprise programme which operates in England. This offers loans and grants to disadvantaged young people who want to set up their own business, but cannot access start-up capital from commercial sources.

As with other similar providers, Jobcentres are encouraged to make young people aware of the support the Prince's Trust can offer, and to refer interested young people to the Trust in their local area. In practice, this means that Jobcentres are guided to:

1. check whether potential participants fall within the required age group;
2. explain to potential participants the range of financial assistance available from the Trust; and
3. refer potential participants to the Prince's Trust and other appropriate providers.

Foot and Mouth

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes were observed in the numbers claiming *(a)* unemployment benefit and *(b)* income support in the areas affected by foot and mouth disease during the period of the outbreak. [24391]

Malcolm Wicks: Between March and October 2001, the Department received some 5,500 claims for jobseeker's allowance (JSA) in England, Scotland and Wales where people stated the outbreak of foot and mouth disease (FMD) was the reason for their previous employment ending. There is a normal monthly flow of people on to JSA of about 225,000. Over the same period there were 130 claims for income support attributed to FMD.

During this period employment continued to grow and new vacancies remained high—providing job opportunities for people leaving employment whatever the reason. Unemployment continued to fall in Wales, Scotland and in all the English regions except London, where it rose slightly.

On 11 April 2001, the Employment Service, together with the then Department for Education and Employment and learning and skills councils, established Rural Skills Action to help those affected by FMD retrain in other occupations. Rural Skills Action also helped people who had been laid off on a temporary basis to upgrade their skills.

National Insurance Numbers

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recourse is open to individuals who have been allocated an incorrect national insurance number and have no record of contributions made over many years. [25137]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The procedure for issuing national insurance numbers has been tightened following the introduction of the enhanced national insurance number allocation process in April 2001.

Any duplicate national insurance number that is identified on the computer systems of the Department for Work and Pensions and the Inland Revenue national insurance recording system is cancelled and the contributions record amalgamated on the single national insurance record.

If my hon. Friend's question refers to a specific case he should write to me giving details.

Claimant Advocates

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* the minimum income guarantee and *(c)* attendance allowance for whom he has appointed a third party who is acting on behalf of the claimant. [25319]

Mr. McCartney: The information for retirement pension and attendance allowance is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows. As at August 2001 there were 179,900 minimum income guarantee claimants in Great Britain who have an appointee acting on their behalf.

Notes:

Figure is based on a 5 per cent. sample and is therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.

Figure has been rounded to the nearest 100.

MIG claimants are defined as a benefit unit where the claimant and/or partner are aged 60 or over.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, August 2001

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action his Department takes in relation to illegal immigrants *(a)* to ensure social inclusion and *(b)* to deal with employment. [26730]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for immigration rests with the Home Office, which aims to remove those who have no basis to stay in the United Kingdom. Social inclusion and integration measures apply particularly to those who are given permission to stay.

Subject to their status, illegal immigrants found working illegally will usually be subject to removal action. Those who employ illegal immigrants may face criminal sanctions.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints have been lodged in the last five years with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in respect of the Public Guardianship Office. [27109]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Forty-six complaints have been lodged with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in respect of the Public Guardianship Office since 1 January 1996. Of these nine have been, or are currently being, investigated.

1901 Census

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations she has *(a)* had from and *(b)* made to the Public Records Office following the difficulties experienced by members of the public trying to access the 1901 Census on the internet. [26922]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Records Office has reported to the Lord Chancellor and myself that it has carried out its statutory duty of making the 1901 census returns available to the public, by providing microfiche copies to local public library and archive services throughout the country and access to a traditional microfiche service at Kew. It has also kept us fully and regularly up to date with the initial difficulties being experienced with the launch of the online service owing to the unprecedented level of demand experienced in the first few days, and the steps that the PRO and its partner QinetiQ Ltd. are taking to resolve these difficulties. A limited online service is already available at the Family Records Centre, the Public Record Office at Kew and some other local libraries and archives.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what penalty clauses for performance failure were included in the contracts for the construction, operation and support of the 1901 Census website; if she plans to invoke such clauses; and if she will make a statement. [26507]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The contract between the Public Record Office and QinetiQ Ltd. contains penalty clauses as is standard practice in this type of contract. The operation of these clauses, which are covered by commercial confidentiality, is a matter for the parties concerned.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will place in the Library copies of the contracts awarded for the construction, operation and support of the 1901 Census website. [26509]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This contract contains commercially sensitive information, which it would be inappropriate to put into the public domain.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate she has made of the cost to public funds of the additional work being carried out to allow the 1901 Census to be accessed online. [26508]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No cost to the Public Record Office is involved in the additional work now being carried out. The contractor QinetiQ Ltd. is meeting the costs of this work.

Government Documents

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what mechanism is used to determine which Government documents are *(a)* retained within a department, *(b)* sent to the Public Record Office and *(c)* destroyed; and what estimate she has made for the last year for which figures are available of the percentage of documents falling into each category. [27541]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The mechanism for determining which Government documents should be sent to the Public Record Office originates from the Public Records Act 1958. Under sections 3(1) and 2(2), public records bodies (which includes Government Departments) are responsible for selection of those records which are to be permanently preserved. This process is carried out under the guidance, supervision and co-ordination of the Public Record Office.

The broad criteria governing selection are set out in the PRO's "Acquisition Policy", published in 1998, with more detailed criteria being set out in operational selection policies relating to particular themes or Departments. These are available on the PRO's website at www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/.

Records not selected for the PRO may be deposited in other archives that have been approved by the PRO under the Act as suitable places of deposit for public records.

The Public Records Act 1958 makes provision for Departments to retain records over 30-years-old for administrative purposes or other special reasons, subject to the approval of the Lord Chancellor. The White Paper "Open Government" (Cm 2290, 1993) defines the grounds on which Departments may apply for permission to retain records. The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on Public Records assesses the applications from Departments. Where applications for retention seem, either to the Advisory Council or to officials at the PRO, to be inappropriate, the items are referred back to the originating Department for further investigation. Once the Advisory Council is satisfied, a schedule of retention applications is passed to the Lord Chancellor for his signature.

Departments are responsible for destroying records which have not been selected for preservation in the Public Record Office or other places of deposit and which they do not require for continuing administrative purposes.

It is not possible to calculate precisely the percentages of records retained and destroyed because Departments are not required to report the overall quantity of records created. A study of records storage and management in Government, conducted jointly by the Public Record Office and Cabinet Office in 1997 ("Records Storage and Management, a Scoping Study"), estimated that on average about 2 per cent. of Government records were selected for permanent preservation, the remainder being considered of no lasting historical interest.

HEALTH

Health Care Funding

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, how much funding for health care per patient there is in the parliamentary constituencies of *(a)* Sedgefield, *(b)* West Chelmsford, *(c)* South-West Surrey and *(d)* North-West Hampshire. [27035]

Mr. Hutton: The health authorities for these parliamentary constituencies, and their allocations per weighted head of population (provided on 8 January) and unweighted head of population in 2001–02, are shown in the table.

It is more meaningful to show health authority allocations per head of population using weighted populations. This is because funding takes into account the relative needs of populations using a weighted capitation formula.

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Parliamentary constituency	*Health authority*	*2001–02*[1]	*2001–02*[2]
Sedgefield	County Durham	730	808
West Chelmsford	North Essex	728	674
South-West Surrey	West Surrey	749	671
North-West Hampshire	North and Mid Hampshire	736	615

[1] Allocation per weighted head of population
[2] Allocation per unweighted head of population

Appointments

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* existing and *(b)* proposed NHS (i) national directors posts, (ii) commissions, (iii) offices, (iv) types of trust, (v) types of authority, (vi) groups, (vii) boards, (viii) committees, (ix) forums, (x) councils and (ix) bodies. [16613]

Ms Blears *[pursuant to her reply, 23 November 2001, c. 580w]:* I regret that my previous reply contained an inadvertent error, in that the list of planned national health service bodies should not have included a tobacco regulatory authority, which we have no plans at the moment to establish. The full list should therefore read:

National Bodies planned to be established

Council for the Regulation of Healthcare Professionals
Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health
Health Professionals Council
NHS Shared Services Programme
Nursing and Midwifery Council
Medical Education Standards Board.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the additional funding to fast track the delivery of better mental health services has been spent; and where and when. [9511]

Jacqui Smith: Announced with the NHS Plan was additional funding to fast forward the National Service Framework. In 2001–02 £12.35 million revenue and £68 million for capital projects will be allocated. In 2002–03 an additional £93.5 million revenue and £79 million capital, and in 2003–04 £312 million revenue and £26 million capital will be allocated.

In 2001–02 most of the revenue will be spent on improving services in the high security hospitals and in prisons. Revenue in 2002–03 to 2003–04 will be spent on crisis resolution, assertive outreach, early intervention, primary care workers, and services for women and carers. Capital funding will be spent on improving services in the high secure hospitals and in prisons.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what range of services is available to someone with severe mental health problems; how much is being spent on mental health services by his Department in 2001–02; and what plans there are to increase this amount. [25160]

Jacqui Smith: Our policy for England as set out in the Mental Health National Service Framework and the NHS Plan is to ensure that each person with a severe mental illness problem receives the range of mental health services he or she needs. Each person who is in receipt of specialist mental health services should have his or her health and social care needs assessed, and a written care plan should be agreed with him or her. A care co-ordinator should ensure that the necessary services are provided, and that the plan is reviewed as the person's needs change.

The range of services available may include:

support from a multi-disciplinary community mental health team;

access to community-based outpatient and day-care services;

intensive support from an early intervention team for a young person with a first episode of a psychosis such as schizophrenia;

assertive outreach for a person with complex needs who tends to disengage from services;

access round the clock to a crisis resolution team which can, if appropriate, provide home treatment until the crisis is resolved;

timely access, if necessary, to an appropriate hospital bed or alternative bed or place, such as a crisis house, in the least restrictive environment consistent with the need to protect the service user and the public, and as close to home as possible;

24-hour staffed accommodation in the community;

supported housing;

employment rehabilitation services;

advocacy services;

welfare rights advice;

in-reach services for those in prison.

The range of services currently available varies across the country. All areas in England have recently undertaken a comprehensive review of their mental health services, and are working towards full implementation of the National Service Framework and NHS Plan.

In 2001–02 an additional £12.35 million revenue and £59 million capital will be made available. This funding is on top of the general allocations to health authorities. In 2002–03 an additional £93.5 million revenue and £70 million capital, and in 2003–04 an additional £312 million revenue and £17 million capital.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of people who suffer clinical depression (i) at any one time, (ii) during the course of the most recent year for which figures are available and (iii) during their lifetimes. [24529]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 663–64W.

Child Abuse

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* Part VIII inquiries into child deaths and *(b)* inquiries into institutional abuse over the past four years have related to disabled children. [11411]

Jacqui Smith: Neither type of information is collected centrally. However, we are aware that children who are disabled and in particular children living away from home who are disabled are vulnerable to abuse, especially if their ability to communicate is impaired.

We will shortly be publishing an overview report drawing out the key findings of a selection of case reviews from the last two years, and their implications for policy and practice. At the same time, we are developing a comprehensive database of all serious case reviews.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the basis on which he determined the relative allocations to tackle bed blocking to the social services departments of *(a)* South Gloucestershire Unitary Authority, *(b)* Bath and North East Somerset Unitary Authority, *(c)* Bristol Unitary Authority and *(d)* North Somerset Unitary Authority. [10801]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* All councils will receive additional funding. 55 councils received extra help. The decision on which councils received extra help was taken on the basis of the councils with the highest rates, and the most severe problems with delayed discharge. Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire councils all met these criteria, and have received extra help.

The table shows the allocations for these councils for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

£

County council	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Bath and North East Somerset	467,938	985,350
Bristol	993,479	2,080,468
North Somerset	551,831	1,162,243
South Gloucestershire	468,324	990,292

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when extra funding for the relief of bed blocking will be available to local authorities; and from when can local authority social services departments commit extra funding under this programme. [11623]

Jacqui Smith: Allocations in respect of 2001–02 were made to councils in the week beginning 19 November 2001. However, councils should have been committing the funding from 9 October, when it was announced.

Allocations for 2002–03 were announced on 8 January 2002.

Public Consultations

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public consultations took place relating to the NHS last year; how many of these defined a preferred option; and in how many cases the preferred option was approved following consultation. [20526]

Yvette Cooper: There are many consultations each year in and about the national health service. Not all of these are initiated, or co-ordinated, by the Department. The Department is not necessarily even involved in consultations unless there is a significant challenge. Department of Health Headquarters and NHS regional offices do not routinely keep records about all NHS consultations. The information requested for 2000 could be collected only at disproportionate public cost.

Residential and Nursing Home Beds

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential and nursing home beds were available in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* mid-Essex in March 1997; and how many were available at the latest date for which figures are available. [20913]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not available for mid-Essex. The table shows the number of places in residential care homes and the number of registered beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics for Essex in 1997 and 2001.

Registered residential and nursing care beds in Essex[1] area in 1997 and 2001

At 31 March	Residential home beds	Nursing home beds[2,3]
1997	10,296	4,588
2001	10,779	3,447

[1] Information is presented for the area covered by the county of Essex prior to local government re-organisation on 1 April 1998. Figures for 2001 therefore include the new unitary authorities of Southend and Thurrock and the reduced county of Essex. For both years, nursing home figures are for the health authorities of North Essex and South Essex which make up the Essex area.

[2] Registered beds in general and mental nursing homes, hospitals and clinics.

[3] Information for 1997 relates to registered beds during the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

Aspergillus Fumigatus Infection

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what precautions are recommended to hospitals and other organisations to prevent the spread of *aspergillus fumigatus* infection. [22454]

Yvette Cooper: The National Health Service Estates has written to all regional heads of estates, asking them to raise awareness of the potential of *aspergillus fumigatus* to cause infections within their Trusts. The letter gives advice on how to minimise the risk of *aspergillosis*, including detailed guidance on containment and reduction of spore numbers, particularly during demolition or extensive refurbishment. Guidance is given concerning those patients most likely to be at risk from *aspergillus* infection. Clinicians, infection control teams and estate teams are advised to undertake specific risk assessments and develop a co-ordinated strategy for ensuring that those at risk are not exposed to high levels of *aspergillus* spores when any new or refurbishment building work is undertaken.

This advice and guidance was reiterated in the publication "Quarterly Briefing", which is distributed to over 1,200 recipients, including chief executives of trusts and health authorities and trust estate directors.

Examples of the precautions that may need to be taken are:

Erection of barriers impermeable to *aspergillus* spores between patient-care and construction areas to prevent dust from entering patient-care areas.

Prevention of dust accumulation, and regular cleaning of ceiling and air-duct grilles when rooms are not occupied by patients.

Maintenance of negative pressure building work areas relative to adjacent patient-care areas unless there are contra-indications, clinical care or infection control requirements, for such pressure differential.

Pedestrian traffic flow to be directed away from construction areas to prevent dust dispersion, entry of contaminated air or tracking of dust into patient areas.

Air and environmental monitoring for fungal spores to be considered when building work is taking place adjacent to a high dependency unit.

Beta Interferon

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Epsom and Ewell constituency suffering from multiple sclerosis have been refused treatment with beta interferon. [23434]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Cancer

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent on cancer prevention projects in (i) each of the financial years since 1990 and (ii) future years for which budgets have been set, broken down by regional health authority. [23382]

Yvette Cooper: The information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how many hospital bed days could be saved annually if cancer *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients, who are transfused with blood, were given alternative treatments that would not require hospitalisation. [25029]

Yvette Cooper: It is not possible to calculate the number of bed days or day-cases saved through giving cancer patients alternatives to blood transfusions as many would still be required to attend hospital for other treatments linked to their illness. Further analysis of potential cost impact of alternative treatments will be produced shortly.

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the NHS Cancer Plan in tackling smoking-related cancers; and if further measures are planned to address this cause of cancers. [27133]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 14 January 2002]*: Smoking is the cause of a third of all cancers. The NHS Cancer Plan set a new target to bring down smoking rates among manual groups from 32 per cent. in 1998 to 26 per cent. by 2010, so that we can narrow the gap between manual and non-manual groups.

It is too early to make an assessment of the effectiveness of the measures in the plan which focus on smoking. However the NHS smoking cessation services have already delivered some 100,000 quitters at the four weeks stage.

As part of a response to the NHS Cancer Plan, we have already established a number of pilot projects focusing action on particularly hard-to-reach groups. The scope of the pilots will be extended in due course. We have also asked health authorities to focus their smoking cessation services on manual groups in line with the NHS Cancer Plan target. Each pilot project will be evaluated and in the light of those evaluations, and the practical lessons learned, we will be able to properly assess the impact of those measures and what further measures will be needed.

Palliative Care

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent on palliative care in (i) each of the financial years since 1990 and (ii) future years for which budgets have been set, broken down by regional health authority. [23383]

Yvette Cooper: Between 1990 and 1994 funding was allocated to the health authorities in England specifically to support hospices and similar organisations. Funding allocated between 1990 and 1994 was as follows:

1991–92: £17 million

1992–93: £32 Million

1993–94: £32.3 million

1994–95: £35.7 million.

The breakdown by regional health authority was as follows:

Amount (£000)

Regional health authority	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Northern	1,124	2,052	2,090	2,308
Yorkshire	2,276	2,409	2,454	2,710
Trent	1,603	3,109	3,167	3,498
East Anglian	672	1,491	1,520	1,679
NW Thames	1,263	2,094	2,135	2,358
NE Thames	1,478	2,332	2,376	2,624
SE Thames	1,395	2,582	2,631	2,906
SW Thames	1,102	2,046	2,086	2,304
Wessex	979	2,157	2,197	2,426
Oxford	774	1,462	1,491	1,646
South Western	1,128	2,493	2,540	2,805
West Midlands	1,798	3,353	3,416	3,772
Mersey	890	1,551	1,582	1,747
North Western	1,478	2,592	2,641	2,917

Since 1994 these resources have been built into general national health service allocations.NHS investment in specialist palliative care during 1999–2000 and 2000–01 was estimated at around £130 million per annum. We plan to invest an additional £50 million per annum by 2003–04. This total amount will match, on a national basis, the investment from the voluntary sector. The additional investment for specialist palliative care will be included in the overall increased investment for implementing the NHS Cancer Plan and will, therefore, be found from within health authority allocations. We will be monitoring the information from financial frameworks and cancer network service delivery plans to ensure that this investment occurs.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mixed sex wards there are in NHS hospitals in each English region. [23806]

Ms Blears: The majority of hospital wards are mixed-sex wards, however these wards are usually subdivided into bays which are designated as male or female. Depending on the case mix and local need, the exact proportion of male to female bays will vary. It is therefore not possible to provide information at the level of the individual ward.

Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the service in 1997 and since then trusts have been working towards clear targets to promote privacy and dignity in hospital wards.

These targets include the abolition of nightingale wards for older people and £120 million has been allocated over the next three years to make progress towards this. Schemes to modify 233 wards have already been approved to commence work this year and further schemes will begin in the next two years.

Dentistry

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investment has been made to improve access to NHS dentists in Staffordshire since 1997. [24072]

Yvette Cooper: The table shows the expenditure on initiatives to improve access to national health service dentistry in the areas covered by North Staffordshire health authority and South Staffordshire health authority. Over £3 million has been invested in NHS dentistry since 1997–98 in both health authority areas, which includes the establishment of dental access centres.

Expenditure on initiatives to improve access to NHS dentistry 1997–98 to 2001–02

£

	North Staffordshire	*South Staffordshire*	*Total*
Investing in Dentistry granted 1997–98 to 2000–01	328,800	107,700	436,500
Dental Care Development Fund 2000–01	80,000	50,000	130,000
Modernisation Fund 2001–02	336,200	364,100	700,300
Personal Dental Services 2000–01 to 2001–02			
Capital	1,028,000	630,000	1,658,000
Preparation	55,000	28,000	83,000
Total for PDS	1,083,000	658,000	1,741,000
Overall Total	1,828,000	1,179,800	3,007,800

Source:
Department of Health Statistics

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether referrals of NHS patients to the Dental Examination Board are based on the potential cost of the treatment. [22661]

Ms Blears: Currently, prior approvals are required from the Dental Practice Board, which was previously called the Dental Estimates Board, for proposed treatments costing in excess of £260. These arrangements are currently under review.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS patients were referred to the Dental Examination Board *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in each nation and region in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [22506]

(2) how many NHS patients referred to the Dental Examination Board were consequently assessed by the regional dental officer *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in each nation and region in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [22505]

Ms Blears: In England and Wales 638,000 new referrals were made to the Dental Practice Board together with 77,000 re-submissions in the year ending March 2001. Separate figures for England are not available. Of these 33,948 were examined by dental reference officers, previously known as regional dental officers.

The distribution between nations was:

(a) England 32,212 (95 per cent.)

(b) Wales 1,736 (5 per cent.).

Information for Scotland is a matter for the devolved Administration.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average cost incurred by the NHS while the Dental Examination Board was considering a case which had been referred to them *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in each nation and region of the UK in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [22503]

Ms Blears: There are no costs involved for the dentist while prior approval is being considered by the Dental Practice Board, formally known as the Dental Estimates Board. Should the patient's condition be such that urgent attention is required then the dentist can provide that treatment, before receiving prior approval.

Information on costs of prior approvals work at the Dental Practice Board is not available as the work of dealing with prior approval applications is not accounted for separately from the other work of the Dental Practice Board.

The Dental Practice Board acts for England and Wales; therefore the information for Wales is also not available.

Information for Scotland is a matter for the devolved Administration.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average length of time NHS patients waited before their treatment resumed following their case being referred to the Dental Examination Board *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in each nation and region over the last 12 months for which figures are available. [22504]

Ms Blears: 93 per cent. of cases referred to the Dental Practice Board, previously known as the Dental Estimates Board, are approved for treatment without examination. The average length of time taken for such approvals is 3.7 days. For those patients examined by the Dental Reference Service, for the Dental Practice Board, before approval is given, the average time taken is 82 days.

Information for Wales and Scotland are matters for the devolved Administrations.

Eye Tests (Burton)

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many free eye tests were undertaken in Burton in each year since 1995. [24063]

Yvette Cooper: The table shows the number of national health service sight tests paid for in Staffordshire Family health service authority (FHSA) for 1995 and 1996 and in South Staffordshire health authority in the years 1997 to 2001. Figures for the number of sight tests in particular areas are not collected centrally.

We extended eligibility for NHS sight tests to everyone aged 60 and over from 1 April 1999. There was an increase of 27,790 in sight tests for the year 2000 and a further 4,440 in the year 2001. It is fair to assume that the majority of these increases were due to newly eligible people aged 60 or over obtaining NHS sight test.

General ophthalmic services: Number of sight tests paid for in Staffordshire FHSA for the years ending 1995 and 1996; and South Staffordshire HA for the years ending 1997 to 2001

	Total sight tests
1994–95	126,240
1995–96	125,530
1996–97	79,030
1997–98	83,940
1998–99	84,370
1999–2000	112,150
2000–01	116,590

Note:

Family health service authorities were re-organised into health authorities on 1 April 1996

Funding (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding was allocated to the Buckinghamshire health authority in each year since 1997. [24851]

Ms Blears: The net revenue allocations made available to the Buckinghamshire health authority for the financial years 1997–98 through to the recently announced allocation for 2002–03 are as follows:

Year	*£000*
1997–98	265,389
1998–99	263,789
1999–2000	368,084
2000–01	399,503
2001–02	443,321
2002–03	493,959

Asylum Seekers (HIV Status)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health needs of asylum seeker mothers who are HIV positive. [24554]

Yvette Cooper: Asylum seekers and their families who apply to the Home Office for support under the arrangements that came into place from 1 April 2000 will be assessed and any medical information including HIV status will be taken into account. If eligible for a support package, which includes accommodation, they will be allocated to accommodation that suits their needs in an area where required medical treatment is available.

Dual Energy X-ray Absorptionmetry

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when NICE will issue guidelines on dual energy X-ray absorptionmetry. [24603]

Jacqui Smith: Dual energy X-ray absorptionmetry is not currently on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's work programme.

Paediatric Intensive Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list expenditure on mobile intensive care provision for children in each of the last five years. [24573]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Smoking Cessation Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has collated on the number of people who gave up smoking on the quit date set during their participating in smoking cessation services who have continued to abstain from tobacco in the following 12 months. [24586]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is available in Statistical Bulletin 2001–32 "Statistics on smoking cessation services in England, April 2000 to March 2001", published by the Department on 5 December 2001, copies of which are available in the Library.

Table 13 of the bulletin gives information about the number of people setting a quit date and successful in specialist services in the health action zones in 1999–2000 and follow-up at 52 weeks.

Rural Health Services

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* other health care services, by category, there were in rural areas, broken down by (i) constituency and (ii) local authority for each year since 1990. [24898]

Mr. Hutton: There are more than 300 national health service trusts, and 164 primary care trusts that provide health care services. Many cover both rural and urban areas. While NHS bodies operate within geographic boundaries of most local authorities, they do not do so in all cases, and do not always follow constituency boundaries.

Data collected by the Department do not identify the constituency or local authority boundaries, or whether they cover 'rural' areas. Therefore, the information is not available and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

GP Waiting Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time to see a GP at present; and what the equivalent figure was in 1997. [24644]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* These data are not collected centrally.

From September 2001 data are being collected quarterly on the lead time for the first available appointment with each general practitioner practice.

The only data on patient waits to see a GP derive from the 1998 national patient survey. This showed that around a quarter waited four days or more (with 5 per cent. waiting over a week) for an appointment.

Public-Private Partnership

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the public-private partnership in the NHS in 2001. [25161]

Mr. Hutton: Five major (more than £25 million in capital value) national health service hospital private finance initiative schemes worth a total of over £442 million and four medium (£10–25 million) sized schemes worth over £78 million completed construction and became operational during 2001.

A consortium was selected on 5 December 2001 to deliver a state-of-the-art electronic staff record system to all NHS trusts in England and Wales—worth £325 million over 10 years. The consortium will deliver the new system to all NHS trusts in England and Wales.

Between April and September 2001 a total of 29,000 elective cases were commissioned in the independent sector under the framework of the concordat signed between the Department and the Independent Healthcare Association in October 2000.

Work is currently being undertaken on a national framework agreement to build longer term relationships between the NHS and the private sector with a view to doubling the number of NHS patients treated in private hospitals from the start of this new year.

European Hospitals

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Continental European hospitals are in negotiation with his Department about the treatment of NHS patients. [24322]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Officials in the Department and National health service staff in the three test-bed sites working to send NHS patients overseas have had meetings with several providers based in France and Germany and a provider based in Greece. There have been visits to France and Germany.

A group of patients will shortly travel for treatment to Polyclinique de la Louviere in Lille, France.

In addition, officials have corresponded with a large number of hospital providers, details of which will be placed in the Library shortly.

Hereford County Hospital

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if all porters employed at the Hereford county hospital have the same pay and conditions of employment; and if he will make a statement. [25531]

Yvette Cooper: As part of the private finance initiative deal for the new hospital in Hereford it was agreed that all existing hotel services staff, including porters, should transfer their terms and conditions of employment under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) Regulations 1981. However, new starters are subject to the terms and conditions offered by the owners of the new hospital.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions recently announced a review of best value in local government. One of the issues which the review will examine is whether a two-tier workforce has developed when services previously operated by the public sector transfer to a private provider and new staff are offered inferior terms and conditions than the workers who have transferred. The Department of Trade and Industry has already published a consultation document on the reform of TUPE with a view to enhanced employee protection.

HIV/AIDS

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died from HIV/AIDS-related diseases aged *(a)* under 14, *(b)* 15 to 24, *(c)* 25 to 39, *(d)* 40 to 50 and *(e)* over 50 years, in each of the last 10 years. [25121]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is shown in the table.

Deaths in HIV infected individuals in England and Wales 1991–2000 by age group[1]

Age group	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[2]	*Total*
Less than 15 years	6	18	27	18	21	26	12	11	6	5	150
15–24 years	35	36	31	57	35	38	9	6	12	5	264
25–39 years	519	563	814	794	876	726	357	217	201	171	5,238
40–49 years	286	338	368	487	412	341	182	131	120	120	2,785
50 years and above	139	176	208	198	214	193	105	84	80	76	1,473
Total	985	1,131	1,448	1,554	1,558	1,324	665	449	419	377	9,910

[1] These data include deaths in HIV-infected individuals without reported AIDS.

[2] 2000 is the latest year for which a full year's reports are available. The numbers of deaths are likely to rise as further reports are received. This particularly affects the most recent years.

Source:

Public Health Laboratory Service

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations his Department has received relating to the provision of digital hearing aids. [24397]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The Department has received numerous letters and postcards on the subject of digital hearing aids. In addition a number of related questions have been answered and two early day motions have been tabled on the subject.

Our substantial investment of £20 million for 2002–03 will mean that by the end of that year almost a third of England will have access to digital hearing aids.

Worcestershire Hospital

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the adequacy of the proposed arrangements for car parking at the new Worcestershire hospital; and if he will make a statement. [26221]

Yvette Cooper: The car park requirements for the new Worcestershire hospital have been prepared by traffic consultants for the trust, using planning standards. Both Worcester city and Worcestershire county planning and highways officers have agreed the car park calculations for the site.

At a meeting on 10 January 2002 the Worcester city council planning sub-committee approved the provision of 337 additional car parking spaces, bringing the total of available spaces on site to 1,322.

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has made for the storage of patients' clinical records in the new hospital in Worcestershire. [26220]

Yvette Cooper: Arrangements have been made for storage of patients' clinical records at the new Worcestershire hospital as follows:

> Notes for current patients to be stored in a small library in the new hospital;
>
> Non-current notes to be stored in an off-site health records library, based in Droitwich, and operated by trust staff. Clear arrangements will be in place to facilitate the quick recovery of notes from the off-site library should they be needed.

Charging

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend charging for *(a)* clinical and *(b)* non-clinical NHS services; and if he will make a statement. [26912]

Mr. Hutton: There are no plans to extend charging for clinical and non-clinical national health service services.

Children's Services

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to support the cost of local authority children's services in *(a)* Manchester and *(b)* the UK. [25778]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Local authorities use their personal social services standard spending assessment (PSS SSA) funding to support children's social services as well as certain grants made available by the Department specifically for these services.

Total Government funding for social services will be £11.2 billion in 2002–03, which is an increase of 6.5 per cent. Since 1996–97 total funding has increased by 20.7 per cent. in real terms which is an average of 3.2 per cent. a year.

Manchester's PSS SSA increased from £111 million in 2001–02 to £114 million in 2002–03. It will also receive substantial increases in grants for social services from the Department for 2002–03, in particular, its children's services grant will increase by 11 per cent. to over £8 million following a 27 per cent. increase in 2001–02.

Social Services

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the Local Government Association regarding financial pressures on social services. [25781]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* We have regular dialogues and meetings with representatives from the Local Government Association.

I met the Local Government Association on 9 and 10 January to discuss the draft settlement paper which has been submitted by the Local Government Association.

MMR Vaccine

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of infants received the MMR vaccine in the last 12 months. [26721]

Yvette Cooper: The information available about children immunised with measles, mumps and rubella is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0121.htm.

Health Action Zones

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of funding for health action zones will be in financial years *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [21989]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The total health action zone budget for 2002–03 is £51.586 million, an increase of 2.5 per cent. on the last financial year. Of this £43.625 million is for programme and development funding and £7.078 million for specific innovation fund and employment pilot work, with the balance held for central support work. In addition HAZs will receive £10 million for national health service smoking cessation services and health authorities in HAZ areas will receive £111 million of the £148 million health inequalities adjustment funding. Decisions on funding for 2003–04 will be made as part of the Department's work on the 2002 spending review.

Hospital Patients (Children)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school-age children were resident in hospitals in each of the past five years in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Teesside and *(c)* the constituency of Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East; and if he will make a statement. [22491]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the number of admissions to hospital (excluding day cases) of children aged 5 to 17 inclusive in England and in Tees health authority area. The same child may be admitted on more than one occasion and lengths of residence will vary. Figures are not available for the constituency of Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East, since some hospital trusts located in the area additionally admit patients to hospital sites outside the area.

	England	*Tees health authority*
1996–97	496,877	9,708
1997–98	506,696	10,258
1998–99	491,345	9,907
1999–2000	486,552	10,138
2000–01	481,874	9,683

Source:
Hospital Episodes Statistics

Social Workers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department intends to introduce to recruit more social workers. [27235]

Jacqui Smith: On 19 October 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a £1.5 million recruitment campaign which is designed to increase the number of people interested in careers in social work and social care work. The first phase of the campaign was very successful—with over 14,000 calls to the help line and over 11,000 visitors to the website. We are now working on the second phase of the campaign.

As well as this action to tackle recruitment problems, the Department is also working with the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services to help employers implement policies to improve recruitment and retention of staff.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures exist to allow his Department to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* appraise the work of social workers. [27237]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not monitor or appraise the work of social workers. Responsibility for this rests with individual employers.

Contingency Fund

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what moneys are available in 2001–02 under his Department's contingency fund; how much has been *(a)* spent and *(b)* allocated; and for what purposes. [27015]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The departmental unallocated provision for the national health service in 2001–02 was £350 million. Of this £300 million was additional money for the NHS announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his 2001 Budget. This money was made available specifically for boosting recruitment and retention, primary care incentives, capital investment in the modernisation of nightingale wards and maternity services and in NHS trusts local modernisation funds. The remaining £50 million departmental unallocated provision was to cover new priorities and pressures requiring capital investment.

All of the departmental unallocated provision will be allocated in 2001–02. Draw down of the funds will be reported to Parliament in winter and spring supplementary estimates.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients attending the accident and emergency departments at *(a)* Brighton general hospital, *(b)* Eastbourne district general hospital and *(c)* Princess Royal hospital, Haywards Heath in each September from 1997 to 2001 were seen within one hour; and how many were admitted or discharged within four hours. [27521]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 17 January 2002

DEFENCE

Warship Support Modernisation Project

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the NAO's report into the organisation of the Warship Support Modernisation project to be published; if he will list the representations made to his Department on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [25867]

Mr. Ingram: The NAO were commissioned by the Warship Support Agency Management Board to undertake an assurance audit of the Warship Support Modernisation evaluation and value for money analysis processes. While NAO reports are normally conducted for Parliament after public money has been spent, officials have asked them in this case to act in advance of any expenditure and to advise them principally on the soundness of the assessment processes. This work is being undertaken for the Warship Support Agency and is not a formal NAO investigation which would be published and presented to Parliament. The assurance audit is continuing and it is expected to be completed before the end of this month. No decision has yet been taken on the publication of this report.

Forces' Mail

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision is made for United Kingdom service personnel on active service abroad to contact their next of kin; and what assessment he has made of similar provision for United States service personnel. [R] [25352]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 558–59W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Cluster Bombs

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has been informed by his United States counterpart of the locations in which cluster bombs have been used by US armed forces in Afghanistan since the beginning of December. [26433]

Mr. Ingram: The US and UK have been in close political, diplomatic and military contact throughout the operations in Afghanistan. A wide variety of issues have been discussed, including the locations where cluster bombs have been dropped.

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much progress was made at the Review Conference for the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to reduce the hazard to civilians from *(a)* cluster bombs in particular and *(b)* unexploded ordnance in general. [26047]

Mr. Ingram: The Review Conference of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons agreed a mandate for a group of governmental experts to discuss ways and means to address the issue of explosive remnants of war and to submit recommendations at an early date to the State Parties to the Convention. The mandate covers consideration of all unexploded munitions, with a specific reference to sub-munitions, which include cluster bombs.

Afghanistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance has been issued by Her Majesty's Government on the handling of prisoners in Afghanistan; and on which dates such guidance was issued. [26436]

Mr. Hoon: Appropriate guidance has been given to the UK forces operating in Afghanistan to ensure compliance with the UK's international legal obligations. I am withholding details of the dates guidance was issued in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W, on special educational needs, what percentage of children in schools operated by the Service Children's Education Agency have special educational needs. [27490]

Dr. Moonie: 18 per cent. of children in schools operated by Service Children's Education have special educational needs between Stages 1 and 5 of the Code of Practice.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W, how many children of service personnel there are whose parents have voluntarily registered their children's special needs stages 1 to 5 on the Service Children's Education Agency's database. [27476]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently 3,257 children registered on the Service Children's Education (SCE) Special Educational Needs (SEN) database. The database includes details of service children with SEN whose parents are in receipt of Special Educational Needs Allowance, children who attend SCE schools worldwide and children who attend state schools in the UK. The database records only children who are at the Code of Practice Stage 3 or above. There is no requirement for parents to register children who are at Code of Practice Stage 1 or 2.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W, on special educational needs, how many children of service personnel there are whose parents have voluntarily registered their children's statement or record of needs on the Service Children's Education Agency's database. [27486]

Dr. Moonie: There are 1,222 children with a statement or record of needs registered on the Service Children's Education (SCE) Special Educational Needs (SEN) database. The database includes details of Service Children with SEN whose parents are in receipt of Special

Educational Needs Allowance, children who attend SCE schools worldwide and children who attend state schools in the UK.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W, on special educational needs, if the Service Children's Education Agency holds information on the SEN needs of the children of service personnel. [27482]

Dr. Moonie: Information is held on the Special Educational Needs of children currently receiving special needs support within Service Children's Education (SCE) schools and for those children in other schools whose parents have registered their child's needs on the SCE Special Educational Needs database.

Nimrod

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Royal Air Force's Nimrod MR2 maritime patrol aircraft. [27270]

Mr. Ingram: The Nimrod MR2 Maritime Patrol Aircraft is due to retire completely from RAF service in January 2009 and will be replaced by the Nimrod MRA4. The Nimrod MRA4 will represent a significant increase in capability for the RAF.

Territorial Army

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many TA commissions have been granted in each of the last four years; [R] [27196]

(2) how many TA places at RMA Sandhurst have been unfilled in each of the last four years. [R] [27197]

Dr. Moonie: The number of places on the Territorial Army commissioning course held at RMA Sandhurst that have been unfilled, and the number of TA commissions granted, in each of the last four years, are shown in the table.

Course	*Capacity*	*Attendance*	*Places unfilled*	*TA commissions granted*
1998	320	242	78	202
1999	360	211	149	190
2000	360	155	205	141
2001	360	214	146	188

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many formed TA units have trained in Canada in each of the last four years. [R] [27198]

Dr. Moonie: Two formed Territorial Army units have trained in Canada during the last four years. The Royal Yeomanry participated in Exercise Pond Jump West from 22 to 26 July 2000 and the King's Cheshire Regiment deployed on Exercise Fingals Cave from 1 to 15 September 2001.

Russian Armed Forces

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Government have to facilitate the teaching of English to members of the Russian armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [27834]

Mr. Hoon: Within the 2002 Outreach defence diplomacy programme with Russia, the Ministry of Defence plans to continue the teaching of English to Russian officers at the Defence School of Languages and at the University of Ripon and York. As a further part of the Outreach programme, English language training is one possible course within our Russian Resettlement Project for retiring and recently retired Russian officers.

Radiation Tests

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will grant the funds necessary to finance *(a)* blood and *(b)* saliva tests for radiation pioneered by Dundee university. [28058]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has been approached in the past to grant funds to Dundee university for such studies into the possible radiation exposure of nuclear test veterans. We have declined to do so because there are reservations about the capabilities of the proposed techniques for estimating historic radiation doses. Other studies using these techniques have found them to be inconclusive when there is a considerable time lapse since exposure, and where the exposure is low. These constraints were found to be particularly so in an age group typical of British nuclear test veterans.

Armed Services Technical Personnel

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the establishment requirement in the Royal Air Force for qualified technical personnel responsible for the maintenance of equipment serviceability in operational units and maintenance depots, stating in each case the *(a)* specialty requirement, *(b)* manning levels and *(c)* percentage difference from establishment requirement; and if he will make a statement. [25897]

Mr. Ingram: The specific information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The table shows the requirement and trained strength, as at 1 December 2001, of RAF branches and trades involved in work relating to the maintenance of equipment serviceability.

Branch/Trade	*Requirement*	*Trained strength*	±	*Percentage*
Engineer Officer	1,745	1,745	0	0
Engineering Technician Airframe	4,510	4,718	208	4.6
Engineering Technician Propulsion	2,544	2,719	175	6.9
Engineering Technician Weapon	2,048	2,149	101	4.9
Engineering Technician Avionics	3,305	3,376	71	2.1
Engineering Technician Aircraft Electrical	1,922	1,844	–78	–4.0
Engineering Technician Electronics	2,359	2,104	–255	–10.8
General Technician Electrical	646	591	–55	–8.5

Branch/Trade	*Requirement*	*Trained strength*	*±*	*Percentage*
General Technician Ground Support Equipment	745	750	5	0.7
General Technician Workshops	123	150	27	21.9
Mechanical Transport Technician	430	437	7	1.6

Not all personnel in the branches and trades listed are permanently employed on operational or maintenance units. Some are required to undergo other duties or further specialist trade training. Generally speaking, surplus personnel are employed in the ground trade posts that may be filled by trained personnel of any trade. Measures are being taken to ameliorate the impact of the deficits and surpluses wherever possible.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the establishment requirement in the Army for qualified technical personnel responsible for the maintenance of equipment serviceability in operational units and maintenance depots, stating in each case the *(a)* specialty requirement, *(b)* manning levels and *(c)* percentage difference from establishment requirement; and if he will make a statement. [25898]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) are the qualified specialist corps responsible for the technical maintenance of equipment within the Army. The table shows the REME trades involved in work relating to the maintenance of equipment, as at 1 December 2001.

	Requirement[1]	*Strength*[2]	*Shortfall ±*	*Percentage*
Career Employment Group				
Artificer Aircraft	88	140	+52	59.1
Artificer Avionics	45	60	+15	33.3
Artificer Electronics	91	141	+50	54.9
Artificer Instruments	24	52	+28	116.7
Artificer Radar	43	72	+29	67.4
Artificer Telecommunications	28	62	+34	121.4
Artificer Vehicles	478	515	+37	7.7
Artificer Weapons	81	122	+41	50.6
Technician Aircraft	580	569	–11	–1.9
Technician Avionics	265	272	+7	2.6
Technician Control Equipment	345	336	–9	–2.6
Technician Instruments	215	210	–5	–2.3
Technician Radar	191	200	+9	4.7
Technician Telecommunications	210	175	–35	–16.7
Armourer	643	506	–137	–21.3
Metalsmith	229	207	–22	–9.6
Recovery Mechanic	591	457	–134	–22.7
Shipwright	29	23	–6	–20.7
Vehicle Electrician	556	363	–193	–34.7
Vehicle Mechanic	4,071	3,136	–935	–23.0
Total	8,803	7,618	–1,185	–13.5
REME Officers	875	817	–58	–6.6

Sources:

[1] DASA (Army)

[2] REME Manning and Career Management Division

Currently the overall shortfalls are 6.6 per cent. officers and 13.5 per cent. soldiers. Staff in trades for which surpluses are shown are employed within trades that are currently undermanned.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the establishment requirement in the Royal Navy for qualified technical personnel responsible for the maintenance of equipment serviceability in operational units and maintenance depots, stating in each case the *(a)* specialty requirement, *(b)* manning levels and *(c)* percentage difference from establishment requirement; and if he will make a statement. [25899]

Mr. Ingram: The respective requirement, strength and percentage difference for each category of technical specialist in the Royal Navy are as shown in the table.

Specialisation	*Requirement*	*Bearing*	*Shortfall (percentage)*
Weapon Engineer Officer	746	733	–1.7
Marine Engineer Officer	652	640	–1.8
Air Engineer Officer	346	312	–9.8
Weapon Engineering Artificer	1,661	1,523	–8.3
Marine Engineering Artificer	2,050	1,972	–3.8
Air Engineering Artificer	984	961	–2.3
Weapon Engineering Mechanic	785	762	–2.9
Marine Engineering Mechanic	3,514	3,225	–8.2
Air Engineering Mechanic	2,240	2,273	+1.4

Currently the overall shortfall is 3.38 per cent officers and 4.61 per cent. ratings. However, all the RN's operational seagoing engineer officer posts are filled, and operational capability is being protected by giving priority to filling front-line posts for ratings. A number of measures are in hand to improve the shortfall.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Indonesia

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Sulawesi, Indonesia, with particular reference to recent bombings of four churches in the area. [28062]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to monitor events in the province of central Sulawesi closely. Sporadic clashes between Muslims and Christians in and around Poso, and more recently between Muslims and the security forces, continued after three Christian militia leaders were sentenced to death on 5 April 201 for their part in killings in May and June 2000. On 19 November 2001, the Supreme Court in Jakarta dismissed appeals by the three militia leaders against the death sentence.

On 23 November 2001, our chargé d'affaires in Jakarta raised our concerns about the escalating violence with Bambang Yudhoyono, the Indonesian Co-ordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs. Mr. Yudhoyono confirmed that police and military reinforcements had been despatched to Poso to help contain the situation. During a visit to Central Sulawesi on 5 December 2001, Mr. Yudhoyono announced that President Megawati had ordered a six-month security restoration plan for the province. The Indonesian Government subsequently brokered an agreement between the warring factions to end the fighting which was signed on 20 December. This appears to be holding up reasonably well, although four bombs exploded outside churches in the region on new year's eve. The culprits are unknown but both Christian and Muslim leaders have appealed for calm.

HMG have consistently made clear their view that long-term solutions to regional conflicts can be achieved only through negotiation and consultation We continue to work with the Indonesian authorities to promote reconciliation, begin wider reconstruction work and offer practical assistance where appropriate. As part of our effort to support conflict prevention initiatives, the British Government recently funded a series of Conflict Reporting training workshops for journalists in various provinces in Indonesia, which included participants from Poso.

Karine A

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the source of funds that financed the arms shipment on Karine A; and if he will make a statement; [28247]

(2) what representations he has made to the Palestinian Authority over the arms shipment detected on the Karine A; and if he will make a statement; [28246]

(3) what assessment he has made of the *(a)* source and *(b)* ultimate intended destination of the arms on the Karine A; and if he will make a statement; [28245]

(4) if he will make a statement on the progress of his inquiries into the links between the arms shipment discovered on the Karine A and the Palestinian Authority. [28244]

Mr. Bradshaw: The discovery of the arms shipment on the Karine A is a serious matter. We have seen evidence linking the shipment to Palestinian officials. But the extent of Palestinian Authority involvement and details of the origin destination and funding for the arms remain unclear. Israeli and Palestinian Authority inquiries are in hand. In a meeting with President Arafat on 15 January I urged him to investigate Palestinian involvement thoroughly and present his findings quickly.

Meanwhile the parties should not be deflected from the urgent business of implementing the Tenet Security Plan and Mitchell Committee recommendations.

Plan Colombia

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the value of Plan Colombia; and what plans he has to promote a similar plan in relation to Afghanistan. [28111]

Mr. MacShane: Plan Colombia is the Colombian Government's programme to tackle Colombia's interconnected problems of violence, social and economic inequality, abuse of human rights and drugs cultivation and trafficking. It is designed to produce results over a number of years.

Neither the UK nor the EU has made a contribution to the plan. The UK is contributing to a separate EU package of assistance to Colombia worth euro 300 million over the period 2001–06. The package focuses on measures that support human rights, long-term economic and social development, including alternative development, and an end to violence.

The Government currently have no plans to promote a similar plan in relation to Afghanistan.

Gibraltar

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is Her Majesty's Government's intention to reach an accommodation with Spain about Gibraltar irrespective of the will of the citizens of Gibraltar. [28265]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) in this House on 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 822.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government's policy is on a referendum of the residents of Gibraltar on *(a)* independence, *(b)* integration and *(c)* joint sovereignty. [28266]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 26W.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government will put forward proposals for further integration of Gibraltar into the United Kingdom. [R] [28263]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W. Discussions under the Brussels Process have not included the possibility of integration of Gibraltar into the UK.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on discussions on independence for Gibraltar. [R] [28264]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W. A copy of the joint press communiqué issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs when they met under the Brussels Process in Barcelona on 20 November has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Independence for Gibraltar is not an issue being discussed under the Brussels Process.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what possibilities Her Majesty's Government are studying for the future status of Gibraltar similar to Ceuta and Mellia. [28267]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W. Discussions under the Brussels Process have not included the possibility of integration of Gibraltar into the UK.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for a referendum to be held in Gibraltar on an agreement with Spain about the status of Gibraltar. [28268]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 853W.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public statements have been made concerning Gibraltar by British diplomats in the last 12 months. [28269]

Peter Hain: British diplomats have set out the Government's policy on many occasions in the last 12 months, including international fora.

James McLintock

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he has been informed by the Government of Pakistan *(a)* on what charges and *(b)* in which prison James A. McLintock is being held; [28123]

(2) if *(a)* he and *(b)* the UK High Commission in Pakistan has requested that James A. McLintock receive legal representation; [28122]

(3) on what date the UK High Commission in Islamabad first requested information from the Government of Pakistan on the case of James A. McLintock; [28120]

(4) what information has been received from the Government of Pakistan on the case of James A. McLintock; [28125]

(5) when *(a)* he last contacted and *(b)* were his most recent discussions with the Government of Pakistan on the case of James A. McLintock; and what was the outcome of these discussions; [28121]

(6) on what date representatives from the UK High Commission in Islamabad were first allowed consular access to James A. McLintock; and on how many occasions representatives have been granted such access; [28124]

(7) what representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan on the case of James A. McLintock; [28119]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not been in contact with the Pakistani authorities about this case.

Staff at the British High Commission in Islamabad first sought information about a detained British national, later identified as James A. McLintock, on 21 December 2001. British officials saw Mr. McLintock on 4 and 5 January 2002. Confirmation of his health and welfare was made and this information was relayed to his family by FCO staff in London on 9 January. Access to Mr. McLintock was given again on 16 January 2002 and more information was passed to his family. Mr. McLintock is being held in Islamabad and has not been charged. Our staff have not requested legal representation, but instead have advised the Pakistanis that if Mr. McLintock is charged he must have legal representation. We continue to be in consultation with the Pakistani authorities about Mr. McLintock's situation. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary would, of course, be happy to see the hon. Member about this case if that would be helpful.

Sellafield

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the representations *(a)* made to and *(b)* received from the European Commission by his Department in respect of the Sellafield MOX plant since 1 January. [19407]

Margaret Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

Further to my answer to my hon. Friend on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 681W, I understand that the European Commission wrote to the Department of Trade and Industry on 20 November 2001 about whether state aid had been granted to Sellafield MOX plant. The DTI does not believe that any state aid has been given to the plant and replied on 7 January.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Industry

10. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on Government policy regarding the coal industry. [25554]

Mr. Wilson: Coal plays a key role in meeting UK energy needs. Future policy in relation to the coal industry will be informed by the PIU energy review, the Clean Coal Technology Review, and the House of Lords report into security of supply.

Energy Policy

11. **Mr. Simmonds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions her Department has had with the European Commission on national energy policy. [25555]

Mr. Wilson: This Department is in continual contact with the Commission on a wide range of European energy issues affecting national energy policy. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met Mrs. de Palacio on 29 November last year when they discussed energy liberalisation, the Commission's Green Paper on security of energy supply, coal subsidies, the need to ensure fair competition in the context of ownership by vertically integrated companies, and nuclear energy including safety standards. I attended the Energy Council on 4 December during which discussion focused mainly on the internal EU market in electricity and gas and on the Commission's Green Paper on security of energy supply. The Council also discussed the proposal for a directive on the energy performance of buildings, on climate change and on the justification or otherwise for continued state aid to the coal industry after expiry of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty.

Postal Services

12. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to ensure that the universal service provision is adhered to in the UK market for postal services. [25556]

14. **Geraldine Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to ensure that the universal service provision is adhered to in the UK market for postal services. [25560]

Mr. Alexander: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) at column 417.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the Crown post offices which have opened since May 1997. [27651]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I understand from Post Office Ltd. that no new Crown post offices have opened since May 1997.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the gross running costs of the Crown post offices in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 2000–01. [27652]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I understand from Post Office Ltd. that the information is not available in the form requested.

Steel Industry

13. **Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with steel industry management regarding the future of the steel industry. [25558]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and my noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment have met senior management from Corus to discuss a variety of issues in recent months.

Aviation Industry

15. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the commercial position of airports and aircraft companies following the attacks of 11 September. [25561]

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Member will be aware that the last four months have been a difficult time for those companies in the aviation and aerospace sectors. UK companies are working extremely hard to remain competitive. The current downturn in these sectors has regrettably resulted in job losses, but the long-term prospects for the industry remain good.

22. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance her Department is providing to small firms affected by the downturn in the aviation industry since 11 September; and if she will make a statement. [25570]

Mr. Wilson: There is no specific support available from the Government for small businesses that have been adversely affected by these events.

The Government do, however, make a significant financial contribution to the aerospace industry generally, in terms of launch investment, research and technology funding, and competitiveness improvement training.

There are also other forms of generic business support available.

The Business Link network provides advice and support for companies suffering as a result of a recent crisis. Business Links can also advise companies on a number of disaster management issues. Companies experiencing difficulties should contact their local Business Link office. The Business Link National Contact Centre, 0845 600 9006, will put small firms in touch with their local provider.

Small businesses dependent on the UK airlines affected by 11 September will also benefit indirectly from the aid package provided by the UK Government to the aviation industry.

Vehicles Directive

16. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy on the end of life vehicles directive. [25563]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Our policy is to implement with a light regulatory touch, achieving the environmental objectives of the directive without putting UK business at a competitive disadvantage. We are now assessing responses to our consultation document, and the recommendations of the Trade and Industry Committee.

Restrictive Practice

17. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the Office of Fair Trading report into restrictive practice in the professions. [25564]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As stated in the pre-Budget report, published on 27 November 2001, the Government intend to remove schedule 4 to the Competition Act 1998, which provides a special regime for the exclusion of professional rules from competition law, in the forthcoming Enterprise Bill.

The professions are conducting reviews of their own in light of the OFT report and some bodies have already announced positive changes as a result. On the remaining matters for Government from the report, the Lord

Chancellor's Department is considering what further steps might be needed in respect of the market for legal services to ensure that competition issues are fully addressed.

Mineworkers' Pension Scheme

18. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's entitlement to half of the surplus of the mineworkers' pension scheme. [25565]

Mr. Wilson: I am pleased to announce a new, additional benefit for members of the mineworkers' pension scheme on the lowest incomes, at a cost of £90 million. This will be funded out of the Government's share of the scheme's reserves.

The package will help mineworkers' pension scheme members who have only very modest miners' pensions, despite many years of service to the industry before 1975. Help for that particular group was identified as a priority in discussions with the scheme's trustees. Now, thanks to gains in the scheme's value under the Government's guarantee, the Government and Trustees have agreed a package of benefits, which includes special one-off payments for up to 66,000 of these members, alongside the 9 per cent. bonus for all members agreed earlier this year.

These lump sum payments will apply to members with at least five years service who left British Coal before or shortly after 1975 and who are on low pensions, defined on a sliding scale from not more than £5 a week after five years' service to not more than £10 a week after 10 or more years' service. The amounts they will receive will depend on their length of pensionable service and the current value of their pensions. Those with the longest service and the lowest pensions will receive the most. Payments, will range between £200 (e.g. for someone with, five years' service on £4 to £5 a week, or with 10 years' service on £9 to £10 a week) and £2,000 (for someone with 10 or more years' service on less than £1 a week). Details will appear in the next edition of the mineworker's pension scheme newsletter.

Members will not need to claim the money—most of those eligible, including all the existing pensioners, are expected to be paid in May, with the remainder paid within the next 18 months.

The Government and the Trustees of the two former British Coal pension schemes, the mineworkers' pension scheme and the British Coal staff superannuation scheme, have also agreed a joint statement agreeing a review of arrangements for the Government's guarantee of members' basic pension benefits. The text of that statement is as follows:

> "In 1994, when British Coal was privatised, the Government agreed to guarantee benefits already built up in the Corporation's pension schemes. These arrangements have served the members of the schemes very well, providing the basis for average pension increases of some 30 per cent. since 1994. Without the Government's guarantee, these closed schemes would have had to pursue entirely different investment strategies, based primarily on holding bonds, and would not have been able to pay anything like these increases.
>
> However, both the Government and the Trustees recognise that there have been changes in circumstances since 1994. They have therefore agreed to explore how these changes might best be reflected in revisions to the 1994 arrangements which would benefit members. In doing so, they recognise that any revisions will need to be based on an equitable sharing of risks and reward between the schemes and the Exchequer, and will need to be sufficiently robust to operate satisfactorily in a wide variety of conditions."

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received on the Government's share of Coal Industry Pension Fund surpluses. [25567]

Mr. Wilson: I have received seven representations on this issue over the last two months.

Manufacturing Industry

19. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage research and development in UK manufacturing industry. [25566]

Alan Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) at column 411.

Venture Capital

20. **Jim Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to increase access to venture capital funds in the regions of England. [25568]

31. **Mr. Neil Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to increase access to venture capital funds in the regions of England. [25579]

Alan Johnson: To increase access to venture capital in the English regions the Government are seeking to stimulate the creation of Regional Venture Capital Funds (RVCFs). Being developed on the basis of one in each of the English regions they are being established to demonstrate institutional investment in the "equity gap" and demonstrate to institutional investors that commercial returns can be made in this sector; to increase the supply of venture capital in amounts of under £500,000; and ensure that every English region has access to "equity gap" funds. All RVCFs will be commercially focused with fund management and all investment decisions undertaken by experienced fund managers. All funds should launch during 2002.

Miners (Medical Test Centres)

21. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the accessibility of medical test centres to former miners in the east midlands seeking compensation for COPD. [25569]

Mr. Wilson: There are six centres that are accessible to the 37,505 claimants in the midlands. These are located at Cannock, Chesterfield, Coventry, Mansfield, Nottingham and Stoke. One of the mobile testing units has been deployed at Mansfield since mid-October 2001. To date, these centres have assessed, through the full medical assessment process (MAP) over 5,130 live claimants, with a further 2,072 appointments being made.

Claimants are usually invited to attend a test centre within a 25-mile radius from their residence. However, claimants are given the option to attend a different centre if a more suitable time is available. For those claimants who are not able to travel to a centre, and have a letter from their doctor, Healthcall, the company contracted to undertake the MAP can carry out home visits.

There has been much focus on resources in this region and the Department, in consultation with the claimants' solicitors, is continuously reviewing ways of improving services and increase throughput. Plans to convert Mansfield into a double testing centre are currently under negotiations.

As at the end of November, the Department had made 8,862 interim payments and settled some 3,322 claims. In total, the Department has paid out some £45.3 million in the midlands area.

Clean Coal Technology

23. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to publish the report of the working group on clean coal technology. [25571]

Mr. Wilson: I hope to be able to announce the publication of the report in the very near future.

28. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to encourage the take-up of clean coal technology. [25576]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are currently spending around £12 million over the three year period 2000–01 to 2002–03 on research and development into cleaner coal technologies. In addition to this I also expect to announce the conclusions of the review into the case for Government support for cleaner coal technology demonstration plant in the very near future.

ALCOA Aluminium

24. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussion she has had with the management team at ALCOA aluminium to discuss the company's proposed redundancies; and if she will make a statement. [25572]

Mr. Wilson: None, although DTI officials have met ALCOA management at UK and EU level to discuss a wide range of issues. The company's proposal for 228 job losses out of a total UK work force of 4,100 would involve the closure of the Dolgarrog facility and employee reductions at the Swansea rolling mill. The proposed reductions in ALCOA's UK work force form part of a global restructuring plan involving 6,500 redundancies brought about by recent falls in world demand for aluminium products. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is working with the Welsh Assembly Government to minimise the impact on those affected.

A task group comprising Conwy CBC, the Welsh Development Agency (WDA), the Employment Service, trade unions and other public agencies is seeking alternative employment for those made redundant. In addition, Conwy CBC and the WDA are jointly funding a study (supported by ALCOA) to look at the potential for continued production at Dolgarrog on a more limited scale. Dolgarrog is also part of an Objective 1 Assisted Area and so the Assembly Government and its partners will be looking to secure the maximum financial support available.

Indo UK

25. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement about the work of Indo UK Partnerships and the Indo UK Round Table. [25573]

Nigel Griffiths: The UK's political and business relations with India, a key partner, are a very high priority for this Government. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visit confirms this. We are making good progress, helped by the Indo-British Partnership for trade and investment and the UK/India Round Table for new thinking about our wider bilateral relations.

The Indo-British Partnership (IBP) was created in 1993 by the then Prime Minister to promote trade and investment. During his recent visit to India my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met the British and Indian co-chairs of the IBP. Since its inception, the IBP has seen a substantial increase in bilateral trade. The UK is now India's second largest trading partner after the US. By the end of 2000 bilateral trade was worth £5 billion. That year UK exports to India grew by 32 per cent. The UK accounts for over 6 per cent. of India's total foreign trade.

The UK/India Round Table, which meets again in April, was established in April 2000 by the two Foreign Ministers. It has produced a series of constructive recommendations for enhancing bilateral relations.

Renewable Energy

26. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure the development of renewable sources of energy. [25574]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are taking active steps to ensure the development of renewable sources of energy.

Introducing the new renewables obligation, exempting renewables from the climate change levy and protecting existing non fossil fuel obligation (NFFO) contracts will together create a long-term market incentive for renewables worth over £1 billion per year by 2010.

We are underpinning the obligation with direct Government funding for renewables worth over £260 million between 2001 and 2004. We are setting up an extensive capital grants programme for offshore wind and energy crops projects, initiating a major photovoltaics demonstration programme, and boosting research and development.

We recently introduced an order to allow locational flexibility for NFFO 3, 4 and 5 projects that have not yet been commissioned. This will allow more appropriate locations to be found in order to overcome problems in securing planning permission.

We have initiated studies of each UK region's capacity to generate electricity from renewable sources. Once all these assessments are completed, it is expected that specific regional targets for renewable energy will be adopted across the UK.

The Government are also exploring the scope for upgrading the electricity distribution system to enable the UK's huge renewable energy resources to be exploited to the full. For example, we have commissioned an initial study of the feasibility of an underwater cable to connect parts of the Western seaboard of the UK directly to the National Grid.

World Trade Organisation

27. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on UK manufacturing of the opening of a new WTO trade round. [25575]

Ms Hewitt: On its own the opening of a new WTO trade round will have little impact on UK manufacturing. This is because the opening of the round merely launches multilateral negotiations. A fuller assessment of the impact on UK manufacturing and the UK economy overall should come after the hoped for successful conclusions of those negotiations. World wide reductions in industrial tariffs should, for example, lead to both improved market access for UK manufacturing overseas and lower cost sources of components. Negotiations start with an expectation of significant benefits. A halving of WTO members' tariffs, for example, could increase world incomes by around $200 billion a year. UK manufacturers could be expected to benefit significantly from such increases in world incomes.

China

29. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage UK exports to China. [25577]

Nigel Griffiths: As my hon. Friend knows from personal experience, China is a key market for British trade and investment. The Government, through Trade Partners UK, recently announced an extensive programme of supported activity for British companies in the China market for 2002–03, including 18 Government supported trade missions, 26 trade fair groups and 10 sector specific seminar initiatives. This is in addition to the regular ministerial visits to and from China including the visit by Chinese Vice-President Hu Jintao in November 2001. Visits from the UK during 2001 included the then Minister for e.Commerce, the then Minister for Trade, the then Minister for Construction, the Minister for Science, the Minister for Energy and Industry and the Financial Secretary.

Trade Partners UK is also supporting a programme of major events in China aimed at promoting the UK's strengths as a competitive, technologically innovative economy and a strong business partner for China. This began with a large scale, award winning UK pavilion at the China High-Tech Fair in Shenzhen last October, visited by Lord Sainsbury. In October 2002 there will be a major programme of activity in Shanghai, followed by a wide-ranging series of events around China in 2003 centred on Beijing.

This high level of activity in China is complemented by awareness-raising activity among British companies in the UK. Trade Partners UK, in close co-operation with the China-Britain Business Council, is engaged in a rolling programme of events to alert UK companies to business opportunities in China. This activity includes the formation recently of a Beijing Olympics Taskforce, which aims to maximise the contribution of UK business to the preparations for the 2008 Games.

UK exports to China rose by 21 per cent. in 2000 and by a further 18 per cent. in the first 10 months of 2001. The work of Trade Partners UK, with the CBBC, is designed further to enhance UK companies' competitiveness in China.

Employment Practices

30. **Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage flexibility in employment practices. [25578]

Alan Johnson: Earlier this week the Government amended the Employment Bill to take forward the recommendations made by the Work and Parents Taskforce to place a duty on employers to give serious consideration to requests to work flexibly from parents of young children .

Yesterday we also announced the fourth round of the Work Life Balance Challenge Fund, which will help employers introduce and develop flexible and diverse working arrangements. The aim of the fund is to raise employers' awareness of the business benefits of policies and practices that help employees achieve a better balance between work and the rest of their lives.

Air Traffic Control (Tanzania)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the sale of the air traffic control system to Tanzania. [25953]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 869W.

Small Businesses

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding has been allocated to help start small businesses in Portsmouth, South in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [24942]

Nigel Griffiths: A breakdown of the information requested is not available by constituency and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Post Office Network

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the sum allocated in the Comprehensive Spending Review to preserve the post office network will be spent; how much has been spent in 2000–01; and how much will be spent in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [25372]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* In the Comprehensive Spending Review 2000, £270 million was allocated to modernise and sustain the post office network over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04. Of this, £15 million over three years was allocated to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to help sustain and improve post offices in deprived urban areas. A total of £35 million over three years has been set aside to pilot the concept of post offices as Government General Practitioners. The balance of the funding is allocated to supporting the restructuring of the urban network and to providing transitional financial assistance to rural post offices.

In the current financial year, up to £25 million has been committed to funding of the cost of the Government General Practitioner "Your Guide" pilot currently running in Leicestershire and Rutland. The phasing of expenditure on the other planned schemes and initiatives over the spending review period will be determined in the light of the detailed arrangements for implementation as they are finalised.

Food Retailing (Monopolies)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers *(a)* she and *(b)* the Competition Commission have to investigate local monopolies of food retailing; and if she will make a statement. [25557]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Fair Trading Act 1973 allows the Director General of Fair Trading or the Secretary of State to make a reference to the Competition Commission in respect of a product or service supplied to the UK market as a whole or to a part of it.

Consignia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Consignia regarding recruitment of delivery staff in London. [26706]

Mr. Alexander: The Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company. However, the recruitment of delivery staff is an operational issue for the company.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when a new Chairman of Consignia will *(a)* be appointed and *(b)* take up his duties. [26565]

Mr. Alexander: Arrangements are in hand to recruit and appoint a new Chairman of Consignia. Recruitment consultants have been engaged and the post has recently been advertised in the press.

In the interim the Board of Consignia have asked Allan Leighton to chair the board.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what factors will affect her decision as to whether Consignia should pay a dividend to Her Majesty's Government for the current financial year. [26567]

Mr. Alexander: In line with the proposals set out in the White Paper "Post Office Reform: A World Class Service for the 21st Century", a number of commercial factors will need to be considered when deciding whether Consignia should pay a dividend to HMG.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she took to inform businesses affected by the foot and mouth epidemic as to the financial assistance available through the regional development agencies and other schemes; what the cost was of marketing such schemes; how many businesses applied; how much funding assistance they applied for; how much they received on average; and if she will make a statement. [27038]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* It was left to the discretion of regional development agencies and other relevant bodies to decide on how to inform businesses of the help available from them. Information is not available centrally either on publicity costs incurred or on how much assistance businesses applied for under the Business Recovery Fund or other schemes operated by the RDAs. As at 12 December some 5,700 Business Recovery Fund grants had been approved at an average of just over £4,000. No reliable information is yet available on take-up of rate relief.

To date the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme has guaranteed 29 loans to businesses affected by FMD, with an average loan size of £50,258. Of these, 18 were made under the relaxed eligibility criteria introduced in April 2001 and publicised by Ministers. In addition, 84 requests for extended loan terms have been granted to businesses with existing SFLGS loans.

The Small Business Service (SBS) produced and distributed a signposting leaflet to raise awareness of the assistance available to businesses experiencing difficulties as a result of FMD. Around 3.5 million leaflets were distributed through banks, post offices, trade associations and Business Link operators. The total cost of production, printing, storage and distribution of this leaflet was £77,628.

Business advice fact sheets have been posted on DEFRA's website and they have also set up a helpline.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many businesses affected by the foot and mouth epidemic applied for financial aid through the Business Recovery Fund in the south-west; how much they applied for; how much they received on average; and if she will make a statement. [27039]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* 1,199 businesses applied for aid through the Business Recovery Fund in the south-west.

Each business was eligible for a grant of up to £15,000. Information is not held centrally by the RDA on the amounts applied for.

The average grant size in the south-west was £8,006.

Departmental Expenditure

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 472–73W, on departmental expenditure, for what reason she is unable to provide reasons for spending outturns lower than planned in subcategories *(a)* 1 'Department of Trade and Industry: programmes and administration' and *(b)* 2 'Department of Trade and Industry: science'; and if she will make a statement. [26474]

Ms Hewitt: Full details of outturn against the 2000–01 voted provision for programmes and administration and science will be published in the appropriation accounts to be presented to the House of Commons by 31 January. The departmental resource accounts on an accruals basis will also be presented to the House of Commons by

31 January. Updated estimates of the outturn for Departmental Expenditure Limits in 2000–01 on an accruals basis were published in the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318; Table B16).

Broadband

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the Third Generator Licence fee money has been spent on broadband infrastructure. [26887]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 17 May 2000, *Official Report,* column 187W.

Sellafield

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the representations *(a)* made to and *(b)* received from the European Commission by her Department in respect of the Sellafield MOX plant since 1 January. [19406]

Margaret Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

Further to my answer to my hon. Friend on 10 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 681W, I understand that the European Commission wrote to the Department of Trade and Industry on 20 November 2001 about whether state aid had been granted to the Sellafield MOX plant. The DTI does not believe that any state aid has been given to the plant and replied on 7 January.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Minimum Wage

5. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Minister for Women how many women have benefited from the national minimum wage. [25587]

Ms Hewitt: Around 1 million women, and about half a million men, have benefited from the new rates for the national minimum wage which took effect on 1 October 2001.

Women's Issues

6. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement on her role on the promotion of women's issues in Government. [25588]

Ms Hewitt: As Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women I am determined to ensure that the needs, and the contribution, of women, who make up nearly half the work force, are properly understood, and rewarded. Women have a valuable part to play in driving up the productivity and competitiveness of the United Kingdom. That is why I place great importance on encouraging flexible working practices and other measures which enable both women, and men, to make a full contribution at work and at home.

Wealth Creation

7. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Minister for Women what steps she is taking to increase wealth creating opportunities for women in the most deprived areas. [25589]

Ms Hewitt: The Phoenix Fund, which provides grants to business to support projects for disadvantaged communities, has supported 21 projects which are specifically targeted at women, although the other projects also assist women entrepreneurs within their target groups. Devolved Administrations make their own arrangements in this area.

Working Mothers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Minister for Women what steps she is taking to make it easier for those mothers who want to return to work to do so. [25581]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have introduced a range of measures, including the national childcare strategy, the new deal for lone parents and the new deal for partners, learn direct and the working families tax credit, all of which help mothers who want to return to work. The Employment Bill currently before Parliament includes a number of measures to enable more mothers to remain in the labour market.

WALES

Health Consultation Document

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 183W, on the health consultation document, if he will request from the Welsh Assembly an analysis of the responses to the consultation document. [26727]

Mr. Touhig: This is a matter for the National Assembly of Wales and I understand that it is not the Assembly's intention to publish an executive summary.

The Assembly received a substantial number of responses in the last three days of the consultation period, and for ease of handling decided to number and summarise these individually.

Copies of these summaries were then placed in the Libraries of the House of Commons and the National Assembly. Also, further copies were made available in the Assembly's Publication Centre for ease of access to the general public.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28106]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I make regular use of the railway in connection with my official duties, and will continue to do so. My most recent journey was from Cardiff Central to London Paddington on Monday 14 January.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26998]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the number of individuals in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26329]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The figures for the Welsh Office and its agencies (until 1999) and (since 1999) for the Wales Office, which has no agencies, are:

	In excess of £100,000	*In excess of £200,000*
1 April 1998:	0	0
1 April 1999:	2	0
1 April 2000:	0	0
1 April 2001:	0	0

Information on NDPBs is provided in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies".

Memorandum of Understanding

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the costs to public funds of the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements. [24759]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary texts are agreements between the UK Government and devolved Administrations on how they intend conducting relations between the Administrations.

It reflects administrative and policy best practice on issues such as co-operation, exchange of information, correspondence and parliamentary business. Supplementary texts add more detail for the international and EU fields, statistics and financial assistance to industry.

A revised version of the MoU was published on 18 December as Command Paper 5240. 300 copies were printed, at a cost of £3,851. These costs were met from the Cabinet Office budget. The main distribution medium will be via the Cabinet Office's website www.Cabinet-Office.gov.uk.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Buildings Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by her Department in each of the last four years. [27961]

Clare Short: The only refurbishment project that my Department has undertaken over the past four years was in relation to our new recently opened headquarters building at 1 Palace street, London.

The expenditure on refurbishment and associated fees was as follows:

	£ million
1999–2000	0.24
2000–01	4.8
2001–02[1]	22

[1] Estimate for whole financial year

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate her Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if she will make a statement. [27294]

Clare Short: The estimated cost to DFID's budget of fraud in the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2001 is some £250,000, of which £175,000 can be attributed to contractor fraud. Of the remaining sum, £22,000 relates to the theft of assets which, in line with Treasury guidance, has been classified as involving departmental staff either directly or through collusion. Details of suspected or proven fraud are provided to the Treasury on an annual basis. The annual report that the Treasury prepares on fraud is deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton dated 3 December 2001 with regard to Mrs. K. Khan. [27320]

Clare Short: We have received a very large number of letters about the situation in Afghanistan. I regret the delay in replying to my right hon. Friend and intend to send him a reply shortly.

Leprosy

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what specific assistance she gives to help people suffering from leprosy; and if she will make a statement. [27156]

Clare Short: Leprosy is a curable disease, and treatment provided in the early stages averts disability. Three quarters of a million cases are still detected each year, of which about 70 per cent. are in India. Ten developing countries account for 90 per cent. of cases. An effective drug cure is available free of charge via the World Health Organisation (WHO) in sufficient quantities to treat all people diagnosed with the disease. The priority now is to get treatment to all who need it, especially in isolated rural areas. To eliminate the disease, political commitment in the key endemic countries is needed along with the successful integration of leprosy treatment into strengthened general health services. Our strategy is to support the creation of basic health care systems—encompassing the public, private and informal sectors—to improve poor people's access to the care, services and essential health products to safeguard their health. Within the foreseeable future it should be possible to reduce the prevalence of the disease to such a low level that it no longer constitutes a public health problem.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what has been the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26985]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) expenditure on recruitment advertising in 2000 and 2001 is listed by publication on the spreadsheet. Figures for 1997–99 are not available.

In addition, DFID commissioned a 12 page report in *The Independent* on the subject of globalisation to accompany the new White Paper on Eliminating World Poverty. The report was published on 12 December 2000 at a cost of £36,589, plus production and incidental costs of £3,687.

£

	By calendar year in 2000	*By calendar year in 2001*
Accountancy Age	6,280.00	3,697.20
Architect's Journal	1,591.20	'—
Africa Health		2,487.60
British Medical Journal	13,104.00	9,199.80
British Psychological Society Appointments Memorandum	'—	1,822.50
Broadcast	1,670.40	'—
Building Design	1,698.00	'—
Business Day	274.95	'—
Caterer and Hotelkeeper	'—	1,237.50
Chartered Surveyor Monthly	'—	1,485.00
Community Care	'—	7,748.36
Computer Weekly	'—	12,577.50
Contract Journal	4,482.00	'—
Daily Mail	'—	12,280.50
Daily News (Zimbabwe)	1,805.04	'—
Daily/Sunday Telegraph	21,501.00	40,423.50
East African Standard	1,069.63	'—
Ends Report—Environment Data Services	'—	612.00
Ethnic Media Group (Eastern Eye, New Nation, Asian Times and Caribbean Times)	3,307.50	6,268.50
Evening Standard and Metro (London)	'—	15,411.60
Far East Economic Review	'—	16,732.80
Financial Times	18,954.00	30,064.50
Flight International	5,676.30	'—
Health Service Journal	2,170.80	4,489.20
Independent and Independent on Sunday	'—	11,650.50
Internal Auditing	'—	720.00
Library and Information Appointments	1,134.00	3,594.60
Mail and Guardian	3,768.36	663.84
Metro London	'—	1,575.00
Nature	'—	2,246.40
New Civil Engineer	13,186.80	6,822.00
New Scientist	9,954.00	34,198.10
New Statesman	'—	1,620.00
New Vision	777.60	'—
Nine to Five	'—	1,350.00
Noticias	1,955.42	'—
Nursing Times	2,016.00	'—
Opportunities	1,063.13	'—
Ottawa Citizen	'—	761.00
People Management	'—	2,025.00
Personnel Today	'—	4,095.00
Planning	3,175.20	3,956.40
Police Review	18,054.00	'—
Public Finance	4,471.20	8,663.40
RSS News-Royal Statistical Society	337.50	'—
Scotland on Sunday	'—	3,861.00
Society of Archivists Newsletter	'—	180.00
Sunday Times (South Africa)	2,898.00	'—
Sunday Times (The Times)	26,208.00	'—
Supply Management	'—	2,979.00
Surveying World	517.50	'—
Surveyor	'—	2,376.00
The Daily Nation	1,458.43	'—
The East African	2,971.90	'—
The Economic/Economist Website	324,850.20	448,434.70
The Globe and Mail	'—	1,823.47
The Guardian	178,289.40	173,118.19
The Guardian (Tanzania)	1,281.33	'—
The Guardian Weekly	16,855.65	12,046.05
The Herald (Glasgow)	8,818.20	22,113.00
The Herald (Zimbabwe)	972.90	'—
The Lancet	3,978.00	4,568.40
The Lawyer	6,328.80	'—
The Namibian	269.10	'—
The Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	7,998.75	5,338.13
The Times	5,733.00	'—
The Times (Malawi)	829.44	'—

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	By calendar year in 2000	By calendar year in 2001
The Veterinary Record	[1]—	1,053.00
Times Educational Supplement	4,363.20	6,462.72
Times Higher Educational Supplement	12,538.60	3,464.55
Times/Sunday Times of Zambia	875.07	[1]—
UK Tropical Forestry Forum	135.00	[1]—
Zimbabwe Independent	323.96	[1]—
Total	751,972.46	938,297.51

[1] Nil

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Solicitor-General what estimate her Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if she will make a statement. [27289]

The Solicitor-General: There have been no instances of fraud within the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers during the period since 1 May 1997 and no cost to its budget.

There have been no instances of fraud within the Serious Fraud Office since 1 May 1997 and no cost to its budget.

Although the Treasury Solicitor's Department has suffered three frauds since 1 May 1997, none has involved any cost to the budget of that Department. The first, in 1998, was a fraud within Government Property Lawyers, which at that time was a separate agency, and involved the improper use of client money, resulting in a loss of £1.2 million to the Exchequer. The second, in 2000, was the theft of jewellery to the value of £250 which reduced the proceeds of Bona Vacantia to the Consolidated Fund. The third, in 2001, involved the misappropriation of £170,000 from the proceeds of Bona Vacantia through the use of forged wills. The loss was to the Consolidated Fund. Of the sum lost, £47,000 has since been recovered and action continues to recover further sums. Details of the three frauds are set out in the Annual Fraud Report, copies of which are available in the Library.

There have been seven instances of fraud against the Crown Prosecution Service since 1 May 1997 involving a total cost to the budget of £8,426.98.

Fraud is treated seriously by all the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible. There are cost implications against budgets from maintaining proactive systems of financial control and governance seeking to ensure fraud against the Departments does not occur. Such costs are, however, an integral part of the general management of the Departments and are not separately assessable.

Crown Prosecution Service

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Solicitor-General when she expects to respond to the Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate report on the CPS in London; and if she will make a statement. [27279]

The Solicitor-General: The HMCPSI report on London was published 13 December 2001. The substance of any Inspectorate report is always the subject of discussion between the Law Officers in their capacity as superintending Ministers and the Director of Public Prosecutions, who is the Head of the Crown Prosecution Service. In this instance, the Attorney-General and I have been closely involved in decisions about the response to the report from the time when it appeared from the emerging finding that there were a number of issues of concern to be addressed. Additionally, I have undertaken a series of visits to units in London to establish at first-hand what have been particular problems which CPS London faces.

The environment in which CPS London operates and has operated since its creation makes it different from any other CPS area—in particular, the transient nature of the population and the difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified and unqualified staff. Now that better funding arrangements have been put in place it should be possible to recruit staff "to the level required" and to ensure that basic systems are maintained. The area is currently involved in a rolling recruitment campaign to increase the numbers of lawyers and administrative staff employed in London.

The area is currently involved in a rolling recruitment campaign to increase the numbers of lawyers and administrative staff employed in London.

The area will be producing by the end of January a detailed "action plan" which will address all recommendations made by the CPS Inspectorate. The Attorney-General and I will take a close interest in the implementation of the plan, and this will be followed by a review.

Senior management have completed a review which is now being implemented. This has meant an increase in the number of Assistant Chief Crown Prosecutors from three to five, who exercise firmer control of the units for which they are responsible.

Much has been done already to address issues of concern, working with the police. These include dealing with the number of ineffective trials and the high rate of discharged committals. By adopting this approach the area should be able to build upon the many features of their operation which were commended by HMCPSI.

Finally, a Ministerial Committee, which I chair, has been established which focuses on criminal justice system issues as a whole in London.

SCOTLAND

Hogmanay Celebrations

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the impact on economic activity in regions beyond Lothian of Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebrations. [25912]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office makes no assessment of the economic impact of Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebrations. However, the latest figures available from Edinburgh city council state that the economic impact for Hogmanay 2000 was £28 million for the local economy and an additional £10 million for Scotland as a whole. This was generated by approximately 500,000 visitors and participants.

NHS Resources

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she *(a)* has held and *(b)* plans to hold in the current financial year on the resources available to the NHS in Scotland with (i) the Scottish Executive and First Minister, (ii) the Secretary of State for Health and (iii) Treasury Ministers; if she will list the (A) items discussed and (B) dates of the meetings held; and if she will make a statement. [26202]

Mrs. Liddell: I have frequent discussions with UK Ministers and the Scottish Ministers on a wide range of issues. Expenditure on the NHS in Scotland is a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive. Scottish Ministers are free, within the Scottish Assigned Budget, to determine their own spending priorities.

Eurozone

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the impact on Scottish business of United Kingdom membership of the eurozone. [26704]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have stated that the Treasury will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Scottish Executive (Representation)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will agree to formal representation of the Scottish Executive in Dover house. [27735]

Mrs. Liddell: The Executive have since devolution had an agreement with the Scotland Office enabling Scottish Ministers and officials to use Dover house.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to encourage greater participation by Ministers of the Scottish Executive in European Council of Ministers meetings on matters of policy which are devolved. [27734]

Mrs. Liddell: Government policy on these matters is set out in the Memorandum of Understanding, and the concordats on International Relations and Co-ordination of European Policy Issues, agreed between the Government and the devolved Administrations.

In accordance with these agreements, the Scottish Executive are involved in formulating the UK policy position on issues which touch on matters within their responsibility. They may also form part of the UK delegation at Council of Ministers meetings where matters with a significant impact on their devolved responsibilities are to be discussed, and speak for the UK in appropriate cases, with the agreement of the lead UK Minister.

It is for the Scottish Executive to agree with the lead UK Minister on those occasions where they wish to attend. They have done so on a regular basis.

HEALTH

Painkillers and Antidepressants

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his most recent assessment of *(a)* deaths and *(b)* other side effects resulting from the misuse, over-use or inappropriate prescription of (i) painkillers and (ii) antidepressants. [26029]

Jacqui Smith: As with all medicines, the safety of painkillers and antidepressants, including adverse effects associated with inappropriate use and overuse, is closely monitored by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

We introduced specific measures in September 1998 reducing pack sizes of the commonly used painkillers, paracetamol and aspirin, aimed at reducing the toxicity from impulsive overdose. New warnings on the packaging emphasised the risks and action to take in the event of an overdose. Recently published papers provide growing evidence that these measures are having an important public health impact.

The MCA is continuing to monitor the impact of these measures by examining a range of data, including hospital admissions, liver transplants and deaths from self-poisoning.

Bristol Royal Infirmary

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken in response to the named civil servant in his Department, Dr. Peter Doyle, who was criticised in the report of the public inquiry into children's heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, 1984 to 1995. [29079]

Mr. Milburn: The Department commissioned independent assessors to lead a review of the inquiry report and other relevant information and make recommendations on whether or not any action should be initiated in respect of Dr. Doyle. The assessors were Lesley James, former Vice President of the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development and Sir David Carter, Vice Principal of Edinburgh university. Their overall conclusion was that Dr. Doyle responded appropriately to the information he was given by Dr. Bolsin on 19 July 1994 about poor results following paediatric cardiac surgery in the Bristol unit, taking into account the context in which he was operating at the time. They concluded that while it is possible with hindsight to question Dr. Doyle's decision not to examine the detailed data he was given by Dr. Bolsin, any criticism has to be balanced both against the prompt and positive action he did take in writing to Professor Angelini at the trust, raising the concerns that had been drawn to his attention and seeking reassurances, and against the subsequent assurances he was given. The Chief Executive of the Department of Health, Nigel Crisp, has accepted their conclusions, including the recommendation that no disciplinary action is warranted and that Dr. Doyle should resume his current duties in the Department, working as the senior medical officer providing advice on renal services and transplant services—which he has done.

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the response to the report of the public inquiry into children's heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, 1984 to 1995. [29078]

Mr. Milburn: I have today published our response to the Kennedy report (Learning from Bristol: The Department of Health's Response to the Report of the Public Inquiry into children's heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary 1984–1995—Cm 5363) and copies are available in the Library and the Vote Office.

Lung Cancer

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the survival rates for lung cancer are in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other countries in Europe and the USA. [27457]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Dr. Jenny Tonge, dated 17 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question the survival rates for lung cancer in (a) the UK and (b) other countries in Europe and the USA. I am replying in his absence. (27457)

Comparable information on cancer survival in the parts of the UK and Europe covered by the Eurocare II study was published in "Survival of Cancer Patients in Europe: the EUROCARE-2 Study" (IARC Scientific Publications No. 151); a copy is available in the House of Commons Library. Information on cancer survival in the USA can be found on the website of the Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) cancer registries: http://www-seer.ims.nci.nih.gov/

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of lung cancer were reported between 1980 and 2000 in the UK. [27458]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Dr. Jenny Tonge, dated 17 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many cases of lung cancer were reported between 1980 and 2000 in the UK. I am replying in his absence. (27458)

It is estimated that there were 800,000 newly diagnosed cases of lung cancer in the United Kingdom from 1980 to 1998 (the latest year for which data are available). This figure is based on the number of registrations of lung cancer in Great Britain in 1980–1998, and an estimate of the number of cases in Northern Ireland made using appropriate adjustments to the numbers of deaths from lung cancer in the period. Numbers of registrations of lung cancer in Northern Ireland are only available for 1993–1997.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Freight

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in what form his Department holds figures on the proportion of freight going by *(a)* road and *(b)* rail over the last 10 years. [22119]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Department compiles statistics of tonnes-kilometres moved and tonnes lifted by road, water, and pipeline. The Strategic Rail Authority do likewise for rail on a quarterly basis. Annual statistics for all modes over the last 10 years are published in the Department's annual publication "Transport Statistics Great Britain 2001", available in the Library.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 33–34W, on London Underground, how many lost passenger hours in 2000–01 were attributable to the Infracos and how many to London Underground; what is the total equivalent number of Infraco-attributable lost customer hours for the whole of 2001–02 so far; what penalty would have been incurred by each Infraco during 2000–01 as a result of the attributable lost customer hours; and what penalty would have been incurred by each Infraco for 2001–02 so far. [22751]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground have been "shadow running" the PPP contracts in the public sector since April 2000 to ensure they are robust for transfer to the private sector. In the light of that experience the initial performance benchmarks have been reset, generally to make the benchmark level of performance higher. This means that there will be realistic benchmarks in place from the start of the PPP contracts. As a result London Underground and not the Infraco will benefit from improvements in performance in the period before transfer of the infrastructure companies to the private sector.

Data on lost customer hours and Infraco penalties are operational matters for London Underground, who have provided the information below.

During 2000–01, 18 million indicative lost customer hours were attributable to London Underground. For the lost customer hour figures for the Infracos for the same period, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 33–34W. For the period 1 April to 11 December 2001, 13 million indicative lost customer hours were attributable to the Infracos.

For 2000–01, the abatement figures (penalty payments to London Underground incurred by Infracos) would, on the basis of the set of benchmarks then in place, have been: £6 million for Infraco BCV; and £2 million each for Infracos JNP and SSL.

For the period 1 April to 11 December 2001, on the basis of the earlier benchmarks, the abatement figure for Infraco SSL would have been £9 million. Infracos BCV and JNP would have received bonus payments from London Underground of £3 million and £1 million respectively. Levels of payment would have been different, and generally lower, on the basis of the reset benchmarks. London Underground will shortly set the final performance benchmarks based on performance during shadow running of the contracts.

UK-US Aviation Market

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when and where officials from his Department last met US officials to discuss *(a)* an open skies agreement and *(b)* the proposed British Airways/American Airlines alliance; [R] [23898]

(2) how officials of his Department travelled to their last meeting in the United States with US officials to discuss *(a)* an open skies agreement and *(b)* the proposed British Airways/American Airlines alliance; [R] [23899]

(3) what plans his Department has to consult with the aviation industry ahead of an open skies agreement with the United States; [R] [23900]

(4) what discussions his Department has had in the last four weeks with United States officials and politicians on *(a)* an open skies agreement between the two countries and *(b)* the proposed British Airways/American Airlines alliance. [R] [23897]

Mr. Spellar: I held informal discussions with the US Deputy Secretary of Transportation in Washington on 7 November 2001 on the prospects for liberalising the UK/US aviation market. An official from my Department met officials from the US Department of Transportation as part of these discussions. As I had a prior engagement in New York, celebrating the re-launch of Concorde services, I and the official travelled on the inaugural Concorde service, on the outbound sector of the journey only. Both tickets were paid for by my Department. We then completed our journey to Washington by train.

My officials continue to be in regular contact, by telephone and by correspondence, with their US counterparts and will, as usual, consult UK aviation interests in advance of any formal talks with the US.

• Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the state of bilateral negotiations between the USA and the UK on open skies. [27430]

Mr. Spellar: We remain keen to liberalise the UK-US aviation market on terms which will give UK carriers effective access to the large US domestic market.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 495W, ref 23221, if this information will be provided to potential bidders for Railtrack. [26471]

Mr. Spellar: It is for the administrator to determine what information to make available to potential bidders for Railtrack.

Rail Safety

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that worn-out train wheels are identified and replaced. [26072]

Mr. Spellar: The maintenance and replacement of train wheels is a matter for individual train companies working to industry standards and monitored by the Health and Safety Executive.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place a copy of the October 2001 rail safety report by Ove Arup, prepared for Railtrack, in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [26062]

Mr. Spellar: A copy of the report has been placed today in the House of Commons Library. Action is in hand and the report acknowledges the significant positive efforts already made by Railtrack, the train operators and the rest of the industry.

Housing (Illegal Immigrants)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what account his Department takes regarding illegal immigrants' housing needs. [26729]

Ms Keeble: None

Housing Stock Transfers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 848–49W, what guidance he gives to *(a)* tenants and *(b)* local authorities on legal remedies available if the proposals in an offer document are not implemented. [27617]

Ms Keeble: The Department would advise tenants or the local authority to raise their concerns with the Housing Corporation as the regulator of registered social landlords. Should all parties be unable to resolve the matter and a legally binding contract is not being honoured then it is open for any party to the agreement to seek recourse in the courts.

Multimodal Studies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the report dates for the multimodal studies undertaken by the Government. [27412]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), gave to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 600–01W.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of dwelling fires attended by fire brigades in the Buckingham constituency occurred where a smoke alarm was installed but failed to operate. [27777]

Dr. Whitehead: Smoke alarms were installed but failed to operate in 8 per cent. of dwelling fires attended by Buckinghamshire fire brigade in 1999 (the latest year for which data are available). Data are not available below fire brigade level.

Matthew Elson

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he met Matthew Elson prior to his appointment as transport adviser in the No. 10 Policy Unit. [27331]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 January 2001, *Official Report,* column 89W.

National Rail Model

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place a copy of the specification issued to interested parties for the contract to develop a national rail model in the Library. [27325]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Yes, I have done so today.

PFI Contracts

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the proportion of PFI contracts made by his Department where an amount in excess of 90 per cent. of the capital value of the asset is recouped by the lessor out of the capital element of lease payments over the lifetime of the contract concerned; and if he will make a statement. [27698]

Dr. Whitehead: No such estimate has been made. PFI contracts are for the provision of a service in return for a unitary payment to cover the costs of the assets, their maintenance and operation. The unitary payment is not broken down into constituent parts. The Highways Agency's contract for the new Traffic Control Centre is the only PFI contract let by DTLR which allows the contractor to generate additional revenues to the income it will receive through the unitary payment.

South Central Franchise

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the present position in respect of the South Central franchise. [27542]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The Strategic Rail Authority is currently negotiating a new franchise agreement with GoVia in line with the heads of terms that have already been signed.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27943]

Dr. Whitehead: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Braer

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the seaworthiness of the tanker the Braer when she left the Norwegian port of Mongstad on 3 January 1993. [27340]

Mr. Spellar: In its investigation into the engine failure and subsequent grounding of the Braer on 5 January 1993, the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) concluded that the vessel was seaworthy when she left Mongstad on 3 January. No evidence has emerged since to contradict this finding.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the opportunity the captain of the Braer was given of commenting on the Marine Accidents Investigation Board inquiry report prior to its publication. [27339]

Mr. Spellar: The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) sent a copy of the draft report to the Braer's captain on 25 August 1993. It was sent to the address in Greece he had given to the MAIB inspectors. It was returned unopened and with no comment as to whether the captain lived there, had moved or that the address was wrong.

The MAIB then contacted the managers of Braer who gave two telephone numbers through which they had contacted him. MAIB tried both numbers during the period 21 to 22 September 1993 but received no reply.

Accident Inquiries

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to publish the technical evidence along with the inspector's findings in future accident inquiries. [27341]

Mr. Spellar: The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1999 require the reports of all investigations conducted by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) to be made publicly available. Such reports refer, where applicable, to the technical evidence. The regulations do not require such evidence to be published and some categories, such as declarations made by witnesses, are specifically excluded.

Director of Government and Political Relations

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met the Director of Government and Political Relations; and what was discussed. [28279]

Dr. Whitehead: My right hon. Friend meets a wide range of colleagues on a regular basis.

Gas Safety

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many prosecutions were initiated by the Health and Safety Executive under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 in 1999–2000. [28053]

Dr. Whitehead: The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 replaced the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994. Both regulations are applicable, as some offences would have been committed before the 1998 regulations came into force.

Each information laid relates to a breach of an individual legal requirement and a duty holder may be prosecuted for more than one of these breaches. Figures quoted relate to the whole of the United Kingdom.

The number of informations laid under both sets of regulations in 1999–2000 was 210.

Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with industry regarding the physical agents (vibration) directive. [25559]

Dr. Whitehead: Since the summer the Health and Safety Executive has had discussions on the European Parliament second reading amendments to the proposed physical agents (vibration) directive with a number of industry organisations and employers including the Confederation of British Industry, the National Farmers Union, the Road Haulage Association, the Construction Products Association, the Quarry Products Association, the Construction Equipment Association, the British Cement Association, the Society of Motor Manufactures and Traders, the Engineering Employers Federation and RMC Group plc.

Uniform Business Rates

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many businesses paid uniform business rates in the Uxbridge constituency in each of the last five years. [28477]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is collected only at local authority level, so figures for the Uxbridge constituency are not available. Information for the London borough of Hillingdon, covering the Uxbridge constituency, is given in the table:

	Number of hereditaments as at 31 December[1]
1997	7,236
1998	7,269
1999	7,202
2000	7,274
2001	7,418

[1] The number of hereditaments for the years 1997 to 2000 are taken from the National Non-Domestic Rates Provisional Contribution to the Pool Return. The number of hereditaments for 2001 is based on information provided by the Valuation Office Agency. In addition to businesses, these include properties that are liable to non-domestic rates, such as schools and advertising hoardings.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Youth Parliament

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Government will respond to the UK Youth Parliament's Manifesto. [24058]

Mr. Denham: I shall be responding shortly.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will respond to the UK Youth Parliament Manifesto; and if she will make a statement. [23324]

Mr. Denham: I shall be responding shortly.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money has been allocated to the UK Youth Parliament in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and what grant aid is planned for future years. [26096]

Mr. Denham: There has been no grant aid to the UK Youth Parliament. The Department for Education and Skills has supported UK Youth Parliament to develop itself as a voice for young people by funding consultancy advice; by providing support for the first sitting of UK Youth Parliament in February 2001; and by funding the secondment of a Departmental official to the UK Youth Parliament. In addition the Home Office made a grant in 2000–01 to fund a part-time Parliament co-ordinator. In 2001–02 the Connexions Service has commercial contracts with UKYP for work to conduct consultations with young people.

The total value of Government support to the UK Youth Parliament is as follows:

	£
1999–2000	12,000
2000–01	264,000
2001–02	69,000

The possibility of any future funding is still under consideration.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much Capita Services has been paid by her Department in respect of its work on individual learning accounts; and what payments remain outstanding under the terms of the contract; [23110]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 814W, on the individual learning accounts centre, if she will set out the key operational indicators which give rise to fees being paid to Capita Business Services Ltd. [23588]

John Healey *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* Payment to Capita Business Services together with the key operational indicators giving rise to these payments are confidential commercial matters for Capita Business Services Ltd. However, Capita announced to the London Stock Exchange on 25 July 2000, a contract value of £50 million in respect of work relating to individual learning accounts.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 814W, on the Individual Learning Account centre, (1) how many shifts were worked on 23 November; and how many people worked on each shift; [23589]

(2) how many people were employed by Capita Business Services at the Individual Learning Account centre on 23 November; and how many of these were employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time. [23590]

John Healey *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* On 23 November, the ILA centre operated a four-shift period with coverage from 8 am to 9 pm Monday to Friday and 8 am to 12 noon Saturday. The number of full and part-time staff employed at the ILA Centre is a confidential commercial matter for Capita Business Services Ltd.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will accept students for registration under the individual learning accounts scheme who could not register by the deadline of 7 December 2001 because of a subsequent decision to close the scheme on 23 November 2001; what representations have been made to her about such closures; and if she will make a statement. [26476]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The Department has received representations from hon. Members, learners and learning providers about the inability to register learning onto the ILA system between 23 November and 7 December.

The ILA programme was closed down on Friday 23 November following evidence of serious potential fraud and theft and it is the Department's first duty to safeguard both public funds and the interests of individual learners. I do recognise the impact the decision to withdraw the programme will have on learners; however, because the programme is now closed, learning that was not booked onto the ILA system before 23 November will not be eligible for a discount. We cannot therefore accept account holders for registration who could not register by the deadline of 7 December because of the decision to close down the programme on 23 November.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has had with those representing providers of training under the Individual Learning Accounts scheme since 23 October 2001; what representations they made to her; and if she will make a statement. [26479]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Officials and I have met with a number of leading providers and provider representative organisations. They have offered us some helpful views on the previous ILA scheme as well as constructive ideas on what a new ILA-style programme might look like. We are now seeking the views of a wider group of providers and a range of other stakeholders.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 959W, on Individual Learning Accounts, whether further arrests have been made in relation to alleged fraud in the operation of the Individual Learning Accounts scheme; what further charges have been made; and if she will make a statement. [26501]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* No further arrests or charges have been made.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many people were employed by her Department on 23 November on the supervision of the contract between his Department and Capita Business Services Ltd.; [23578]

(2) what assessment she has made of whether Capita Business Services Ltd. has operated in compliance with the contract with her Department in their provision of services at the individual learning account centre. [23579]

John Healey: The Department employed a team of four who were responsible for day-to-day performance monitoring, issue resolution, contract finance and budget management. These people, supported by specialists employed within the Department were also engaged in matters relating to the 7 December planned closure of the individual learning account programme.

An assessment of the compliance of Capita Business Services in their provision of services at the individual learning account centre is integral to standard contract management arrangements.

LEAs (Repairs)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the cost of estimated repair or renewal work needed over the next five years for each local education authority, as listed in the LEA asset management plans submissions to her Department. [24102]

John Healey: The table shows school premises repair or renewal costs over the next five years for each local education authority. The figures are derived from data supplied by LEAs from their asset management plans over the past two years. The costs relate to work needed to restore buildings to a serviceable state, but do not cover improvement, modernisation or sufficiency issues. Costs have been adjusted to current prices and to take account of regional variations in pricing levels.

Details have not been included for the City of London, Isles of Scilly and the 15 LEAs that are reassessing their condition needs following last year's AMP appraisal exercise.

Repair or renewal costs over the next five years

	£ million *Total cost*
Barking and Dagenham	4
Barnet	45
Barnsley	36
Bath and North East Somerset	20
Bedfordshire	44
Bexley	29
Birmingham	135
Blackburn with Darwen	15
Bolton	50
Bournemouth	18
Bracknell Forest	11
Brent	34
Brighton and Hove	22
Bristol, City of	71
Bromley	28
Buckinghamshire	60
Cambridgeshire	64
Camden	13
Cheshire	49
Cornwall	65
Coventry	34
Croydon	19
Cumbria	55
Darlington	19
Derby, City of	44
Derbyshire	143
Devon	86
Doncaster	71
Dorset	56
Durham	105
Ealing	36
East Riding of Yorkshire	82

Repair or renewal costs over the next five years

£ million

	Total cost
East Sussex	33
Enfield	49
Essex	164
Gateshead	17
Gloucestershire	45
Greenwich	33
Hackney	31
Halton	18
Hammersmith and Fulham	17
Hampshire	248
Harrow	19
Hartlepool	16
Havering	47
Herefordshire	15
Hertfordshire	84
Hillingdon	25
Hounslow	29
Isle of Wight	16
Kensington and Chelsea	7
Kent	120
Kingston-upon-Hull, City of	52
Kingston-upon-Thames	21
Kirklees	85
Knowsley	35
Lancashire	265
Leeds	141
Leicester, City of	40
Leicestershire	73
Lewisham	42
Lincolnshire	35
Liverpool	59
Luton	27
Manchester	91
Medway	24
Merton	19
Milton Keynes	28
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	71
Newham	45
Norfolk	75
North East Lincolnshire	45
North Lincolnshire	18
North Somerset	26
North Tyneside	33
North Yorkshire	44
Northamptonshire	64
Northumberland	52
Nottingham	53
Nottinghamshire	110
Oldham	61
Oxfordshire	64
Peterborough	32
Plymouth	40
Poole	16
Portsmouth	21
Reading	19
Redbridge	33
Redcar and Cleveland	27
Rochdale	54
Rotherham	63
Rutland	4
Sandwell	24
Sefton	51
Sheffield	71
Shropshire	25
Slough	19
Solihull	22
Somerset	52
South Gloucestershire	33
South Tyneside	31
Southend-on-Sea	13
Southwark	24
St. Helens	24
Staffordshire	83
Stockport	73
Stockton-on-Tees	47
Stoke-on-Trent	65
Suffolk	42
Sunderland	54
Surrey	69
Sutton	16
Swindon	44
Tameside	33
Telford and Wrekin	35
Thurrock	19
Torbay	11
Tower Hamlets	28
Trafford	38
Wakefield	72
Walsall	64
Waltham Forest	28
Wandsworth	50
Warrington	26
West Berkshire	17
West Sussex	76
Westminster	24
Wiltshire	57
Windsor and Maidenhead	32
Wirral	58
Wokingham	25
Wolverhampton	44
Worcestershire	61
Total	6,383

Note:

Fifteen authorities are currently reviewing their assessments. More work is needed to confirm the data, but initial broad estimates are that these authorities' needs total £635 million.

Occasional Teachers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the number of occasional teachers working in each LEA area on the date of the 2002 census of teachers in service giving the percentage which this comprises of the total number of teachers working in that authority. [25955]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not yet available.

Provisional summary information on teachers in service at national and regional level at January 2002 is expected to be published in April or May, as in previous years. Information at local education authority level will be published later in "Statistics of Education, Teachers, England, 2002 edition".

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) when she will publish the number of teacher vacancies in maintained schools in each local education authority area in January; [26583]

(2) how many teacher vacancies there are in England broken down by local education authority area; and in each case what the figure is as a percentage of the establishment figure at the time of the annual census of teachers in January 2002. [26400]

Mr. Timms: The latest available information on teacher vacancies in each local authority, for January 2001, is published in my Department's evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body in September 2001. This is also available on the DfES website at www.dfes.gov.uk/teachingreforms/rewards/teacherspay/strb_evidence/index.shtml.

As in previous years, provisional summary data on teacher vacancies at national and regional level in January 2002 are expected to be published in April or May. Teacher vacancy information at local education authority level will be published in the DfES evidence to the School Teacher's Review Body in September 2002. It will also be published later in "Statistics of Education, Teachers, England", 2002 edition.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collated on the number of teaching vacancies which have to be re-advertised. [28528]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not collect information on the number of readvertisements.

Tuition Fees

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will compensate those students who have started their course after the introduction of tuition fees but who will not benefit from changes to the system that decrease student debt. [27157]

Margaret Hodge: There are no significant changes in student funding arrangements planned for 2002–03 academic year. Decisions on changes for 2003–04 academic year and beyond will be taken in due course.

Teachers (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teachers have left the London borough of Hillingdon education authority in each of the past five years as a result of (i) ill health, (ii) reaching retirement age, (iii) early retirement and (iv) to work for another education authority. [26940]

Mr. Timms: Qualified teachers leaving regular full and part-time service in maintained nursery/primary and secondary schools in Hillingdon to retire or work for another local authority are as follows:

	Nursery/ primary	*Secondary*
1995–96		
Ill-health retirement	4	6
Age retirement	9	1
Premature retirement	17	19
Working for another local authority	43	41
1996–97		
Ill-health retirement	5	1
Age retirement	4	4
Premature retirement	18	14
Working for another local authority	46	52
1997–98		
Ill-health retirement	2	6
Age retirement	6	7
Premature retirement	22	21
Working for another local authority	73	45
1998–99		
Ill-health retirement	2	3
Age retirement	2	4
Premature retirement	6	6
Working for another local authority	55	54
1999–2000[1]		
Ill-health retirement	5	2
Age retirement	5	4
Premature retirement	4	11
Working for another local authority	54	57

[1] 1999–2000 data are provisional

Note:

The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the Teacher Pension Scheme records.

Student Support

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to introduce a new system of student support for students in higher education. [27223]

Margaret Hodge: We have announced a review of the current student funding policy. No decisions have been taken on the timing of implementation of possible changes arising from that review.

Education Action Zones

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects the East Manchester Education Action Zone accounts for the year ended 31 March 2001 to be published. [27684]

Mr. Timms: I expect the annual accounts for all statutory education action zones to be published by the end of April 2002. This reflects the Comptroller and Auditor General's intention to certify individual EAZ accounts with a clear audit opinion by 31 March 2002.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which education action zones have not published their accounts for *(a)* the year ended 31 March 2000 and *(b)* the year ended 31 March 2001. [27685]

Mr. Timms: For the year ended 31 March 2000, the accounts of eight education action zones have not yet been published. These are Plymouth, Sunderland, East Cleveland, Dudley, Weston, Birmingham Aston Nechells, Hackney and Camborne, Redruth and Pool.

None of the accounts for year ended 31 March 2001 have been published.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what time limits are set down for the production of accounts by education action zones. [27686]

Mr. Timms: The Schools Standards and Framework Act 1988 requires all education action zones to submit accounts to the Comptroller and Auditor General by 31 August following the end of the financial year to which they relate.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what reasons underlie the length of time taken to publish the East Manchester Education Action Zone accounts for the year ended 31 March 2000; and if she will make a statement. [27725]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* In their first year of operation some zones had difficulty in submitting auditable sets of annual accounts; East Manchester was one such zone. As a result the National Audit Office had to undertake considerable additional work on East Manchester EAZ accounts, including agreeing a significant number of amendments before these could be published on 9 January 2002.

Sure Start

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made on the evaluation of the Sure Start programme begun in 2001; and if she will make a statement. [26817]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The national evaluation of Sure Start will look at the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of Sure Start in the short, medium and long term. Researchers from Birkbeck college, University of London are carrying out this work on behalf of the Government.

A comprehensive programme of fieldwork is under way. Findings will be published on a regular basis starting with a report on the early experiences of setting up and implementing Sure Start, in spring 2002. The first findings on the impact of Sure Start on children, families and communities will be available in spring 2003.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when Warrington will be invited to submit a bid for another Sure Start project. [26818]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Later this year we will invite more applications for Sure Start, bringing the total number of programmes announced to at least 500. The districts where these programmes will be located will be selected primarily on the basis of their levels of disadvantage and child poverty. I cannot say at this stage which districts will be included.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to abolish the requirement for schools to raise £50,000 from local sources before securing specialist status; what assessment she has made of the difficulties of raising such funding in areas of high deprivation; and if she will make a statement. [26539]

Mr. Timms: There are no plans to abolish the requirement on specialist school applicants to raise £50,000 sponsorship but we do keep the sponsorship criteria under annual review. We are aware that some schools find raising the required sponsorship more difficult than others and we grant aid the Technology Colleges Trust and Youth Sport Trust to provide advice and support to applicants, including in relation to raising sponsorship. There are specialist schools in all parts of the country and a wide range of areas. Nearly 90 schools have been designated in Excellence in Cities (EiC) areas since EiC was implemented.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have taken on specialist status in each quarter since May 1997, broken down by different specialist areas chosen; and if she will make a statement. [26542]

Mr. Timms: The number of specialist school designations by specialism from each competition since May 1997 is shown in the table.

	Competitions				
	Arts	*Sports*	*Language*	*Technology*	*Total*
May 1997	3	5	—	—	8
October 1997	5	6	3	18	32
March 1998	6	9	8	28	51
October 1998	12	11	5	15	43
March 1999	—	—	9	28	37
June 1999	20	24	—	—	44
October 1999	—	—	15	22	37
March 2000	8	7	13	31	59
June 2000	18	16	—	—	34
October 2000	4	1	9	25	39
March 2001	12	16	18	33	79
Total	88	95	80	200	463

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial provision her Department has made in the next three years to support additional specialist schools; what her estimate is of the number of specialist schools in each quarter over the next three years; what her estimate is of the proportion of all schools which will be specialist-status in each quarter over the next three years; and if she will make a statement. [26543]

Mr. Timms: Financial provision for the specialist schools programme up to 2003–04 is provided in the table. Any future and additional funding will be considered as part of the 2002 Spending Review.

Financial year	*£ million*
2002–03	108.0
2003–04	127.0

New specialist schools start operating as such in September each year. Current projections are for at least 830 by September 2002 (25 per cent. of maintained secondary schools), at least 1,000 by September 2003, (31 per cent. of maintained secondary schools) and at least 1,500 by 2005 (46 per cent. of maintained secondary schools).

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list schools which have been granted specialist status without having to raise £50,000 themselves from local private sources, showing the amount they raised locally and the sources of other moneys raised to meet the £50,000 threshold; and if she will make a statement. [26545]

Mr. Timms: All specialist schools have to raise £50,000 sponsorship. This may come from local or national sources in any combination. Information showing the amount of sponsorship raised from different sources can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Specialist schools raise sponsorship from a range of sources including national companies, local business, charitable trusts, parent teacher associations and individuals. They are supported by the Technology Colleges Trust and (in the case of sports colleges) the Youth Sports Trust.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the application process for the next round of specialist school awards. [26546]

Mr. Timms: My Department is currently assessing applications received in October 2001. Successful schools will be announced in February. The next competition closing dates are in March. All applications received will be assessed against the published criteria set out in the guidance relevant to each of the specialisms.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to extend the education maintenance allowance pilot scheme to the London Borough of Hillingdon. [28488]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have no such plans at present. We will be taking decisions on any future extension of the scheme on the basis of the rigorous evaluation exercise, which is currently being conducted.

Connexions Service

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on enrolment of personal advisers for the Connexions Service. [27667]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The numbers of Personal Advisers (PAs) working in Connexions Partnerships since the Service was launched in April 2001 have risen steadily as partnerships have established their infrastructures. At the end of November, 1,820 PAs were in post in the 15 partnerships that are fully operational, representing nearly three quarters of the first year's PA recruitment estimates provided by Partnerships in their business plans.

PAs are being recruited from a range of backgrounds, including careers, education and youth services. Steps have been taken to widen the age and ethnic mix of PAs. Data from PA training records indicate that 12 per cent. of training participants are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds and almost 40 per cent. of all PAs are under the age of 35.

Foundation Degrees

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many foundation degree places are available; and what proportion of them have been filled. [27666]

Margaret Hodge: A total of 2,123 student places were made available on 40 prototype foundation degree programmes. Of these programmes, 32 commenced in September 2001 and offered 1,539 student places. 85 per cent. (1,303) of these places were filled. The remaining eight programmes are on offer from January 2002. Figures relating to take up of these places will not be available until February 2002.

In addition to the 40 prototype programmes, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) allocated 1,790 additional student numbers for delivery of a further 29 courses. These student places were funded through HEFCE's mainstream funding routes and information on the take up of these places is collated as part of their management information cycle. This information is expected February 2002.

Examination Results (Somerset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the proportion of pupils achieving *(a)* one or more A* to C, *(b)* five or more A* to C and *(c)* five or more A* to G grades was (i) in the UK, (ii) in Somerset schools and (iii) in Yeovil constituency schools in each year since 1994–95; and if she will make a statement. [27042]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The proportion of 15-year-old pupils achieving *(a)* one or more A* to C, *(b)* five or more A* to C and *(c)* five or more A* to G grades at GCSE or the GNVQ equivalent, in (i) the UK, (ii) Somerset and (iii) the Yeovil constituency since 1994–95 are:

Academic years	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
(i) United Kingdom							
1 or more A* to C	70.2	71.4	71.7	72.7	73.9	74.8	75.1
5 or more A* to C	44.4	45.5	46.2	47.5	49.1	50.4	51.0
(ii) Somerset							
1 or more A* to C	74.9	75.6	75.5	77.1	78.0	79.0	79.0
5 or more A* to C	47.7	50.0	48.9	51.2	52.7	55.3	54.6
5 or more A* to G	90.8	91.4	92.5	92.3	93.7	93.4	93.0
(iii) Yeovil constituency							
1 or more A* to C	76.2	76.4	76.4	79.3	79.9	80.7	79.8
5 or more A* to C	48.1	53.4	50.4	52.6	53.1	56.8	54.0
5 or more A* to G	94.6	92.6	93.5	95.3	94.3	94.4	94.7

The information on those achieving five or more grades A* to G is not available for the United Kingdom.

Local Network Fund

Mr. Miliband: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will announce the areas that will receive funding in the second and third waves of the Local Network Fund. [28965]

Mr. Denham: I am pleased to announce that 30 new areas will be eligible for funding from the Local Network Fund in its second and third years of operation. The Local Network Fund is designed to tackle poverty and disadvantage among children and young people by making grants direct to local community and voluntary groups helping vulnerable children aged 0–19. £70 million is available over three years with second year areas operational from 1 April 2002.

The Local Network funds are used to support local and community groups under four themes:

Aspirations and experiences—projects that give children experiences, or help them achieve goals that more privileged children may take for granted.

Economic disadvantage—projects that help families to improve their living standards and cope with difficulties that come from being on low incomes.

Isolation and access—projects that help children that are isolated or alone, or have trouble accessing services.

Children's voices—projects that give children and young people the chance to express their opinions and give advice on matters that concern them.

Examples of the type of projects funded in the first year of operation are shown in the table along with the full list of the new areas eligible for funding and the provisional budget for each area.

Local network areas funding for 2002–03

Local network area	£ *Approximate allocation*
North East	1,523,100
Tees Valley (Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, Darlington)	437,500
Tyne and Wear (Newcastle upon Tyne, Gateshead, South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Sunderland)	644,500
Durham (County)[1]	275,700
Northumberland (County)[1]	165, 400
North West	3,684,500
Merseyside/Halton (Knowsley, Sefton, Liverpool, St. Helens, Wirral, Halton)	977,000
Greater Manchester (Manchester, Salford, Oldham, Rochdale, Bolton, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan, Bury, Stockport)	1,452,700
Lancashire (Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn)	726,500
Cheshire (Cheshire, Warrington)[1]	310, 400
Cumbria (Cumbria)[1]	217,900
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,566,700
South Yorkshire (Doncaster, Barnsley, Rotherham, Sheffield)	699,200
West Yorkshire (Bradford, Kirklees, Calderdale, Wakefield, Leeds)	1,137,400
Humberside (Kingston upon Hull, NE Lincolnshire, N Lincolnshire, East Riding)	478,500
North Yorkshire (County, and York)[1]	251,600
East Midlands	1,845,100
Nottinghamshire (Nottingham and Nottinghamshire)	525,800
Leicestershire (Leicester and Leicestershire)	389,200
Derbyshire (County and Derby)[1]	407,100
Lincolnshire (County)[1]	265,200
Northamptonshire (County)[1]	257,800
West Midlands	2,426,300
Birmingham/Solihull (Birmingham and Solihull)	825,300
The Black Country (Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Dudley)	631,000
Shropshire (County, Telford and Wrekin)[1]	207,400
Staffordshire (County, Stoke on Trent)[1]	427,000
Warwickshire (County, Coventry)[1]	335,600
East	804,900
Norfolk	305,100
Bedfordshire (County, Luton)[1]	254,600
Suffolk (County)[1]	245,200
South West	1,327,600
Cornwall (Cornwall with Isles of Scilly)	252,600
Devon (County, Torbay and Plymouth)	452,200
Former Avon (Bristol, Bath and NE Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire)[1]	371,300
Dorset (County, Bournemouth and Poole)[1]	251,500
South East	1,472,200
Kent (Medway, Kent)	592,000
East Sussex (East Sussex and Brighton and Hove)	297,700
Hampshire (County, Southampton, Portsmouth and Isle of Wight)[1]	582,500
London	3,349,600
All London Boroughs	3,349,600

[1] New area

Examples of projects funded in the first year of funding:

Ashford Mobile Toy Library, Kent

The library lends good quality toys to families with pre-school children. Over 100 children from around 70 families use the toy library regularly. The Local Network grant helped to purchase new equipment and fund the costs of training new volunteers.

The Mustard Seed Project, Cornwall

Covering the Helston, Porthleven and Lizard areas of Cornwall, which have the highest rate of unemployment in the district, this project provides a range of services including evening club activities for 10 to 14-year-olds, a drop-in centre and coffee bar with cheap wholesome food. The Local Network grant helped provide outreach into rural areas to help isolated young people and their families access the centre and its information and support services.

Alpha Grove Community Centre, Millwall, East London

The Alpha Grove Community centre is working to help disadvantaged young people in the area, providing an environment where they can meet, learn, create, express and develop social skills. A Local Network grant will allow a local artist to work with these young people to produce artwork for the centre which reflects subject matter derived from debates conducted with them on the issues they feel are relevant to them.

Tyne and Wear Youth Bank, Newcastle Upon Tyne

YouthBank is a grant making scheme run by young people. The Local Network grant is redistributed by the young people to small projects in the Tyne and Wear area which are run by and for young people.

Sefton Women and Children's Aid, Litherland, Liverpool

SWACA was established 24 years ago to provide a range of services for women and children who are victims of domestic violence, including valuable one-to-one support to children aged 0–17 years. The new grant will enable the group to assess what impact this service is having on the children and whether it is meeting their real needs. It will run group sessions with children aged five and over, so that they can describe what they would like to get from the service, allowing them to discuss issues of concern to them.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Investment Strategy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost in 2001–02 of the Departmental Investment Strategy. [18977]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Departmental Investment Strategy for 2001–02 covers only the part of Department of Work and Pensions which was formerly the Department of Social Security.

The cost of the former Department of Social Security Departmental Investment Strategy is expected to be in the region of £840 million.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what are the projected additional annual costs at current prices for each of the next 35 years for *(a)* the annual uprating of the minimum income guarantee in line with average earnings, *(b)* the pension credit, *(c)* raising the level of the basic state pension to the level of the MIG for (i) all pensioners, (ii) all pensioners over 75 and (iii) all pensioners over 80 years and *(d)* the annual uprating of the state second pension in line with average earnings. [20235]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested for the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit is set out in the paper "The Pension Credit: long-term projections" which has been placed in the Library today. Copies are also available in the Vote Office.

The additional information requested is set out in the tables.

Annual costs in 2001–02 prices of increasing the basic state pension to the level of the minimum income guarantee and then uprating by earnings thereafter

£ billion

	All	*Over 75s*	*Over 80s*
2002	8.5	3.8	2.2
2005	10.7	4.7	2.8
2010	15.8	6.6	3.9
2015	21.3	8.9	5.3
2020	27.5	12.1	7.0
2025	36.8	17.3	9.6
2030	48.6	22.2	13.6
2035	61.0	28.5	17.1
2050	92.3	51.4	34.1

Source:

The Government Actuary's Department

Annual costs in 2001–02 prices of earnings uprating state second pension

£ billion

	State Second Pension
2002	0.0
2005	0.0
2010	0.0
2015	0.1
2020	0.3
2025	0.7
2030	1.2
2035	2.0

Notes:

1. The costs of increases in the basic state pension and state pension are net of income related benefit savings that would be generated by these increases.
2. The costs given for earnings uprating of state second pension assume that expenditure on SERPS (accruals up to 2001–02) would not be affected.
3. The costs of earnings uprating of the state second pension only begin to become significant by 2015 because S2P only begins accruing in 2002–03 and therefore the amount of S2P in payment will be negligible for some time after that.
4. The costs shown for state second pension in the table have been calculated based on the estimated costs of S2P which were shown in the report by the Government Actuary on the Financial Effects on the National Insurance Fund of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Bill 1999 (Cm 4573). The costs shown are the increase in expenditure over and above the baseline projected S2P expenditure shown in this report.
5. It has been assumed that the basic state pension and state pension changes would not happen together. If they did, there would be an interaction because the Lower Earnings Limit is linked to the basic state pension. This means that the cost of S2P would be reduced if the basic state pension and, therefore, the LEL were raised.
6. Average earnings are assumed to grow in line with Treasury economic assumptions until the end of the Parliament and then 1.5 per cent. above inflation over time.
7. The pensioner population is assumed to grow according to GAD's central population growth estimates.

Source:

The Government Actuary's Department

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the take-up rate for the minimum income guarantee for pensioners. [27668]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of take-up for the minimum income guarantee (MIG) by pensioners were published in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take Up in 1999–2000", a copy of which is available in the Library.

As at August 2001 there were 1.736 million pensioners receiving the MIG.

State Retirement Pension

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the value was of the state retirement pension as a percentage of the average weekly wage in *(a)* 1971, *(b)* 1978, *(c)* 1981, *(d)* 1988, *(e)* 1991, *(f)* 1998 and *(g)* 2001. [21750]

Mr. McCartney: The objective of the basic state pension, since it was introduced in 1948, has always been to provide a foundation for income in retirement on which individuals could build their own second pension or other savings income. The Government are committed to retaining the basic state pension in this role as well as making it easier to build up second pensions, whether through private stakeholder pensions or the new state second pension (which will particularly help people on low pay or with broken work records such as carers or disabled). In addition, the Government are committed to tackling pensioner poverty directly with the minimum income guarantee and ensuring that thrift is rewarded through the pension credit.

The information requested is as follows:

	Percentage
September 1971	20.3
November 1978	23.2
November 1981	22.4
April 1988	18.8
April 1991	18.3
April 1998	16.8
April 2001	[1]—

[1] Not yet available

Note:

The percentage is based on the amount of a single person's pension

Source:

"The Abstract of Statistics for Social Security Benefits and Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings", 2000 edition published by the DSS, page 57.

Minimum Wage

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of people who no longer receive *(a)* one and *(b)* more than one means-tested benefit due to the introduction of the minimum wage; and if he will make a statement. [24104]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. The number of people affected by the introduction of the minimum wage will vary year on year as people move off benefit and into work. For 2001–02 we estimate that up to 50,000 people no longer receive one or more of income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit as a result of the introduction of the national minimum wage.

Notes:

1. Estimate is for 2001–02 and is based on 1998–99 Family Resources Survey data, uprated to 2001–02 prices and benefit rates. Minimum wage and benefit receipt have been modelled within the Policy Simulation Model.
2. Estimate is rounded to the nearest 10,000.
3. Estimate is based on minimum wage rates of £4.10 for those aged over 21 and £3.70 for those aged 18–21.

Consultation Papers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 179W, if he will list the consultation papers released by his Department during the summer recess. [24220]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The list of consultation documents issued during summer recess is as follows:

Issue date	*Consultation document*
19 July 2001	Social Security Fraud Act 2001 Code of Practice on Obtaining Information
23 July 2001	Changes to Invalid Care Allowance
23 July 2001	Amending the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979
1 August 2001	The Occupational Pension Schemes (Winding Up Notices and Reports etc.) Regulations 2001
3 August 2001	Housing and Council Tax Benefits Verification Framework: Splitting the Verification Framework into Modules
13 August 2001	The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Amendment Regulations 2001
13 August 2001	The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Consultation Document) Amendment Regulations 2001
18 September 2001	The Minimum Funding requirement—The next stage of reform

Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to reply to the question of 3 December, ref. 21339, from the hon. Member for Buckingham on sickness absence. [24727]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 693W.

Industrial Action

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of occasions on which *(a)* an interview, *(b)* a benefit claim and *(c)* a claim review has been delayed as a result of the current industrial action. [25226]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The contingency plans that have been put in place during the current dispute have meant that all new claims have been dealt with quickly with customers receiving appropriate payments.

Claim reviews—including fortnightly reviews for claimants of jobseeker's allowance—have in general continued to be carried out during the course of the industrial action, although in some locations these have been deferred to ensure the most vulnerable customers are dealt with as quickly as possible. No figures are available centrally on the number of such deferrals.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many days each *(a)* Employment Service office, *(b)* Benefits Agency office and *(c)* JobCentre Plus office has been closed as a result of the current industrial action. [25227]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of offices closed as a result of the national industrial action taken on 12 and 13 December was 75 out of a total of more than 1,650 offices.

The number of days on which offices involved in the continuous industrial action have been closed is 85, involving between four and six offices, up to and including 17 December 2001.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations his Department has made to Her Majesty's Treasury concerning the treatment of the receipt of digital hearing aids funded through the access to work scheme as a taxable benefit. [25366]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The Employment Service has met with officials of the Inland Revenue and established the tax liability position of access to work beneficiaries with digital hearing aids, as set out in the answer given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 11 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1033W.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of those leaving the new deal for the long-term unemployed left the new deal for unsubsidised sustained jobs; and how many did not return to claim jobseeker's allowance within *(a)* 26 weeks and *(b)* one year since the inception of the new deal. [25981]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to the end of October 2001, 49,010 new deal 25 plus leavers had gained unsubsidised sustained jobs. Of these, 42,280 did not return to claim jobseeker's allowance within 26 weeks, and 37,030 had not re-claimed the benefit one year after leaving the new deal.

Notes:

The figures quoted refer to people who entered the pre-April 2001 new deal [illegible] plus programme. An enhanced new deal 25 plus programme was launched in April 2001. The figures include those leavers who have been in employment for less than six to 12 months, but who have not yet returned to jobseeker's allowance.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton dated 27 November 2001 with regard to Miss C. Fryar. [27319]

Mr. Darling: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 16 January.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, dated 3 December 2001 with regard to Miss A. Steeles. [27324]

Mr. Darling: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 10 January.

Self-administered Pension Schemes

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the costs of registration of trustees under the Data Protection Act 1998 for self-administered pension schemes. [27669]

Mr. McCartney: The Department has made no assessment of the costs of registration of trustees under the Data Protection Act 1998. The Act sets out the provisions under which data controllers are required to complete notifications to the Information Commissioner (formerly registrations under the Data Protection Act 1984). Trustees, as the people responsible for the administration of their pension schemes, are responsible for deciding whether they are required to send a notification to the Information Commissioner. A fee of £35 is payable for notification and the period of notification is one year.

Pension Credit

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide a breakdown of the forecast cost of the pension credit by *(a)* 2010, *(b)* 2020, *(c)* 2030 and *(d)* 2040. [21026]

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people will be entitled to the pension credit; and what the cost will be in *(a)* 2005, *(b)* 2010, *(c)* 2015 and *(d)* 2020 if the minimum income guarantee element of the pension credit is uprated in line with earnings from 2003 and the basic state pension in line with prices. [21409]

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of people retiring who will receive a pension above benefit levels (i) this year, (ii) in 2005, (iii) in 2010, (iv) in 2020, (v) in 2030 and (vi) in 2040; and if he will make a statement. [25749]

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the coverage of the proposed pension credit scheme if the pension credit was uprated in line with earnings to *(a)* 2005, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2015; [20299]

(2) if he will estimate the annual *(a)* cost and *(b)* coverage in terms of the numbers of pensioners in receipt of pension credit in each of the first five years after 2003–04 on the basis of his present proposals and their uprating in line with earnings; [27335]

(3) if he will estimate the annual *(a)* cost and *(b)* coverage in terms of numbers of pensioners in receipt of pension credit, on the basis of his proposals and their uprating in line with earnings, at (i) 2010, (ii) 2020, and (iii) 2030. [27336]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answers 5 December 2001 and 16 January 2002]:* The information requested is set out in the paper "The Pension Credit: long-term projections", which has been placed in the Library today. Copies are also available in the Vote Office.

Child Care

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* cost of publicly funded child care places in each of the last 10 years. [24969]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

In England, over 424,000 child care places, including pre-school and out of school child care places (including child minding places), have been created since April 1997. For the current financial year, 2001–02, a total of £188 million has been made available to support the creation and sustainability of good quality, affordable child care places and complementary special projects. Of the total, the Government have made £149 million available to early years development and child care partnerships, which includes £46 million from the neighbourhood nurseries initiative, and the European Social Fund has made £39 million available for special projects.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Spending

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent by the Home Office on advertising in the past two years; what the cost and purpose of each advertising campaign was; which advertising agencies were involved in each campaign; and if he will make a statement. [27648]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 478W.

There follows a more detailed breakdown of the spending on advertising.

Over the past two years the Home Office has spent the following on advertising:

In 1999–2000 £5.65 million was spent on the following campaigns:

An information campaign encouraging people to register to vote—£575,000;

An information campaign explaining changes to the voting system for the European Election—£1.87 million;

An information campaign on how to obtain a passport—£545,000;

A fire safety information campaign £1.675 million; and

Police recruitment campaign (Accelerated Promotion Scheme for Graduates (APSG)/Special Constables)—£985,000.

The advertising agency involved in all these campaigns is Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper.

In 2000–01 £28.36 million was spent on the following campaigns:

A campaign to inform people about new rolling electoral registration procedures—£3.34 million. Agency involved—Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper;

A campaign to inform people about new postal voting procedures £3.2 million. Agency involved—Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper;

A fire safety information campaign—£5 million. Agency involved—Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper;

A campaign to make people aware of the introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998—£800,000. Agency involved—(Collett Dickinson Pearce);

A police recruitment campaign—£7.35 million. Agency involved—M&C Saatchi; and

An information campaign to help reduce vehicle crime—£8.67 million. Agency involved—Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe/Y&R.

All the costs listed include VAT.

Environmental Audit Committee

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he has made to his Department's practice in respect of environmental appraisals to reflect the recommendations contained in the Environmental Audit Committee's 5th report of Session 1999–2000, HC 341. [27517]

Angela Eagle: *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* A section on environmental appraisals is included within the Department's Policy Checklist, which staff have been commended to use by the Permanent Secretary. The ministerial website also states that policy submissions should include a paragraph on environmental considerations.

The Prison Service Management Board has agreed that all new policies and programmes should be subject to environmental screening and appraisal. This will apply to submissions to Ministers, papers to the Prison Service Management Board and Operational Policy Group and to business cases in respect of prison maintenance and construction work.

Green Minister

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the work completed by the Green Minister with his Department since the general election. [27506]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The Department has continued to work to contribute towards [illegible] Government's sustainable development agenda. As the Green Minister, I have held meetings with lead officials to review progress. The main developments are as follows:

(i) 13 key sites including all central London headquarters buildings now use 100 per cent. green electricity, with a further two sites using a 10 per cent. green electricity supply.

(ii) SR 2002 bids are required to state which sustainable development indicators their bids will have an impact on.

(iii) An excellent Buildings Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (BREEAM) rating was achieved at the Harmondsworth Detention Management Unit.

(iv) Waste minimisation schemes will be introduced in all key core Home Office buildings by the end of March 2002.

(v) Work is under way on the methodology to be used in energy efficiency benchmarking of prisons, college sites and laboratories on the HO estate.

(vi) The Prison Service published its first annual environmental report in July 2001 and "Buying Green", a guide to green purchasing.

(vii) A Prison Service Greening Conference in October 2001 was attended by around 300 delegates.

(viii) The Prison Service has spent over £600 million on funding green initiatives covering such as energy efficiency, waste management, environmental management systems and biodiversity.

Police Force Expenditure

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what police force expenditure has been for each police authority *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head of population in each year since 1989. [22981]

Mr. Denham: A table showing the information for England and Wales has been placed in the Library. The figures are taken from the Chartered Institute of

Public Finance and Accountancy Police Statistics. Actual expenditure is used for years to 1999–2000. Latest available data for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are estimates.

Deportation

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy is in relation to deciding which airline should be used for a deportation; and if he will make a statement. [27845]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The powers relating to the removal of persons subject to immigration control are contained in schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971 (paragraphs 8–15).

Where the cost of removal falls to be met by the company responsible for bringing the person to the United Kingdom, the choice of carrier would be a matter for that company. Where the cost falls to public funds, we would normally give directions for removal on the first available flight to the country concerned.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research his Department has commissioned into the effect on race relations of illegal immigrants. [26728]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office has not commissioned any recent research specifically into the effect on race relations of illegal immigrants, but is considering a broad range of research on immigration including improving knowledge of the illegal population and improving the integration of refugees and other migrants into communities.

The current year's research programme of the Research Development and Statistics Directorate, including the work on immigration, is published on the website, which can be found at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/resprog1.html.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost to his Department was of illegal immigrants in the last 12 months. [26841]

Angela Eagle: This information is not available as the Immigration and Nationality Directorate does not quantify the costs of illegal entrants separately from those of its other activities.

Prostitutes

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 893–95W, if he will make a statement explaining the nature of the public policy limitations which will enable the UK to prevent Polish, Czech and Slovak nationals establishing themselves as self-employed prostitutes in the UK despite the EU Court of Justice decision 268/99 published on 11 December. [27504]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The European Union Court of Justice decision 268/99 ruled that a member state is entitled to rely on the public policy limitation aspect of the Association agreements where it adopts measures designed to combat prostitution carried out by its own nationals.

The United Kingdom adopts a number of measures designed to combat prostitution. In particular, soliciting is an offence. Should a Polish, Czech or Slovak national seek to enter the United Kingdom in order to establish themselves as a self-employed prostitute they would, in order to conduct that business successfully, have to engage in an illegal activity. Therefore, the United Kingdom would be within its rights to refuse such an application on public policy grounds.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Part 12 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 will take effect. [27481]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We intend that Part 12 of the 2001 Act will take effect on 14 February 2002, in accordance with a Commencement Order which will be made under section 127 of the Act.

Asylum and Immigration Act

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of Judicial Reviews on asylum decisions have been successful since the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999 came into force. [27454]

Angela Eagle: Since October 2000, when the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999 came into force, 1,546 Judicial Reviews have been lodged against asylum decisions. Of the 645 Judicial Reviews where the final outcome has been made known, 69 applicants (10.7 per cent.) have been successful in obtaining the relief sought. By comparison, 110 applicants have withdrawn their applications during the judicial process.

Departmental Staff (Home Working)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21826]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office is committed to the work-life balance of its staff as part of its commitment to the diversity agenda. A range of flexible working patterns, including flexible working hours, part-time working, job sharing, and home working are available to staff by agreement with their management.

Guidance on the range of work-life balance options for staff was first published in a booklet, "Balancing Work and Home Responsibilities", in 1997. Subsequent developments reflect changes in technology which allow staff secure access to some Home Office systems remotely via laptop computers specifically developed for this purpose.

Over 350 staff have laptop computers which have facilities for them to access the Department's information technology system remotely, and many more have equipment which allows them to read or write documents off-line. Information on the number of staff who do so is not collected centrally but managers are responsible for ensuring that staff working from home are properly authorised to do so.

People Trafficking

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the UK Government have made a financial contribution to the Global Programme Against Trafficking in Human Beings launched by the Centre for International Crime Prevention. [26903]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: As major donors, the British Government contribute 5.58 per cent. of the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention's (CICP) regular budget. We are currently considering what additional donations we might make to CICP work during this financial year.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of asylum seekers who enter the UK as a result of third party traffickers who assist their passage. [26904]

Angela Eagle: Information about the numbers involved is not collected centrally. However, it is clear from the analysis of interviewing and debriefing conducted for intelligence purposes that the majority of asylum seekers are assisted in some way. I understand that this is consistent with the experiences of other European Union member states.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had in the past six months with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe about trafficking in human beings. [26902]

Angela Eagle: There are a number of initiatives on trafficking with which the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) is associated, including the Anti-Trafficking Task Force of the Stability Pact for South East Europe. Officials from both the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have been in regular contact with the (OSCE) in Europe on this subject.

Crime Report

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish Lord Birt's report on crime. [25973]

Mr. Blunkett: Lord Birt provides private advice to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on a number of issues. In relation to crime and the criminal justice system, Lord Birt's advice is reflected in the Government's strategy document, "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead" (Cm 5074), which was published on 26 February 2001.

Zimbabwean Asylum Seekers

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Zimbabwean citizens seeking asylum in Britain have been deported since June 2000. [26620]

Angela Eagle: The latest available information relates to the period April to June 2001, during which an estimated 40 principal asylum applicants (to the nearest five) of Zimbabwean nationality are recorded as having been removed from the United Kingdom. This includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and may include some persons leaving under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme, but excludes dependants of those asylum seekers who departed at the same time, for whom nationality information is not available.

Information on the destination of asylum seekers removed from the United Kingdom is not recorded centrally and could be obtained by examining individual case files only at disproportionate cost. Therefore it is not possible to determine how many of these persons were returned to Zimbabwe.

I regret that a nationality breakdown of asylum seekers removed between June 2000 and March 2001 is not available due to data recording problems.

Information on the nationality of principal asylum applicants removed in the period July to September 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.htm

Heroin

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the change in the availability of heroin on Britain's streets if the Government bought the stockpiles and new production of heroin in *(a)* Afghanistan, *(b)* Burma and *(c)* Pakistan. [28117]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: None.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Television Licences (Prosecutions)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many defendants were proceeded against at magistrates courts in England and Wales for offences under the Wireless and Telegraphy Acts in each of the last four years; how many were convicted; and what was *(a)* the total of fines imposed and *(b)* the average fine. [27690]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested in respect of prosecutions under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 is as follows. All prosecutions resulted in convictions.

	Number prosecuted	*Total fines imposed (£)*	*Average (£)*
1998	104	20,265	332
1999	103	17,265	288
2000	80	12,830	229
2001[1]	26	9,180	399

[1] To 30 September 2001

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of the millennium dome is, broken down by category of expenditure, from conception to the date for which the most recent figures are available for each financial year; and what future finances have been committed from *(a)* public finances, *(b)* lottery funding and *(c)* other sources. [20190]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has advised that the total cost of the Millennium Experience, broken down by expenditure heading, by its financial year is as follows:

£ million

	1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	*1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999*	*1 April 1999 to 31 December 1999*	*1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000*	*1 January 2001 to 18 December 2001*	*Total project*
Dome structure and associated infrastructure	74	128	77	0	–4	275
Dome exhibits and attractions	4	26	149	63	0	242
Dome operating costs	0	0	42	61	–1	102
Commercial communications and marketing	3	10	16	12	0	41
Set-up costs, staff accommodation IT, legal and corporate services	8	6	29	12	–2	53
National programme	1	9	17	23	0	50
Decommissioning and corporate wind down	0	0	0	6	25	31
Grand total	90	179	330	177	18	794

The cost of the Millennium Experience includes the National Programme of events and activities. Also included is the London Riverside new year's eve celebrations of 31 December 1999. Negative figures shown in the table against 2001 result from rebates and savings on costs provided for in previous years' account.In addition, from 1 July 2001, when the lease of NMEC ended, English Partnerships, the Government's urban regeneration agency, has incurred £1.5 million on care and maintenance related costs, £6.4 million on decommissioning the Dome contents in preparation for a future use and about £2.2 million in relation to the current sale process, up to 31 December 2001. The cost of the previous competition to find a long-term use for the Dome, which began in March 1999 and ended at the beginning of 2001, was £6.7 million. All these costs will be met from within English Partnerships' normal budget, and recovered from eventual sale proceeds.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been spent on fees for advisers to the *(a)* Government and *(b)* New Millennium Experience Company for the Dome project. [22693]

Dr. Howells: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) paid £82,000 to consultants for specific advisory work in connection with the potential sale of the Millennium Dome. In terms of supplying details of all other advice for all aspects of the project, an accurate figure could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

English Partnerships, the Government's regeneration agency, responsible for managing the Dome sale process on behalf of the Government, is expected to incur costs in the order of £2.2 million for the current sale process up to 31 December 2001. This largely relates to consultants' costs for the market testing and other matters associated with the on-going sale process. The cost of the previous competition for the sale of the Dome, which began in March 1999 and ended at the beginning of 2001, was £6.7 million. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport incurred costs of £68,495 for legal advice relating to the sale process during this period.

An estimated (still to be finalised) £17,600 is likely to be incurred by DCMS for advice received in relation to the appointment of liquidators to NMEC in December 2001.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in her Department. [26977]

Dr. Howells: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

DCMS is committed to managing sickness absence effectively and reducing sickness absence.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last used the railway service in connection with her official duties; what station she left from and what was the destination; and whether it is her intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28098]

Tessa Jowell: I last travelled by train during the course of my official duties on 12 December 2001. I travelled to Leicester from St. Pancras in order to break the ground at the Bharat Football Club in Leicester.

All travel by Ministers in this Department is made in line with the guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers", using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport and bearing in mind security considerations. We will continue to do so.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to instruct local authorities to reduce rates and rental on sports clubs occupying sites in the ownership of their local authority. [27869]

Mr. Caborn: Local authorities are responsible for rents charged to sports clubs which are located on their property, and the Government have no scope to dictate the amounts charged.

Local authorities can already grant discretionary rate relief of up to 100 per cent. to sports clubs, and the majority do so. However, sport's governing and representative bodies have asked the Government to provide greater certainty for local clubs. I therefore welcome the Charity Commission's announcement of 30 November 2001 that community amateur sports clubs may now apply for registered charitable status. Eligible clubs which successfully apply to become charities will enjoy a range of financial benefits including mandatory rate relief of 80 per cent. (which may be topped-up to 100 per cent. at the discretion of local authorities).

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to direct local authorities not to take into account improvements made to sports clubs occupying sites in the ownership of their local authority when agreeing a new lease. [27868]

Mr. Caborn: This is a matter for local authorities, which are responsible for setting the terms of leases of their property. However, the Government expect local authorities to take account of the special characteristics and needs of sports clubs when doing so.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Sustainable Development Summit

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has made for inclusion on the agenda of the World Summit on Sustainable Development; and which of these were *(a)* discussed and *(b)* recommended for inclusion on the agenda at the meeting of the UN Economic Commission for Europe Meeting in Geneva on 24 and 25 September. [13247]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The United Kingdom has been working with European Union partners to develop a range of ideas on the agenda for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In particular, we have pressed for the summit to address poverty eradication, and making globalisation a force for sustainable development particularly to help poorer countries. The UK has argued for specific action on access to fresh water and sanitation, sustainable energy, Africa, and strengthening UN institutions to promote sustainable development. These issues were reflected in the UNECE ministerial declaration.

Electricity Consumption

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the most cost-effective ways in which *(a)* industry and commerce and *(b)* domestic consumers can reduce electricity consumption. [17429]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* We have carried out a wide range of detailed assessments of the most cost-effective options for saving energy, including reducing electricity consumption in both the business (industry and commerce) and domestic sectors. This includes research, demonstration and case studies of energy efficient practices and technologies. The resultant information is provided to business sectors, the building industry, landlords and local authorities, as well as to individuals, via the Carbon Trust, the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme www.energy-efficiency.gov.uk and through the Energy Saving Trust's Energy Efficiency Advice Centres www.est.org.uk.

Examples of the best practice advice and assessments provided can be found on these websites.

Waste Disposal

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will issue advice on the storage of waste refrigeration equipment before 1 January 2002. [24166]

Mr. Meacher: The Department issued guidance on the storage of waste refrigeration equipment, prior to CFC extraction, at the beginning of December 2001.

Home Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many homes have benefited from completed warm front scheme installations; how many homes are in the process of being assessed; how many people have been turned down for upgrading of their heating; what the average wait is between application and installation; what has been the cost thus far to the public purse; and what assessment he has made of the efficiency of the EAGA partnership in delivering the scheme. [24951]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), now marketed as The Warm Front Team, is administered by two scheme managers, TXU Warm Front Ltd. (responsible for the Eastern, East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber) and Eaga Partnership Ltd. (responsible for the rest of England).

HEES provides households with packages of heating and insulation measures tailored to their circumstances and property type. Where the householder is eligible and the property requires heating; then it is provided. The precise package is discussed and agreed between the householder and HEES surveyor.

Number of homes completed or orders placed with the contractor (June 2000 to December 2001): 274,000

Number of homes awaiting assessment: 56,000

Number of homes where insulation-only measures provided or currently being assessed: 285,000

Current average waiting time between application and installation: 71 days[1]

Total cost of the scheme (June 2000 to December 2001): £193 million

[1] Measured from date of call with respect of telephone applications, from date of receipt in case of postal applications or from date of e-mail. There is usually a period of 1–8 weeks between the date of actual installation and the receipt of the invoice from installers.

The introduction of the radically improved Home Energy Efficiency Scheme in June 2000 represented a difficult challenge for both scheme managers. The national shortage of gas heating engineers has led to severe delays in some areas in the installation and repair of central heating systems. Both scheme managers have worked hard to recruit installers and to improve the quality of service provided to householders. The Department continues to maintain a close watch on their performance.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what provision there is within the warm front schemes to allow the most vulnerable households who are in immediate danger of risking their health because of lack of heating to queue jump the waiting list for grants during the winter months; how many households were allowed to queue jump in each month since April 2000; and what plans she has to review the first-come, first-served system of Warm Front grants during the present review of the grants. [25355]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector in England is the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES). HEES is marketed as the Warm Front Team. Two scheme managers, Eaga Partnership Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd. administer the scheme.

HEES has been developed to help tackle the problem of fuel poverty, those who spend 10 per cent. or more of their income staying warm. Fuel poverty is caused by a combination of energy inefficient housing and low incomes. Certain people are particularly vulnerable to cold-related ill health—the old, families with children, the disabled and the long term sick. HEES is targeted at these priority households and all applicants are therefore treated equally.

We have no intention of removing the current first-come approach. Any prioritising system would be complex to administer and likely to dissuade households from the scheme. Instead, we believe it is better to concentrate resources on reducing the time taken to install measures on all households.

Packaging

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will exempt re-usable wood packaging from the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997. [25342]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* There are no grounds within the Directive or the UK Regulations for exempting any types or items of packaging from their scope.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the cost of compliance to the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 by the United Kingdom wood packaging industry in terms of the percentage of the industry's average profits in the last year. [25343]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The recovery of wood packaging waste has only been required by the Regulations since 1 January 2000. No assessment has been made of the cost of compliance with the Regulations to the wood packaging industry.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 on the re-use of products in the United Kingdom wood packaging industry. [25344]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Government have made no assessment of the impact of the regulations on the re-use of products in the UK wood packaging industry.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of companies evading the producer responsibility obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997; and what plans the Environment Agency has to prevent this. [25345]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Regulations place a monitoring duty on the Environment Agency. The agency continues to trace businesses which should be subject to the packaging regulations and they have the powers to monitor businesses which they believe should be subject to the regulations. It is impossible to estimate the number of businesses that might still be evading their producer responsibility obligations. However, comparison of the data derived from obligated businesses with estimates derived from materials organisations and making allowance for businesses outside the scope of the regulations because they do not satisfy turnover and packaging tonnage threshold limits, the amount of packaging not accounted for is probably less than 2 per cent. of the total. The Environment Agency's compliance plan for 2001–02 has provision to check on more than 2,000 businesses and the agency is on schedule to fulfil that commitment. The number of registrations under the regulations (which includes individual businesses and groups of companies) has continued to rise, from 5,451 at the end of 2000 to 5,629 now.

Agency enforcement is steadily improving. There were 38 prosecutions in 2001 (a total of 72 since the start of the agency's enforcement programme in 1998). Fines are on average higher, with fines totalling £152,350 (average £4,000) in 2001, compared to only £63,878 (average £2,060) in 2000 in 31 cases. The highest fine last year reached £25,000. As fines increase, so does their deterrent effect.

Bird Populations

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the percentage changes in British bird populations in the last three years, broken down by county. [26201]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's Quality of Life Counts indicator of wild birds uses an index of UK bird populations set at 100 for 1970. The values of the index for the last three years are presented in the table for all 105 bird species included. The index increased by

3 per cent. in 1999 and by a further 4 per cent. in 2000. Further information on these statistics is published in the DEFRA News Release No. 303/01.

The Department has also commissioned research from the British Trust for Ornithology and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to develop indicators of bird populations for England and Government Office regions. The indicators will show the percentage change in bird populations in the last 30 years. The results are expected to be published in the spring and a copy of the report will be placed in the Library of the House. Information on changes in bird populations for individual counties is not held centrally.

Bird population index	*All birds*
1998	100
1999	103
2000	107

Compost Bins

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those local authorities which provide compost bins *(a)* free of change and *(b)* on payment to households in their areas; and if she will make a statement. [27145]

Mr. Meacher: Information from the 1999–2000 Municipal Waste Management Survey shows that 17 local authorities in England distributed home composting bins to households free of charge during 1999–2000. 235 local authorities in England either charged some or all of their households for this service. The remaining 102 authorities either did not distribute compost bins during 1999–2000 or did not provide information.

Authorities that distributed home compost bins free of charge in 1999–2000: 17

Carrick District Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Forest of Dean District Council
Hounslow LB
Kingston-upon-Thames LB
Mendip District Council
Merton LB
North Cornwall District Council
North Shropshire District Council
Pendle Borough Council
Restormel Borough Council
Shepway District Council
South Tyneside MBC
Sutton LB
Test Valley Borough Council
Three Rivers District Council
Trafford MBC

Authorities that made a charge to households for some, or all, compost bins in 1999–2000: 235

Adur District Council
Allerdale Borough Council
Amber Valley Borough Council
Arun District Council
Ashfield District Council
Aylesbury Vale District Council
Babergh District Council
Barnet LB
Barnsley MBC
Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council
Basildon District Council
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Bassetlaw District Council
Bath and North East Somerset Council
Bedford Borough Council
Bexley LB
Birmingham City Council
Blaby District Council
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Blackpool Borough Council
Blyth Valley Borough Council
Boston Borough Council
Bournemouth Borough Council
Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Bradford City MDC
Braintree District Council
Breckland Borough Council
Brent LB
Brentwood Borough Council
Brighton and Hove Council
Bristol City Council
Broadland District Council
Bromley LB
Bromsgrove District Council
Broxbourne Borough Council
Broxtowe Borough Council
Burnley Borough Council
Bury MBC
Calderdale MBC
Camden LB
Caradon District Council
Carlisle City Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Charnwood Borough Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Cherwell District Council
Chester City Council
Chesterfield Borough Council
Chester-Le-Street District Council
Chichester District Council
Chiltern District Council
Chorley Borough Council
Christchurch Borough Council
Colchester Borough Council
Congleton Borough Council
Cotswold District Council
Coventry City Council
Crawley Borough Council
Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council
Dacorum Borough Council
Daventry District Council
Derbyshire Dales District Council
Derwentside District Council

Doncaster MBC
Dover District Council
Durham City Council
East Cambridgeshire District Council
East Devon District Council
East Hertfordshire District Council
East Lindsey District Council
East Northamptonshire Council
Eastbourne Borough Council
Eden District Council
Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council
Elmbridge Borough Council
Enfield LB
Epping Forest Borough Council
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Fareham Borough Council
Fenland District Council
Forest Heath District Council
Fylde Borough Council
Gateshead MBC
Gedling Borough Council
Gloucester City Council
Gosport Borough Council
Gravesham Borough Council
Gravesham Borough Council
Greenwich LB
Guildford Borough Council
Halton Borough Council
Hambleton District Council
Harborough District Council
Haringey LB
Harlow District Council
Harrow LB
Hart District Council
Hastings Borough Council
Havant Borough Council
Hertsmere Borough Council
High Peak Borough Council
Hillingdon LB
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Isle of Wight Council
Islington LB
Kennet District Council
Kensington and Chelsea London Borough
Kerrier District Council
Kettering Borough Council
Kirklees MBC
Knowsley MBC
Leeds City Council MBC
Leicester City Council
Lewes District Council
Lichfield District Council
Luton Borough Council
Macclesfield Borough Council
Maidstone Borough Council
Maldon District Council
Malvern Hills District Council
Manchester City Council MBC
Mansfield District Council
Medway Borough Council
Melton Borough Council
Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Mid Devon District Council
Mid Suffolk District Council
Mid Sussex District Council
Milton Keynes Council
Mole Valley District Council
New Forest District Council
Newark and Sherwood District Council
Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council MBC
North Devon District Council
North East Derbyshire District Council
North East Lincolnshire Council
North Lincolnshire Council
North Norfolk District Council
North Somerset Council
North Tyneside Council
North Warwickshire Borough Council
North West Leicestershire District Council
Northampton Borough Council
Norwich City Council
Nottingham City Council
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
Oxford City Council
Penwith District Council
Peterborough City Council
Plymouth City Council
Preston Borough Council
Reading Borough Council
Redbridge LB
Rochdale MBC
Rochford District Council
Rother District Council
Rotherham MBC
Rugby Borough Council
Runnymede Borough Council
Rushcliffe Borough Council
Ryedale District Council
Salford City Council MBC
Sedgefield Borough Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Sefton MBC
Sevenoaks District Council
Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council
Slough Borough Council
Solihull MBC
South Bedfordshire District Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
South Gloucestershire Council
South Hams District Council
South Holland District Council
South Kesteven District Council
South Lakeland District Council
South Norfolk Council
South Northamptonshire District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
South Shropshire District Council

South Somerset District Council
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Southwark LB
Spelthorne Borough Council
St. Albans City and District Council
St. Helens MBC
Stafford Borough Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Stockport MBC
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Stroud District Council
Suffolk Coastal District Council
Sunderland City Council
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Swale Borough Council
Swindon Borough Council
Tameside MBC
Tamworth Borough Council
Tandridge District Council
Teignbridge District Council
Telford and Wrekin Council
Tendring District Council
Tewkesbury Borough Council
Thurrock Council
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Torbay Council
Torridge District Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Vale of White Horse District Council
Vale Royal Borough Council
Waltham Forest LB
Wandsworth LB
Warrington Borough Council
Watford Borough Council
Waveney District Council
Waverley Borough Council
Wealden District Council
Wellingborough Borough Council
West Devon Borough Council
West Lancashire District Council
West Lindsey District Council
West Oxfordshire District Council
West Wiltshire District Council
Westminster City Council
Wigan MBC
Winchester City Council
Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council
Wirral MBC
Wokingham Council
Worthing Borough Council
Wychavon District Council
Wycombe District Council
Wyre Borough Council.

Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimates she has made of the cost to *(a)* public funds and *(b)* land managers of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas) (England) Regulations 2001; [27140]

(2) what consultations were undertaken, with whom, prior to the laying before Parliament of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas) (England) Regulations 2001. [27138]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The cost to public funds and land managers cannot be estimated accurately without knowing in advance the number of projects subject to EIA. As part of the Regulatory Impact Assessment, it was estimated that the cost to DEFRA might be in the region of £0.1 to £0.2 million per annum. Costs to land managers will vary depending on the nature, size and potential impacts of the project and whether any changes need to be made in the light of the assessment. As an illustration it was calculated that the costs arising from 100 projects subject to an application, of which 10 led to preparation of an Environmental Statement prepared by a consultant, could be around £20,000 to £28,000.

Two formal consultations were carried out in 2001; the first in May on the options for implementation elicited 42 responses; the second in September, with detailed proposals, received 32 responses. Respondents included statutory agencies (English Nature, English Heritage, Environment Agency and Countryside Agency) and bodies representing environmental and historic interests and the farming industry.

Carcase Burial

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her decision to apply for planning permission for the mass burial of animal carcases at Great Orton. [27137]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The mass burial site at Great Orton is Crown property and, as such, planning permission was not required for its use. However, to fall in line with best practice DEFRA applied for a retrospective Notice of Proposed Development and Environmental Statement on 4 December 2001.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the age and status are of children in a household for that household to be deemed vulnerable under the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy; and how many such households with children there are in *(a)* private sector housing and *(b)* public sector housing in England; [26425]

(2) what age a person must be for their household to be classified as vulnerable under the fuel poverty definition; and how many such households there are in *(a)* private sector housing and *(b)* public sector housing in England. [26424]

Mr. Meacher: Householders aged 60 years or more, families with children under 16 and those that are disabled or suffering from a long-term illness are all regarded as being particularly vulnerable to cold-related ill-health.

The number of fuel poor households in England in 1998 is set out in Table 4.1 of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy. This shows that out of the 2.7 million vulnerable households in fuel poverty in England in 1998, 2 million were in private sector housing and 0.7 million in social housing.

Chart 4.2 of the strategy shows that in 1998, some 14 per cent. or half a million fuel poor households had a child under 16. It is not possible to estimate the breakdown of this between different housing tenures.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28397]

Mr. Leslie: Full regulatory impact assessments are placed in the House Libraries.

The Good Policy Making Guide recommends that policy makers take early soundings from affected parties. The results of these informal consultations are not required to be produced in a RIA at this stage. However, Departments are advised to include a partial RIA in formal consultations. Consultations can be accessed via www.ukonline.gov.uk/citizenspace/consultations/.

The Good Policy Making Guide does recommend that as part of the RIA's assessment of costs and benefits, any additional costs and indirect costs should be identified and quantified stating who or what bears them.

There is no specific requirement in the Good Policy Making Guide to consult on appropriate methodology, nor is there a specific requirement to set out the information at *(b)*. The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Archbishop of Canterbury (Appointment)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister by what means bishops are asked whether they wish to be considered for appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury. [28179]

The Prime Minister: Any bishop in the Church of England, who is under the Church's age of retirement, is eligible to be considered. It is open to any bishop to indicate that he does not feel able to be called to this position.

Civil Service Pay

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to increase civil service pay. [28085]

The Prime Minister: Responsibility for pay, outside the senior civil service, is delegated to Ministers and office holders in charge of Departments. Departments are required to operate their pay systems within public sector pay policy and in accordance with a framework set out by the Cabinet Office in the Civil Service Management Code. Annual pay negotiations are a matter for the Department or agency concerned.

For information about senior civil service pay, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) on 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 993W.

Energy Review

Mr. Syms: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress of the Energy Review. [25562]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 816W.

James McLintock

Mr. Weir: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan on the case of James A. McLintock; [28127]

(2) whether he raised the case of James A. McLintock with the Government of Pakistan during his recent visit there. [28126]

The Prime Minister: I have not made any representations on this case.

Staff at the British High Commission in Islamabad have had access to Mr. McLintock and are in consultation with the Pakistani Authorities about his situation. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office today at column 400W.

Chief Surveillance Commissioner

Geraint Davies: To ask the Prime Minister when the annual report of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner appointed under section 91(1)(a) of the Police Act 1997 will be laid before the House; and if he will make a statement. [29077]

The Prime Minister: A copy of Sir Andrew Leggatt's report for 2000–01 is being laid before the House today in accordance with section 107(3) of the Police Act 1997 (as amended by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000). After consultation with the Chief Surveillance Commissioner material in an annexe to a report has been excluded from that copy under section 107(4) of the Act because its publication would be prejudicial to the prevention or detection of serious crime.

For the first time the annual report covers Part II of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

I am most grateful to Sir Andrew and his colleagues for the work which has gone into preparing it.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many magistrates courts have closed in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Yorkshire or Yorkshire and Humber since 1972; [27368]

(2) how many magistrates courts have been closed in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside in (i) the last 30 years, (ii) the last 20 years, (iii) the last 10 years and (iv) the last five years; [27472]

(3) how many magistrates courts have been closed in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Yorkshire and Yorkshire and Humber between (i) 1979 and 1983, (ii) 1983 and 1987, (iii) 1987 and 1992, (iv) 1992 and 1997 and (v) 1997 and 2001. [27406]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department assumed responsibility for the magistrates courts in 1993, and conducted the first annual survey of courthouses in September 1995. Records do not exist for earlier periods.

In England and Wales as a whole, seven magistrates courthouses closed between September 1995 and the end of 1995, 20 closed in 1996, 22 closed in 1997, 24 closed in 1998, eight closed in 1999, 13 closed in 2000, and 21 closed in 2001.

During this period, the only closure in Yorkshire and Humberside was at Keighley in April 2000. This was associated with the enlargement of Bingley courthouse in the same Petty Sessional Area.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average distance travelled by an accused person attending trial at a magistrates court over the last 12 months. [27372]

Mr. Wills: This information is not held by the Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* magistrates clerks and *(b)* people were employed in magistrates courts in each of the last 25 years. [27369]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department assumed responsibility for the magistrates courts in 1993, and conducted the first annual survey of staffing in March 1994. Records do not exist centrally for earlier periods.

The information on the full-time equivalent number of justices clerks and all staff is in the table.

	Justices clerks	*Total staff including Justices clerks*
1994	214	11,022
1995	204	11,015
1996	156	10,819
1997	145	10,720
1998	188[1]	10,795
1999	166[1]	10,570
2000	141[1]	10,393
2001	122[1]	9,774

[1] Includes Justices' Chief Executives appointed in a dual capacity

Source:

Magistrates Courts Division Ethnic and Gender surveys.

Marriage and Relationship Support Programme

Jim Knight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been requested in grants from the Lord Chancellor's Department's marriage and relationship support programme for 2002–03; and how many organisations have submitted applications for grants. [27200]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department received requests for a total of £9,370,556, from 69 different organisations.

Pension Sharing Orders

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many pension sharing orders have been made to date. [27671]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Pension sharing came into force on 1 December 2000. My Department has been monitoring orders made in the courts and is aware of 133 orders that have been made to date in England and Wales. Six orders have been made in Northern Ireland. I understand that there is no record of any orders having been made by the courts in Scotland, however pension sharing by agreement is possible in Scotland and six such agreements have been recorded.

Judges

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many judges he has admonished for falling asleep on the bench in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [27149]

Mr. Wills: None—according to records held by the Lord Chancellor's Department's Judicial Correspondence Unit.

Departmental Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what estimate her Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if she will make a statement. [27307]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chanellor's Department incurred the following costs to its budget since 1 May 1997 as a result of fraud:

Financial year	*£*
1997–98	4,838.52
1998–99	59,079.02
1999–2000	11,847.49
2000–01	91,214.39
Total	166,979.42

Figures for the current financial year are not yet available.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in her Department. [26966]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 37W.

The Lord Chancellor's Department is committed to managing sickness absence effectively. A great deal of work has been undertaken to raise awareness of our Service Delivery Agreement targets and of the need to manage attendance in accordance with best practice policies.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 18 January 2002

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Pan-African Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Eradication Campaign

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the Pan-African Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Eradication Campaign. [27759]

Clare Short: DFID recognises that Trypanosomiasis is a major constraint to human health and to the livelihoods of poor livestock keepers throughout many parts of Africa. We have made considerable investments (over £37 million) to develop methods to control the disease in livestock and we support the World Health Organisation in its efforts to control sleeping sickness in humans.

The long-term goal of the Pan-African Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Eradication (PATTEC) is to eradicate tsetse fly from the continent. It is a complex and ambitious programme that would require many billions of dollars to implement, and is founded on as yet unproven scientific and economic theory.

Our analysis—shared also by the European Commission—is that it will not be possible to eradicate tsetse flies from Africa. The aims of the campaign are laudable, but we do not believe that they are achievable.

Our strategy is to promote methods for controlling the tsetse fly and preventative and curative methods of treatment that can be readily implemented by poor people themselves. We have programmes of support with the Inter-African Bureau of Animal Resources of the African Union, and with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, to promote the establishment of sustainable animal health services that provide poor people with the means to control tsetse fly and the disease it carries.

Where the political will for control exists, and where there are clear social benefits, a regional approach to tsetse control may be justified. Such large scale programmes would however be best handled through multilateral channels such as the EC, and not by bilateral agencies such as DFID.

Burkina Faso

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the situation in Burkina Faso regarding the incidence of HIV cases; and what assistance has been provided by her Department in each of the last five years. [28621]

Clare Short: Burkina Faso has the second highest HIV/AIDS infection rate in west Africa, the UN estimating the adult prevalence rate as being 6.4 per cent. at the end of 1999. The Burkinabe Government are strongly committed to tackling HIV/AIDS through a comprehensive national strategy, and are working in partnership with neighbouring countries to contain the epidemic. Last month Burkina Faso hosted the 12th International Conference on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases in Africa.

DFID does not have a substantive aid programme to Burkina Faso, and has not provided direct support for any projects linked to HIV/AIDS over the last five years. However, we fund such work indirectly through our contributions to international agencies—UNAIDS supports regional work to strengthen the response to HIV/AIDS throughout Africa, and the World bank's $500 million Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Program for the Africa Region (MAP) includes $22 million for Burkina Faso to help the Government expand access, particularly for vulnerable groups, to prevention, care and treatment.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much development aid was provided to Burkina Faso by the UK in each of the last five years. [28620]

Clare Short: DFID does not have a development programme in Burkina Faso. Small-scale funding has been available from the small grants scheme and the civil society challenge fund (and its forerunner). Details of DFID grants in aid and in kind are as follows:

	£
1996–97	204,000
1997–98	156,000
1998–99	305,000
1999–2000	267,000
2000–01	234,000

In addition the UK provided debt relief of £430,000 in 1997–98.

The EC maintains a substantial development assistance programme to Burkina Faso. The calculated estimate of the proportion attributable to UK contributions over the years 1995–99 (the last year for which we have data) is as follows:

	£ million
1995	7.4
1996	4.5
1997	5.7
1998	7.0
1999	6.3

Departmental Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for her Department in each of the last four years. [27906]

Clare Short: The estimated cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for my Department in each of the last four financial years is:

		£
	(a)	*(b)*
1997–98	257,247	71,185
1998–99	290,081	55,144
1999–2000	270,654	57,118
2000–01	212,114	78,308

Zimbabwe

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the situation relating to the distribution of food aid in Zimbabwe; and on what development assistance from the United Kingdom is being spent. [28434]

Clare Short: The prospect of food shortages in Zimbabwe has been clear for a long time. NGOs have planned ahead, including purchasing food, and have been operating supplementary feeding programmes since September 2001. DFID has committed £4 million for food and logistics support for programmes run by NGOs. We are monitoring these activities carefully and working with the NGOs and other donors to help ensure their success. We are satisfied that, at present, they are still able to work effectively.

The World Food Programme is now beginning food aid operations in Zimbabwe as a part of the UN Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery Programme. WFP will transport food within Zimbabwe, and will also work through NGOs to deliver food at the community level. DFID has pledged a further £3.5 million to WFP for food and logistics support.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the value of trade credits guaranteed by the ECGD for sales of military equipment to highly indebted poor countries in each year since 1983. [25240]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The value of ECGD cover for defence business in each of these years for countries currently classified as HIPCs (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Value of ECGD cover*
1984–85	102.8
1987–88	20.1
1988–89	49.2
Total for all years since 1983	171.2

For years not listed the total value of ECGD cover was £0.

Not included in the table is cover provided by ECGD's short-term operation which was privatised in 1991. More generally ECGD's records of business supported prior to 1 April 1987 are no longer comprehensive.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. John Stonborough

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when and for what purpose Mr. John Stonborough was engaged by the House of Commons Commission; what the selection process was; and when the need for advice on media relations was identified. [27263]

Mr. Kirkwood: Mr. Stonborough was engaged with effect from 20 December 2001 to provide the House of Commons Commission with advice on media relations generally, and on long-term information strategy. The commission chose him at its meeting on 18 December 2001. The need for a corporate approach to media matters was identified in the Braithwaite Review of Management and Services (HC745) published in July 1999. This led to the appointment of a communications adviser in the Office of the Clerk in 2000. Mr. Stonborough's engagement represents a further step in that direction.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Abandoned Housing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will rank local authorities in England by *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of (i) public and (ii) private housing stock which have been abandoned. [27147]

Ms Keeble: Data on levels of abandonment are not held by my Department. Abandonment arises where a property owner simply walks away or 'abandons' a property. The owner's intentions as well as their actions are therefore relevant and it is difficult to define objectively. However, we do have data reporting low demand, which I have placed in the Libraries of the House.

Homebuy Scheme

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people in the constituency of Buckingham have received interest free equity loans under the Homebuy scheme; and what the total amount of funding granted is. [27775]

Ms Keeble: The number of people in Aylesbury Vale that have received interest free equity loans under the Homebuy scheme is four.

1999–2000: 1

2000–01: 1

2001–02: 2.

	£
1999–2000	24,938
2000–01	24,640
2001–02	61,320
Total amount of funding granted	110,898

Note:

The Buckingham constituency is only part of Aylesbury Vale local authority area (albeit the main part) and that part of Aylesbury constituency is also covered within this area. Thus, any loans within the Aylesbury constituency may also be included in the figures.

Source:

Notting Hill Housing Association

Starter Home Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people in the Buckingham constituency have benefited from the Starter Home initiative for key public workers; and what is *(a)* the average amount and *(b)* the total amount granted. [27778]

Ms Keeble: The Starter Home initiative allocations announced on 6 September 2001 included a scheme to help 272 key workers across Buckinghamshire. The grant that has been allocated to the scheme over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04 is £6.988 million, averaging £25,199 grant, and £493 administration costs, per key worker. Separate allocations were made to other schemes to help 20 key workers in Aylesbury Vale and 70 in Milton Keynes.

It is proposed that a further 40 key workers are helped in Buckinghamshire under the bidding arrangements for the Starter Home initiative equity loan scheme announced on 16 January 2002, together with a further 10 in Milton Keynes.

Information on the number of key workers who have purchased homes under the Starter Home initiative scheme during this financial year will be available towards the end of April 2002.

Right to Buy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many homes in the Buckingham constituency were bought under *(a)* right to buy and *(b)* right to acquire in each year since their inception; and what the total revenue is generated under each scheme. [27774]

Ms Keeble: The information is as follows:

(a) Information on Right to Buy sales reported by Aylesbury Vale district council since October 1980 is in the following table. The figures include a small number of RTB shared ownership sales and sales under the Rent to Mortgage scheme in the local authority's area, which includes part of the Aylesbury constituency.

	Number	*Selling price (£000)*
1980–81	17	n/a
1981–82	337	[1]3,780
1982–83	404	4,771
1983–84	427	5,772
1984–85	464	7,069
1985–86	395	6,190
1986–87	455	8,415
1987–88	460	10,028
1988–89	491	11,791
1989–90	247	7,048
1990–91	179	4,987
1991–92	159	3,868
1992–93	151	3,191
1993–94	226	5,047
1994–95	176	4,378
1995–96	121	2,917
1996–97	166	4,273
1997–98	216	6,066
1998–99	159	4,972
1999–2000	204	6,831
2000–01	227	9,260

[1] Estimate

Notes:

1. The total selling price of properties sold under the Right to Buy scheme since April 1981 was £120.65 million. Comparable information for 1980–81 was not collected.

2. The Buckingham constituency is only part of Aylesbury Vale local authority area (albeit the main part) and that part of Aylesbury constituency is also covered within this area. Thus, any houses within the Aylesbury constituency may also be included in the figures.

Source:

DTLR P1 (B) quarterly housing activity returns

(b) No homes have been bought in Buckinghamshire under right to acquire.

Homeless Households

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many homeless households in the constituency of Buckingham have been resident in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in each year since 1997; and what percentage of them claimed social security benefits in each year. [27770]

Ms Keeble: Information reported by Aylesbury Vale district council on the number of households resident in bed-and-breakfast hotels under statutory homelessness provision at the end of March in each year since 1997 is shown in the table. This relates to households within the local authority's area, which includes part of the Aylesbury constituency. The number of these households claiming, or in receipt of, social security benefits is not collected centrally.

Homeless households resident in bed-and-breakfast accommodation[1] as at 31 March

	Aylesbury Vale DC
1997	6
1998	11
1999	8
2000	12
2001	5

[1] Includes households accommodated pending completion of inquiries by the local authority

Source:

DETR P1(E) housing return (quarterly)

Estates Renewal Challenge Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many projects in the Buckingham constituency have received funding from the Estates Renewal Challenge Fund; and if he will list the beneficiaries. [27779]

Ms Keeble: Buckinghamshire received no funding from the Estates Renewal Challenge Fund.

Council Houses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council houses have been empty in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [27773]

Ms Keeble: The number of local authority owned dwellings reported as being vacant in each year since 1997 is as follows:

Local authority owned dwellings in Aylesbury Vale district council area as on 1 April:

	Vacant stock
2001	105
2000	131
1999	142
1998	125
1997	118

A level of vacancy is a usual feature of housing management, reflecting turnover and movement within the stock. There is likely to be some variation in the proportion of dwellings that are vacant in a local authority from one date to another during the year.

Note that the Buckingham constituency is only part of Aylesbury Vale local authority area (albeit the main part) and that part of Aylesbury constituency is also covered within this area. Thus, any houses within the Aylesbury constituency may also be included in the figures in the table.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council houses there are in the Buckingham constituency; and how many of these are owned by the local authority. [27829]

Ms Keeble: The number of 'council' houses in the Aylesbury Vale local authority area at March 2001 is 9,621, of which 8,626 are owned by the local authority.

Note that the Buckingham constituency is only part of Aylesbury Vale local authority area (albeit the main part) and that part of Aylesbury constituency is also covered within this area. Thus, any houses within the Aylesbury constituency may also be included in the figures provided.

Source:

Aylesbury Vale Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2001–31

Traveller Sites

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* local authority and *(b)* private traveller sites there were in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [27771]

Ms Keeble: The number of local authority traveller sites that were in Aylesbury Vale local authority area in each year since 1997 are shown in the table:

January	*Number of local authority sites*
2001	[1]2
2000	[1]2
1999	2
1998	[2]—
1997	[2]—

[1] Of which one closed February 1999

[2] Data for the number of local authority sites in January 1998 and January 1997 is not held within the Department headquarters and is not accessible within the given time scale

Source:

Data from the annual DTLR gipsy return GS2

Figures for the number of private sites are not collected centrally and thus are not available.

Note that the Buckingham constituency is only part of Aylesbury Vale local authority area (although the main part) and that part of Aylesbury constituency is also covered within this area. Thus, any gypsy sites within Aylesbury constituency may also be included in the figures provided.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many traveller caravans and families were on *(a)* authorised and *(b)* unauthorised sites in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [27772]

Ms Keeble: Figures for the number of caravans and families on authorised and unauthorised sites in the Aylesbury Vale local authority area for each year since 1997 are reported in the table.

	Caravans	*Families*
Total		
July 2001	39	32
January 2001	28	26
July 2000	30	20
January 2000	35	31
July 1999	33	27
January 1999	35	25
July 1998	40	30
January 1998	32	25
July 1997	48	39
January 1997	37	26
Unauthorised encampments		
July 2001	19	14
January 2001	8	8
July 2000	13	4
January 2000	16	15
July 1999	19	16
January 1999	9	3
July 1998	9	7
January 1998	2	1
July 1997	16	[1]15
January 1997	8	4
Authorised sites: Council		
July 2001	5	5
January 2001	5	5
July 2000	4	4
January 2000	6	4
July 1999	3	0
January 1999	15	11
July 1998	20	12
January 1998	19	13
July 1997	21	13
January 1997	18	11
Private		
July 2001	15	13
January 2001	15	13
July 2000	13	12
January 2000	13	12
July 1999	11	11
January 1999	11	11
July 1998	11	[1]11
January 1998	11	[1]11
July 1997	11	[1]11
January 1997	11	[1]11

[1] Estimated figure

Note:

The Buckingham constituency is only part of Aylesbury Vale local authority area (although the main part) and that part of Aylesbury constituency is also covered within this area. Thus, any caravans or families on gypsy sites within Aylesbury constituency may also be included in the figures provided.

Source:

Counts data are from the bi-annual DTLR Gypsy return GS1

Coastal Erosion

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effects of sand dredging on coastal erosion. [28115]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Careful consideration is given to all of the environmental implications of marine minerals dredging proposals that are submitted to the Secretary of State. Each proposal is subject to environmental impact assessment that includes a coastal impact study prepared by HR Wallingford. The proposed dredging will be allowed only if the Secretary of State is satisfied that there will be no unacceptable coastal impacts.

A14

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when, upon the Highways Agency completing its preparatory work on the major A14 improvements, included in the preferred plan of the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study, the scheme will entered into the DTLR's targeted programme of improvements. [27737]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Highways Agency to carry out preparatory work on the major A14 improvements included in the preferred plan of the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study with a view to an early entry to the targeted programme of improvements. This work by the Highways Agency began this month with the aim of finishing it within six months, after which a decision will be made on entry to the TPI. Subsequently, public consultation on the route would be expected within 12 months.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether, in the event of approval of the final plans for the proposed major A14 improvements arising from the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study, it is the Government's intention to utilise the resources, provided for implementing decisions arising from multi-modal studies in the Government's 10-year transport plan, to effect the A14 improvements. [27738]

Mr. Spellar: I can confirm that in the event of approval of the final plans for the proposed A14 improvements, the scheme will be funded from the resources made available under the 10-Year Plan for Transport.

Landscaping Industry

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research he has commissioned into the health and safety record of the landscaping industry; and if he will publish this research. [27884]

Mr. Raynsford: No recent research has been commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive into the health and safety record of the landscaping industry.

Construction Industry

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what new health and safety measures are planned for the construction industry, with particular regard to those businesses working within the land-based sector. [27883]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have established the Strategic Forum for Construction to bring about industry consensus on future strategy and policy and has asked the chairman, Sir John Egan, to tackle the industry's health and safety performance as a key priority for action. The Health and Safety Commission has also initiated a Construction Priority Programme to focus its resources on the industry and the Health and Safety Executive is planning to publish a discussion document in the spring to ask the industry's views on a wide range of issues that affect health and safety.

The Constructors' Liaison Group, the umbrella body for the British Association of Landscape Industries, committed itself to adopting targets for certificated competence in health and safety of the work force, encouraging members to support the Construction Skills Certification Scheme and similar schemes.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the public register holding information on genetically modified organisms will be reopened. [29351]

Dr. Whitehead: The public register holding information on the contained use of genetically modified organisms will be reopened on or around 11 February and will contain all information except for that excluded in the interests of national security.

Under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 2000 the Competent Authority—the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in England, the Scottish Ministers and HSE in Scotland—is required to maintain a public register, and is firmly committed to a policy of openness and transparency. The register contains information on all notified premises and activities.

Following the activities of 11 September, HSE, on behalf of the Competent Authority, took the decision to temporarily withhold public access to the register because of the security risk.

Yesterday I signed the Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 which will allow the Secretary of State to exclude information from the register in the interests of national security.

A meeting of the Technical Sub-Committee of the Advisory Committee on Genetic Modification and invited experts will consider the list of pathogens already compiled for schedule 5 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and whether any additional genetically modified pathogens should be excluded from the register.

HSE acting on behalf of, and with the agreement of, the other members of the Competent Authority, will then review and sift the entries on the register and will reopen the register on or around 11 February. In the meantime HSE has arranged to make the information available to enquirers on a case-by-case basis.

Following the reopening of the register a system of regular review will be put in place to consider those items excluded from the register, with the aim of keeping to a minimum information which has to be excluded in the interests of national security.

Commuter Traffic

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the environmental benefits of using financial incentives to encourage commuter traffic to shift from using cars to motorcycles; and if he will make a statement. [26731]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The Government believe there are some environmental benefits associated with commuting by motorcycle rather than car. These are outlined in the interim report published by the Advisory Group on Motorcycling in April last year. A copy is available in the House Library.

The Government are also currently undertaking a consultation exercise asking for views on how VED for motorcycles can better reflect environmental impacts. The closing date for responses is 8 February.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of HM CPS inspectorate's report on inspection of the CPS in North Yorkshire; and if she will make a statement. [27682]

The Solicitor-General: The HMCPSI report on North Yorkshire was published on 4 December 2001. The Attorney-General and I have considered the report and are pleased to note the positive picture that it presents.

The report identifies clear improvements since the last inspection of North Yorkshire in 1998. Inspectors found that the area had a very good sense of corporate identity supported by good communication, with an experienced, stable and committed staff and strong leadership. Good systems are in placed for monitoring and reporting on casework performance. The quality of the lawyers' decision-making is sound and cases are progressed well with on-going reviews. Some aspects of casework still require improvement but work is in hand to bring about the necessary improvements. The report commented positively on the quality of management of the area, standards of advocacy, relationships with other criminal justice agencies and the involvement of staff in community and specialist groups across the county.

Plans have already been agreed to tackle those areas highlighted in the report where further improvements are necessary and action will be taken to ensure even better performance in the future.

Bob Spink: To ask the Solicitor-General what action she takes to prevent the use of inappropriate lesser charges by the Crown Prosecution Service. [28415]

The Solicitor-General: When considering any allegation, Crown Prosecutors are guided by statutory provisions and the Code for Crown Prosecutors. It is the duty of Crown Prosecutors to make sure that the right person is prosecuted for the right offence. In doing so, they must always act in the interests of justice and not solely for the purpose of obtaining a conviction.

The code further advises that Crown Prosecutors should select charges which reflect the seriousness of the offending, give the court adequate sentencing powers and enable the case to be presented in a clear and simple way. This means that Crown Prosecutors may not always continue with the most serious charge where there is a choice.

There are two stages in the decision to prosecute. The first stage is the evidential test. If the case does not pass the evidential test, it must not go ahead. If the case does meet the evidential test, Crown Prosecutors must decide if a prosecution is needed in the public interest.

In addition to statutory provisions and the Code for Crown Prosecutors, the Crown Prosecution Service, Crown Prosecutors are guided by charging standards, nationally agreed with the police for a range of offences, including offences of violence. The charging standards for assaults were designed to ensure consistency in the charging and prosecuting of offences involving violence.

CPS Essex has moved to a Criminal Justice Unit and Trial Unit structure. This move, together with the Narey reforms have meant that prosecutors are involved at a far earlier stage of the process and are able to provide advice.

Bob Spink: To ask the Solicitor-General how many cases, by category of offence, have been discontinued in the Essex Crown Prosecution Service in the last year for which records are available. [28420]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not record offences discontinued or dropped by offence category. However, in the year October 2000 to September 2001, CPS Essex finalised 27,942 defendant cases, in the magistrates and Crown courts, out of which cases against 3,163 defendants were discontinued. This represents 11.3 per cent. of the total casework, against a national average for discontinue of 13.1 per cent.

Bob Spink: To ask the Solicitor-General what the target staffing level is of the Crown Prosecution Service in Essex; and what the actual level is. [28421]

The Solicitor-General: The staffing level for the Essex area of the Crown Prosecution Service on 1 April last year was 106.2 posts, comprising 37.6 prosecutor posts, and 68.6 administrative posts. The Government have made substantial extra resources available to the Crown Prosecution Service, a 23 per cent. increase in real terms, which has enabled it to recruit significant numbers of extra staff.

Currently the Essex area has 115 staff in post, comprising 42 prosecutors and 73 administrative staff. This level of staffing meets the area's current needs.

DEFENCE

Air-to-Air Missile

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile to enter service; and if he will make a statement. [29350]

Mr. Ingram: The Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) will enter service with the Royal Air Force later this month. The delivery of the first batch of missiles marks the successful agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the missile manufacturer MBDA. By working constructively together, we have agreed a clear and robust route map to achieve the full operational capability required of the missile. Tornado F3 will be the first of our aircraft to be fitted with ASRAAM. The missile will also be one of Eurofighter's principal weapons. ASRAAM will provide a major advance in our short-range air-to-air combat capability.

Conflict Prevention Fund

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on disbursement of the UK Conflict Prevention Fund. [26669]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Policy on the disbursement of the pooled budgets for conflict prevention is determined jointly by the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, working together with the Cabinet Office and the Treasury.

The aim of the pooled budgets is to reduce the number of people whose lives are affected by violent conflict and the potential sources of future conflict. Strategies to achieve this are planned and reviewed through two sub-committees of the Cabinet Office Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, one for sub-Saharan Africa, the other for the rest of the world.

The strategy for sub-Saharan Africa includes, for example, assisting with building indigenous peacekeeping capacity, as well as conflict resolution and security sector reform in Sierra Leone. Strategies for the rest of the world include regional strategies in the Balkans, central and eastern Europe, South Asia and the middle east, and functional strategies like assisting UN peacekeeping reform and controlling small arms and light weapons.

The budgets also contribute to the additional costs of the UK's support to peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations. In 2001–02 these have included commitments in Sierra Leone, Macedonia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Iraqi no-fly zones. Conflict prevention priorities and strategies are reviewed annually.

RAF Bases

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of flying hours were lost at *(a)* Lyneham and *(b)* Brize Norton in each of the last five years on account of (i) ice, (ii) fog and (iii) wind. [26625]

Mr. Ingram: Flying hours are not generally lost due to bad weather, as postponed flights will usually take place on a subsequent occasion. However weather conditions at RAF stations are assessed on an approximately hourly basis. Table 1 shows the percentage of occasions where weather conditions were assessed as 'red', ie the most severe conditions in terms of visibility and cloud cover. Table 2 shows the percentage of occasions when gusts of over 30 knots were registered. Not all flights are necessarily postponed in these conditions.

Table 1

	RAF Brize Norton	*RAF Lyneham*
1997	3.96	4.71
1998	1.72	2.52
1999	1.36	2.29
2000	1.46	2.32
2001	2.34	3.01
Average	2.17	2.97

Table 2

	RAF Brize Norton	*RAF Lyneham*
1997	3.05	3.75
1998	2.07	3.60
1999	2.22	3.79
2000	2.27	4.02
2001	0.84	1.92
Average	2.09	3.41

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate how many aircraft movements take place on an annual basis at *(a)* RAF Lyneham and *(b)* RAF Brize Norton; and how many of them were (i) in daylight and (ii) at night. [26626]

Mr. Ingram: The number of aircraft movements undertaken at RAF Lyneham was approximately 36,000 during 2001 and at RAF Brize Norton 33,000. About 9 per cent. of these movements were undertaken at night.

Wind Turbines

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the support of wind turbine deployers seeking planning consent in consultative statements issued by Defence Estates of district councils as part of the planning consent issue process. [27274]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a policy to assess each wind farm proposal on a case-by-case basis. We have an agreement with the wind energy industry that enables Defence Estates Safeguarding section to receive details of wind farms from individual companies some time prior to them applying for formal planning permission.

If the developer subsequently proceeds to seek formal planning permission from the local planning authority (LPA) and the site lies outside a formally safeguarded area then there is no statutory obligation on the authority to consult Defence Estates although most do so. In cases where the MOD does object to a proposal and the developer continues with the project then Defence Estates would seek to be formally consulted by the local authority.

As with all planning application consultations, Defence Estates Safeguarding strives to meet the response deadlines imposed by the planning process. Where we are unable to meet the deadline because the assessment is still being undertaken the LPA are advised to wait for our reply before consent is given. This action ensures that development does not occur that will either cause a safety hazard to military activity or interfere with the ability to train effectively.

Antonov Aircraft

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Antonov cargo planes are on charter to the RAF; how long those charters will last and what their total cost is; for what reason chartering Antonov is necessary; what assessment he has made of the possibility of using C-17s; and if he will make a statement about RAF transport requirements. [28182]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Eleven Antonov aircraft sorties have been flown to date in support of UK force deployments to Afghanistan. Six further sorties have been contracted. £4 million has been spent to date.

The nature of airfields available in Afghanistan, together with the threat presented by surface-to-air missiles (SAM) had limited the RAF to the use of Hercules transport aircraft, which are fitted with a defensive aids suite. While the Hercules is a versatile and capable aircraft, the Antonov has a far greater payload, and has enabled the more rapid deployment of equipment, since the company operating the Antonovs has not restricted their use, even with the SAM threat.

A review of the threat to aircraft, and the re-opening of Kabul International airport, is likely to mean that use of the RAF's C-17 aircraft will soon be possible. However, the demanding timetable for the operation in Afghanistan is likely to mean that further Antonov charter will be required.

Berthing Capacity

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria he is using in the review of berthing capacity at Her Majesty's naval bases. [27897]

Mr. Ingram: The aim of the study into berthing capacity at Her Majesty's naval bases is to define the future policy for base porting and the required waterfront infrastructure to support maritime and joint operations. The criteria that will be used for the study include the following:

(a) Any current base porting and waterfront infrastructure limitations that constrain the support of maritime and joint operations.

(b) The waterfront infrastructure capacity required to support future maritime and joint operations. Taking into account that the next generation of warships including, the future aircraft carriers, Type 45 Destroyers, amphibious ships and ASTUTE class submarines are all significantly larger than their predecessors.

(c) Apart from the larger dimensions of future vessels, a number of other considerations need to be taken into account, including increased use of naval harbours by commercial operators, the implications for personnel, the delivery of operational sea training, the need to accommodate visiting vessels from NATO and other nations, conventional weapons handling safety regulations, environmental impact and future berthing policy for Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels. A large number of longer-term factors, including the consequences of various initiatives such as the Navy's TOPMAST project (Tomorrow's Personnel Management System), warship support modernisation, contractor logistic support and reliability centred maintenance will require further detailed consideration during the course of the work.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will decide the outcome of his Department's review of berthing capacities at Her Majesty's naval bases. [27896]

Mr. Ingram: The study into berthing capacity at Her Majesty's naval bases is due in the summer of 2002. Decisions on base porting will be informed by this study.

Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost to the armed forces pension scheme of providing pensions, at a rate of one half the serving members' pension, to widows and widowers of personnel who retired before 1 April 1973. [27193]

Mr. Ingram: The Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) increased the rate of widows' and widowers' pension from one third of the members pension to one half, from 31 March 1973. Individuals serving on or after this date were provided with the opportunity to make additional contributions so as to qualify former service for the half rate of widows' pension. On this basis, it would be difficult, in equity, to extend the half rate pension to widows whose husbands had left the service before that date and who had not, as a result, contributed financially towards the improvement. It has also been the long-standing policy of successive Governments that discretionary changes to improve the benefits offered by public service pension schemes should be implemented for future service only.

We do not know exactly how many people would be affected by such a change, but we estimate the cost for the Armed Forces Pension Scheme to be £25–30 million per year. The cost would be substantially higher if the improvement were extended to other public service pension schemes.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme of entitling servicemen and women who retired before 31 March 1973 to buy-in to the scheme's improved benefits in respect of providing widows and widowers a full half pension. [27194]

Mr. Ingram: As such a change would be on a "buy-in" basis, we would expect the cost of extending the half rate pensions to pre-1973 widows and widowers to be covered by contributions. The Ministry of Defence would incur administration costs but these would be relatively small. However, such changes have been ruled out by the long-standing policy of successive Governments that scheme improvements should not be retrospective.

UN Military Staff College

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the status is of the proposed UN military staff college for the training of peace keepers; and if he will propose using the Scottish Centre for Nonviolence as its location. [26683]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The UK's approach to providing support to UN training is through a flexible programme of training aimed at enhancing multinational co-operation and interoperability, and strengthening the integrated civil-military approach to peace support operations. This is achieved through conferences, seminars and workshops, expanding places on, or reorientating, existing courses and the development of bespoke UN courses. This is being carried out very successfully throughout locations within the UK and abroad. While a dedicated UN military staff college remains a possibility, we are not currently pursuing the establishment of one.

Eagle-Picher

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the accuracy of bombs dropped on Afghanistan with batteries produced by Eagle-Picher; and if he will make a statement. [27258]

Mr. Ingram: Eagle-Picher batteries are used in US munitions, and this is therefore a matter for them.

Search and Rescue Squadron

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that waterproof helmet-fitted radios are made available for Royal Air Force Search and Rescue Squadron winchmen. [28096]

Mr. Ingram: Subject to a satisfactory outcome of current trials, a helmet-radio assembly for RAF Search and Rescue winchmen will come into service this summer. A fully integrated and waterproof helmet-radio is scheduled to be introduced next year. This will permit full radio and intercom voice communications between the helicopter crew and the winchman.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many winchmen serve with the Royal Air Force Search and Rescue Squadron. [28095]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 49 Search and Rescue winchmen within the Royal Air Force.

US Trident Submarines

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with its counterparts in Washington concerning US plans to convert two of its fleet of Trident submarines to conventional use. [28259]

Mr. Ingram: We have not taken part in any formal discussions.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate her Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if she will make a statement. [27288]

Dr. Howells: The available information is given in the table:

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
DCMS[1]	1,909	0	0	0
Royal Parks Agency	0	0	0	0
Historic Royal Palaces Agency[2]	13,600	—	—	—
Non-departmental Public Bodies	152,183	178,894	1,978	23,272

[1] Net of amounts recovered

[2] Historic Royal Palaces Agency became an non-departmental public body on 1 April 1998

Film Council

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many full-length feature films the Film Council has financially supported in each year since its creation; what the total income for each of those films is; what estimate the Film Council has made of each film's total audience; and if she will make a statement. [27754]

Dr. Howells: The Film Council has directly or indirectly financially supported a total of 58 feature length films to date since its creation. Of these, 15 were directly funded from the Film Council Lottery funds which became operational in October 2000. The remainder were funded through the pre-existing Lottery film franchises or through the interim arrangements with the film production activities of its predecessor bodies—the Arts Council of England (through Lottery funding) and British Screen Ltd. (through grant in aid funding).

The total cash received by the Film Council to 31 December 2001 against the 58 titles is £2,091,739. A film is normally expected to generate income over several years and the income received to date against these titles is therefore only a small part of the expected return on investment.

The Film Council does not produce estimates of total audience for individual films. A film's earning potential spans a number of international markets or countries and a range of media platforms (including cinema, video, DVD, and television) and it is therefore unrealistic to attempt to estimate total audience.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money the Film Council received from lottery funds in the last financial year; what amount the Film Council allocated in the last financial year; what amount the Film Council allocated and paid out in the last financial year; and if she will make a statement. [27753]

Dr. Howells: The Film Council was allocated £31.474 million in income from the National Lottery Distribution Fund during the 2000–01 financial year. The Film Council allocated £33.82 million of lottery funding to projects and paid out £20.003 million in the same year.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [27993]

Dr. Howells: Items stolen from the Department over the last four years are as follows: a laptop computer (1998), three personal computer base units and one personal computer monitor (2001). As required each incident was reported immediately on discovery as a security breach.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by her Department in each of the last four years. [27970]

Dr. Howells: The Department has needed to relocate some divisions during the last four years and refurbishment has been necessary in those cases in preference to higher rental costs for property offered by developers. In 1999 the Government Art Collection was rehoused at a cost of £144,000. In 2000 the cost of moving towards a single roof solution for the Department was £615,000 and improving facilities in 2000 and 2001 was at a cost of £375,000 and £648,000 respectively.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of the (i) Integrated Enquiry Service, (ii) Shared Fraud Hotline, (iii) local authority departmental information teams and (iv) overpayment recoveries in respect of housing benefit. [19009]

Malcolm Wicks: These initiatives made up the housing benefit improvement programme, the purpose of which was to contribute to improving housing benefit and council tax benefit administration. During the life of the programme, strong links were established with local authority managers and staff that will continue to develop as the recommendations from the programme are taken forward. These relationships have contributed to a greater understanding of the local authority information requirements, and the introduction of a standard set of procedures that will help deliver improvements to the recovery of housing benefit and council tax benefit overpayments.

The information on costs is in the table:

Housing benefit improvement programme expenditure

£

	2000–01[1]	*2001–02*
Integrated Enquiry Service	557,000	[2]309,000
Shared Fraud Hotline	78,000	[2]57,000
Local Authority/Benefits Agency Information Flow Project	24,000	0
Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Project	64,000	[2]819,000

[1] Outturn

[2] Forecast

Note:

Figures are rounded to nearest £1,000

Source:

Housing Benefit Improvement Programme budget

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research the Government have conducted on the health impact on mental health service users of the implementation of his Department's benefits policies. [20231]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A major goal of the Government are to help those people who are sick or disabled who can work to do so, while providing security for those who cannot work. This group includes people with mental health problems, whether they use mental health services or not. The Department for Work and Pensions consults with service users to ensure that relevant research informs new ideas and policy implementation.

The Office for National Statistics published a report on the Psychiatric Morbidity of Adults carried out on behalf of the Department of Health on 18 December. The main aim of the survey was to estimate the prevalence of psychiatric morbidity among adults aged 16 to 74 living in private households in Great Britain. The survey report also examines the use of services associated with mental disorder and considers the characteristics—including economic activity—of people with mental disorder.

A longitudinal follow up to that survey is planned for 2002 and aims to estimate the duration of mental health problems. The study will also involve some follow-up work on use of services.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26999]

Mr. McCartney: We have no plans to publish an independent report on the reasons for absence in the Department.

The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report covering all Government Departments; "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism in my Department.

The report for the year 2000, will be published shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to respond to the consultation on the impact of NETA on small generators. [26601]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are analysing and considering responses to their consultation carefully. The Department of Trade and Industry will be issuing a response shortly.

Departmental Expenditure

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 473W, on departmental expenditure, what estimate she has made of the savings produced by refinancing; over what period of time she expects these to be realised and under which vote; and if she will make a statement. [26080]

Ms Hewitt: The refinancing programme to date is estimated to generate £75 million of savings. The majority of the savings will be realised over the next five years, but will continue until 2018.

The relevant vote is the Export Credits Guarantee Department Request for Resources 1.

Former Miners

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations *(a)* she and *(b)* her Department has received on allowing former miners, who were sacked in the 1980s, access to their pension funds. [27606]

Mr. Wilson: None. All former British Coal miners when reaching pensionable age, whether dismissed or not, have access to the pension benefits they have accrued while in employment.

I announced on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 759–60W, that certain miners dismissed during the 1984–85 strike would receive an enhancement to their pension in recognition of the years of further service they lost as a result of British Coal's decision not to re-employ them.

Environmental Reports

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* multinational companies with bases in Scotland and *(b)* Scottish companies had published environmental reports by 31 December 2001. [27272]

Mr. Wilson: While the Government are keen to encourage companies to report, it is not mandatory to do so. There is, therefore, no central register of which companies report.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total level was of Government financial support to the renewable energy sector in each year between 1980 and 1990 broken down by *(a)* research grants, *(b)* non-fossil fuel levy and *(c)* other sources. [27456]

Mr. Wilson: Main Government financial support for the renewable energy sector between 1980 and 1990 was in the form of research grants from the then Department of Energy's New and Renewable Energy Research and Development Programme. Programme spend was as follows:

	£ million
1980–81	11.1
1981–82	17.3
1982–83	14.1
1983–84	[illegible]
1984–85	14.1
1985–86	12.7
1986–87	11.6
1987–88	14.3
1988–89	15.3
1989–90	17.2
1990–91	20.4

During these years, the Government may also have funded some other relevant research projects managed by the research councils, but to identify these projects now would be difficult and would involve disproportionate cost.

The Non Fossil Fuel Obligation and the Fossil Fuel Levy supporting it were introduced in financial year 1990–91. In 1990–91, levy support for renewable energy was £6.1 million. I am not aware of funding for renewable energy from other Government sources from 1980 to 1990.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the projects and institutions benefiting from the Lottery money announced by the Government in March 2001 for research into renewable energy projects. [25888]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Funding from the Lottery is being directed especially towards the development of the offshore wind energy and energy crops industries. The offshore wind energy scheme is now open for applications and we are presently working up the details of the energy crops scheme. No funds have yet been awarded under either scheme.

Wind Turbines

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much she has allocated for grant aid to farmers in siting small scale wind power generators on their land; and how much has been issued under this grant scheme to date; [27277]

(2) what steps are being taken in support of farmers in the siting of wind turbines as a vehicle for agricultural diversification. [27276]

Mr. Wilson: The Government believe that the financial incentive provided by the Renewables Obligation and exemption from the climate change levy will be sufficient to bring forward new onshore wind projects without the requirement for further financial support from Government.

The Renewables Obligation will succeed the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO). Between 1990 and 1998 302 wind projects were awarded NFFO contracts, of which 74 had commissioned by 30 September 2001. The Electricity from Non-Fossil Fuel Sources (Locational Flexibility) Order 2001 which was made in December will enable a number of those projects which have yet to commission to come forward and a number of these are likely to be on agricultural land.

I was pleased to launch on 28 August 2001 an innovative new service, operated by National Wind Power Ltd., to help farmers and landowners to develop small wind energy projects typically comprising one, two or three turbines. The WindWorks package has been developed to provide farmers with the financial rewards associated with ownership of a wind energy project while avoiding exposure of farmers and landowners to new financial risks at a time when great uncertainty exists in the farming industry and rural economy. More detail on WindWorks can be found at: http://www.natwindpower.co.uk/windworks/index.htm.

NETA

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has taken to help intermittent suppliers adversely affected by NETA. [25894]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* On 1 November 2001 I published a consultation document in response to Ofgem's reports on NETA and its impact on smaller generators, including intermittent generators. Consultation closed on 1 December and follow-up work to analyse responses and take appropriate action is now under way. On 20 December I announced the formation of a working group to look at obstacles to consolidation under NETA, and to report to DTI by 31 January 2002. Many of the issues raised and considered in the consultation document, and by the working group, apply to the demand side, including intermittent suppliers. The Government will be publishing a response to their consultation shortly.

Nuclear Waste Storage

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the ability of the UK's intermediate and high level nuclear waste storage facilities to withstand terrorist attack. [25891]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The UK's civil nuclear sites apply stringent security measures regulated by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), the security regulator. The security regulator works closely with the Health and Safety Executive, the safety regulator, which provides advice on the safety implications of events, including external hazards such as plane crashes, at nuclear installations. Security and safety precautions at nuclear sites are kept under regular review. Both regulators are reviewing all relevant precautions in the light of the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* annual cost of maintaining the nuclear waste storage facilities at Sellafield and Dounreay and *(b)* the forecast for the annual running and maintenance costs over the next 50 years. [25896]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I am advised by UKAEA and BNFL that the current total annual cost of maintaining radioactive waste storage facilities at Dounreay is £12 million, and at Sellafield is £50 million, while the forecast total running and maintenance cost of radioactive waste storage facilities over the next 50 years at Dounreay is £450 million and at Sellafield is £1,100 million.

All figures are at 2001–02 money values and include overheads.

Energy Charter Conference

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who represented her Department at the Energy Charter Conference session on 17 December 2001. [27889]

Mr. Wilson: Officials of the Department of Trade and Industry represented the United Kingdom at this meeting.

BAE

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with BAE concerning the future of the plant at Broughton. [28658]

Mr. Wilson: Airbus UK owns the plant at Broughton and another site at Filton, where all the wings for Airbus aircraft are developed and manufactured. The Department remains in close touch with the company and with BAE Systems, which is a 20 per cent. shareholder in the Airbus company. UK work on Airbus programmes, including at Broughton, was covered in recent discussions between BAE Systems and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and also in discussions which I had recently with Airbus UK and Airbus in Toulouse.

TREASURY

Public Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of each public expenditure programme was cash-limited in each of the years from 1992–93 to 2001–02. [26273]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information on the cash limits and total spending for each Department is available in the following documents.

Year	*Spending plans*		*Final cash limits and DELs*	
1992–93	Cm 1920	Tables 3.3 and B1	Cm 2273	Tables 1 and 2
1993–94	Cm 2219	Tables 3.3 and B1	Cm 2617	Tables 1 and 2
1994–95	Cm 2519	Tables 2.1 and 2.2	Cm 2903	Tables 2 and 3
1995–96	Cm 2821	Tables 2.1 and 2.2	Cm 3318	Tables 2 and 3
1996–97	Cm 3201	Tables 2.1 and 2.2	Cm 3696	Tables 2 and 3
1997–98	Cm 3601	Tables 1.1 and 1.2	Cm 3988	Tables 2 and 3
1998–99	Cm 3901	Tables 1.1 and 1.2	Cm 4416	Tables 2 and 3
1999–2000	Cm 4201	Tables 1.2 and 1.3	Cm 4812	Table 1
2000–01	Cm 4601	Tables 1.2 and 1.3	Cm 5243	Table 1
2001–02	Cm 5101	Tables 1.1 and 1.2	HC 391	Table 1.4[1]

[1] Latest position

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the gross domestic product he expects public expenditure to constitute in 2006–07. [27447]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Firm spending plans for 2006–07 will be set out in a future Spending Review. Paragraph B20 of the pre-Budget report (Cm 5318) explains the assumptions made in the Government's current fiscal projections.

Direct and Indirect Taxation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the percentage change in upper tax income per income decile as a consequence of announced changes to direct and indirect taxation over the period 2002–03 to 2004–05. [26330]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There will be a reduction in income tax for a relatively small number of higher rate taxpayers with the increase in the children's tax credit to up to £20 a week for families in the year of a child's birth from April 2002. Apart from this, announced tax changes over the period 2002–02 to 2004–05 will have no impact on higher rate taxpayers.

Single Person's Allowance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much in real terms the average annual tax payments of a person with no allowance and reliefs other than the single person's allowance earning *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £20,000, *(c)* £30,000, *(d)* £50,000 and *(e)* £100,000 has changed since 1997–98. [26214]

Dawn Primarolo: The reduction in tax at 1997–98 prices for a taxpayer claiming only the personal allowance and earning the specified levels in 1997–98 and 2000–01 are shown in the table.

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£

Earnings *Tax reduction at 1997–98 prices*[1]

Earnings	£ *Tax reduction at 1997–98 prices*[1]
£10,000	271
£20,000	531
£30,000	792
£50,000	1,816
£100,000	3,276

[1] Deflated using RPI

Customs and Excise Forecasts

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy *(a)* to record the reasons for manual adjustments made by HM Customs and Excise to their modelled forecasts for alcohol receipts and *(b)* to make public those reasons. [26411]

Mr. Boateng: Under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it would be inappropriate to publish internal discussion and advice leading to the published alcohol revenue forecasts.

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of the publication and distribution of the 2001 pre-Budget report. [27438]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The net cost of printing and distributing the 2001 PBR was £56,000.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which other countries in the European Union have introduced an aggregates levy; what discussions he has had with the finance Ministers of the European Union regarding a common aggregate levy; what the level of aggregates levy proposed in each of the countries of the European Union is; whether aggregates imported into the UK from other countries *(a)* in and *(b)* outside the European Union will be subject to the aggregate levy; what tonnage of aggregates has been imported into the United Kingdom from (i) the European Union and (ii) countries outside the European Union in each of the last five years; and whether added value aggregates products from outside the United Kingdom will be subject to the aggregate levy. [26775]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The aggregates levy is designed to address the environmental effects of aggregate extraction in the UK and the rate was set to reflect these costs following independent research. Aggregate taxes in other EU member states are a matter for the individual states themselves. The known current position in the member states can be summarised as follows:

Denmark—0.67 euro/m^3

France—0.1 euro/tonne

Spain—no national tax but potential for regional taxation

Italy—regional taxation, typically 2 to 5 per cent. of value

Sweden—0.6 euro/tonne on sand and gravel only

Austria—regional tax of approximately 0.15 euro/tonne

Greece—2 per cent. of value

Netherlands—in the process of introducing a tax.

Aggregates imported from other countries, whether in the EU or not, will be liable to the levy. The total tonnage of imported aggregate for each of the last five years for which data are available is as follows.

Imports

	Tonnes
1994	2,166,211
1995	1,942,602
1996	642,581
1997	502,381
1998	822,087

Imported products made from aggregates are not themselves aggregates and so will not be subject to the levy.

Business Taxation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to simplify business taxation. [27465]

Dawn Primarolo: A number of measures to simplify business taxation were contained in the Budget and pre-Budget reports, published in March 2001 and November respectively. Both these documents are available in the Library of the House.

Departmental PFI Contracts

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the proportion of PFI contracts made by his Department where an amount in excess of 90 per cent. of the capital value of the asset is recouped by the lessor out of the capital element of lease payments over the lifetime of the contract concerned; and if he will make a statement. [27697]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No such estimate has been made. The existing PFI contracts in the Departments are for the provision of a service in return for a unitary payment, the payment of which is dependent on satisfactory performance. The unitary payment is not broken down into constituent parts.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the impact of the public pay review bodies' recommendations will be on the public spending limits of 2001–07. [27921]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public spending plans are settled in the spending reviews, and are not amended by reference to the recommendations of the pay review bodies. It is normal practice for Departments to accommodate pay awards within public spending limits.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is towards introducing reduced rates of VAT on organisations covered by category 14 of annexe H to the Sixth Directive. [26536]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Not-for-profit welfare services provided by charities are already VAT exempt.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by Department the total amount allocated to tackling problems relating to drugs in each of the last 10 years. [27452]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

Information on resources is not available in the form requested.

The Government have made available substantial resources for directly tackling the problem of drug misuse. A breakdown of funding allocated for the years 1995 to 2004 is as follows.

The first United Kingdom drugs strategy, "Tackling Drugs Together", was launched in May 1995 and allocated £8.8 million over three years to Drug Action Teams, £5.9 million on schools drug education for 1995–96, and £1 million in the same year for services to young people at an early stage of drug misuse.

For the present strategy "Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain", the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review settlement provided an additional £217 million of resources for three years. The Spending Review 2000 (SR 2000) and the Budget 2001 provided further resources bringing total expenditure under the drugs strategy to nearly £1 billion by 2003–04—see Table A.

Furthermore, SR 2000 also supported a range of related programmes—see Table B—and following the Budget 2001, some additional investment was made, particularly to help Communities tackle drug misuse—see Table C.

Table A: 2000 Spending Review—resources directly allocated for tackling drug abuses (by main aim of the national anti-drugs strategy)[1]

	2000–01[2]	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Drug treatment[3]	234	328	377	401
Protecting young people	63	90	97	120
Safeguarding communities	45	79	81	95
Reducing availability[4]	353	373	376	380
Total	695	870	931	996

[1] Excludes devolved spending

[2] Estimates of baseline spend in Departmental Expenditure Limits

[3] Comprises mainstream spending by the Department of Health, local authorities and the pooled National Treatment Agency (NTA) budget. Excludes additional Prison Service treatment spend, brigaded under Communities

[4] UK spend for 2001–02 to 2003–04 includes the anti-drugs share of the £90 million approved for combating organised crime

Table B: 2000 Spending Review—new resources provided for related programmes[1]

	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Criminal Justice System	1,420	2,290	2,720
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	200	300	400
Children's Fund	100	150	200
Connexions[2]	77	177	[3]—

[1] Excludes devolved spending

[2] This was added to existing provision for the careers service. Funding will continue to go to the careers service in areas where Connexions is not yet running

[3] Provision for 2003–04 will be announced in due course

Table C: Budget 2001—new resources for anti-drugs measures[1]

	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Strengthening communities	50	70	100
Extending drug testing in the CJS	0	20	30
Providing more help to find jobs	5	15	20
Strengthening DATs	5	5	5
Expanding Positive Futures	2	3	[2]—

[1] Excludes devolved spending

[2] Provision to be decided in the light of other sources of funding

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Home Energy Efficiency

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* how much is invested annually into household energy efficiency and *(b)* how this money is spent. [25625]

Mr. Meacher: The Government estimate that during 2000 (the most recent year for which figures are available) the total investment in household energy efficiency measures was approximately £250 million (excluding double glazing). The breakdown for the major items of this expenditure is:

	£ million
Loft insulation	90
Cavity wall insulation	70
Lighting	50
Draught proofing	20
Condensing boilers[1]	10
Tank insulation	5

[1] This figure includes only the fraction of the total cost of the boiler assumed to represent the additional cost of the increased energy efficiency.

Although installing double glazing in homes does increase the energy efficiency of the building it is rare that double glazing is installed for energy efficiency reasons alone. Hence, expenditure on double glazing is excluded from the figures. However, the Government estimate that the energy efficiency component of double glazing installations totals some £500 million p.a.

Home Heating

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will install heating equipment at the house of Mrs. Anita Farrow of Ashburton, a constituent; and if she will make a statement on the reason for the delay. [24955]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), now marketed as The Warm Front Team, is administered in south-west England by the Eaga Partnership Ltd. Eaga advise that contractors are due to complete the work on Mrs. Farrow's property by the end of this month.

The delay was mainly due to the original heating contractor declining to carry out the work after having agreed to do so. It took some time to locate an alternative contractor and resolve a shortage of suitable heating equipment.

Rural Regeneration

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what sources of *(a)* Government and *(b)* EU funding are available to (i) farmers, (ii) rural villages, (iii) rural businesses, (iv) local authorities, (v) parish councils and (vi) rural voluntary organisations to help regenerate rural economies. [27257]

Alun Michael: Many Government and European Union programmes contribute to the rural agenda.

Through the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the Countryside Agency we support the market towns programme which is intended to regenerate some 120 small rural towns as well as a range of support measures to rural businesses via the rural development programme and redundant building grant scheme.

Through the Countryside Agency we support the Vital Villages programme which includes community service grants to support projects to maintain or introduce services which are local priorities; parish transport grants for small scale projects to meet local needs; parish plans grants to help 1,000 parishes draw up their own town or village plans to set out local needs and aspirations.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for the following programmes which involve funding from the Government and from the European Community:

> The England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) under which the two main priority areas for funding are schemes to conserve and enhance the rural environment and schemes to enable farming, forestry and other rural businesses and communities to adapt to changing circumstances and to create a productive and sustainable rural economy.
>
> Objective 1 funding in certain areas (Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Merseyside and South Yorkshire) to promote similar measures to the ERDP. Because these areas are defined by the Commission as being of greater need, the rates of grant are slightly higher.
>
> Leader+ Local Action Groups (which include farmers, rural villages, rural businesses, local authorities, parish councils and voluntary organisations) are helping to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in their area through innovative approaches to sustainable rural development.

A more extensive list of potential sources of funding and advice for rural businesses can be found in Annex 1 of the Rural White Paper, "Our Countryside: the future, a fair deal for rural England" published in November 2000. A report on our progress on implementation of the Rural White Paper was included in "England's Rural Future", published on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 920W.

Kyoto Protocol

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she proposes an early ratification of the Kyoto protocol by the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement [27837]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* For legal and presentational reasons, the UK will ratify the Kyoto protocol at the same time as the European Community and other member states. At the European Council on 31 October 2001, the EU stressed

> "the Community's and its member states' resolve to complete their ratification procedures in time for timely ratification with a view to entry into force of the Kyoto protocol by the World Summit on Sustainable Development"

in 2002.

The first step in the process is for the EC to ratify the protocol through the adoption of a Council Decision that will include further clarification on the arrangements for implementing the agreement between the EC and its member states in 1998 on sharing out the EC's −8 per cent. target. A Council Decision dealing with these issues is currently under discussion and is expected to be adopted at the next Environment Council on 4 March 2002.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Student Loans Company

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the Student Loans Company were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21299]

Margaret Hodge: The Student Loans Company's provisional outturn of administration costs in 2000–01 was £47.5 million (cash). The final figure will be included in the company's 2000–01 annual report which is expected to be published in mid-December 2002. Copies of this document will be placed in the Libraries of both of the Houses of Parliament.

The planned administration expenditure for 2001–02 is £55 million.

Both of these figures are provided on a UK basis, and include funding from the private sector to cover the administration of the two sold loan portfolios.

Higher Education Funding Council

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the Higher Education Funding Council for England were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21291]

Margaret Hodge: Provision for the administrative costs of the Higher Education Funding Council for England is £14.6 million in 2001–02 and £14.9 million in 2002–03.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the Further Education Funding Council were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–01. [21292]

John Healey: We do not yet have final expenditure details for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) in 2000–01. Latest planned funding for the FEFC for administration was £27.4 million.

The FEFC will not incur any administrative costs in 2001–02. From April 2001 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has taken over the majority of the functions previously carried out by the FEFC, as well as those of TECs.

Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the Teacher Training Agency were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21297]

Mr. Timms: The administration costs of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in 2000–01, as published in the agency's annual financial statements, were £7.392 million. The TTA's current forecast administration costs for 2001–02 are around £7.85 million.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21300]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority incurred administration costs in 2000–01 of £25,600,000, and expects to spend £28 million in 2001–02.

Investors in People

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of Investors in People were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21301]

John Healey: In this financial year, Investors in People UK will receive grant in aid of £1.617 million. Up to 75 per cent. of this is used for running costs—e.g. staff/premises costs; the remainder is used to fund the development of the standard. In addition to this, the company has also received additional funding of £1.6 million from the Department for marketing purposes. Last year, IiP UK generated additional income of £3.7 million from their own operations, which was used to carry out development, quality assurance, and advice and guidance.

Exam Standards

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the full report of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority into the claims of Mr. Jeffrey Robinson about exam standards. [24887]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: QCA commissioned a full report from the awarding body OCR on Mr. Robinson's allegations. Although the OCR report is a confidential technical document and it is not QCA's practice to publish documents of this type, QCA's assessment of it has been published in the QCA website.

Civil Service Code

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints have been reported in her Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999; and how many of them related to special advisers. [25328]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The procedures for making complaints under the Civil Service Code are set out in the Department's staff handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code with their line manager. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to a nominated official (or officials). It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this Department under paragraph 11 of the code, as there is no requirement for managers to report centrally details of complaints made under the Civil Service Code which are resolved within the management line.

Early Education Places

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of three-year-olds in Trafford are in receipt of a free early education place. [25994]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* We are committed to providing all three-year-olds, whose parents want one, with a free nursery education place by September 2004. We have recently announced details of the £275 million of funding we are making available to provide free early education places for three-year-olds in 2002–03. This funding has been initially allocated according to the position of an authority on the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation. As a result, Trafford LEA has been allocated £335,000 of this funding to provide 275 free early education places.

Estimates of the percentage of three-year-olds already provided with a place are used nationally for internal planning and monitoring. However, accurate local population figures are not available to the Department, although local authorities may choose to make their own estimates based on local data.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many speech therapists qualified for teaching children with special educational needs are in practice in each local education authority in England. [27696]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information is not collected centrally. Under the Standards Fund, grant support is available to local education authorities to help them enhance speech and language therapy services in conjunction with the NHS and voluntary sector. We have also supported the work of the charity I-CAN on creating a joint professional development framework for teachers and speech and language therapists, to be published shortly.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for her Department in each of the last four years. [27903]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Nick Matheson, Chief Executive of the Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA) which provides ministerial cars and drivers, will be writing separately in response to part *(a)* of this question.

It is not possible, even at disproportionate cost, to provide an estimate of the cost of taxis used within my Department in each of the last four years.

Sixth Form Funding

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those local education authorities in England which have indicated that they will be unable to meet the financial provisions for school sixth forms in 2002–03, as specified by the Learning and Skills Council; and if she will make a statement. [28109]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Learning and Skills Council has issued to LEAs and schools their provisional sixth form funding allocations for 2002–03. These allocations will be confirmed shortly. LEAs will be required to pass on all the money received for sixth forms to the schools.

Because the way the LSC distributes the funds differs from that formerly used by LEAs, transitional issues have arisen for some authorities. We propose to deal with these by providing extra grant resources for 2002–03 for those authorities most significantly affected, and by allowing more flexibility in the way LEAs fund schools. A letter to this effect was sent to all LEAs on 7 December 2001 and copies have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list, by local education authority in England, the amounts allocated for 2002–03 to schools with sixth forms, excluding funding for statemented special education needs, by the Learning and Skills Council according to the *(a)* terms of the Real Terms Guarantee, *(b)* Learning and Skills Council's methodology and *(c)* Learning and Skills Council's methodology as modified by the restriction of gains to 30 per cent. above the levels of the Real Terms Guarantee. [28110]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is principally a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. Their provisional school sixth form allocations were published on 14 December 2001 and are publicly available on the LSC's internet website in the form requested by the hon. Member at www.lsc.gov.uk. The allocations will be confirmed shortly.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given to local educational authorities to cater for the needs of children whose education is disrupted by ME. [28221]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: On 1 November 2001, the Department for Education and Skills jointly with the Department of Health published new statutory guidance; "Access to Education for children and young people with medical needs". This guidance sets out minimum national standards for the education of children who are unable to attend school because of medical needs, and is applicable to children with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME).

The Independent Working Group report on CFS/ME was published on 11 January 2002. The Government hope that publication of the report will result in improved awareness and understanding of this condition and lead to improved diagnosis, treatment and management. Advice is given in the report about the education of children and young people with CFS/ME.

Children's Rights Commissioner

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received on the establishment of a Children's Rights Commissioner. [27431]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* My Department has received two letters making representations about a Children's Rights Commissioner in England, one of which was forwarded by the Prime Minister's office.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the total expenditure on specialist schools in *(a)* England and *(b)* Somerset for each year from 1997–98 to 2003–04 (planned); and if she will make a statement. [27043]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Information on the actual and planned expenditure for specialist schools for *(a)* England and *(b)* Somerset for each year from 1997–98 to 2003–04 is provided if the table.

Financial Year	*England (£ million)*	*Somerset (£)*
1997–98	33.1	247.175
1998–99	40.8	462,660
1999–2000	47.4	523,972
2000–01	71.9	815,716
2001–02	94.0	885,063
2002–03	[1]108.0	[2]957,063
2003–04	[1]127.0	[2]957,063

[1] Estimates for 2002–03 and 2003–04 are baseline figures for those years based on targets of 1,000 specialist schools by 2003 and 1,500 by 2005.

[2] Estimated expenditure on specialist schools in Somerset for 2002–03 and 2003–04 is based on current pupil numbers in schools already designated.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have applied for specialist school status in each quarter since May 1997; how many of these schools were granted specialist status in each of these quarters; how many cluster bids have been accepted; and if she will make a statement. [27051]

Mr. Timms: The number of specialist school applications received in each competition since May 1997 and the number of schools designated in each round are shown in the table. A small number of "associated applications" have been discussed with officials but no applications which are part of these associated applications have yet been successful.

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	Competitions	
	Schools applying	*Number of schools designated*
May 1997	40	8
October 1997	107	32
March 1998	122	51
October 1998	67	43
March 1999	52	37
June 1999	95	44
October 1999	68	37
March 2000	117	59
June 2000	115	34
October 2000	106	39
March 2001	154	79

Note:

261 applications received in the October 2001 competition are currently being assessed.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools will be granted specialist school status in the bidding rounds during 2002; what proportion this is of the total number of expected bids; and if she will make a statement. [27052]

Mr. Timms: It is difficult to estimate the number of bids we will receive this year but it is likely to be at least as many (both in March and October) as in the October 2001 competition, when 261 schools made applications. Our published target is to have at least 830 specialist schools by September 2002. There are 463 specialist schools at present.

Nurture Groups

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to establish nurture groups in primary schools in order to give special assistance to young children with social and educational problems; and if she will make a statement. [27047]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government recognise the benefit that nurture groups can provide for disaffected young children or those with emotional behavioural and other difficulties (EBD).

A number of LEAs and schools already use this approach for pupils with EBD. In June 2001, My Department published guidance on promoting children's mental health in early years and school settings, which includes the use of nurture groups as an effective early intervention strategy for young children in schools who have mental health difficulties. In co-operation with the Coram Foundation we will also be publishing guidance later this year on effective strategies for dealing with pupils with behavioural and other difficulties. This will include the use of nurture groups as one of a range of strategies primary schools might adopt. It is for individual schools to decide where it is appropriate for nurture groups to be used depending on the needs of the children and the school's circumstances.

Launchpad Status

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria will be used in determining which schools are awarded launchpad status; and if she will make a statement. [27049]

Mr. Timms: The aim is to include a broad cross-section of primary and secondary schools from across the country, together with a small number of special schools since it is vital that lessons learned from the project have credibility and wide application. We shall be taking into account factors such as school size and location, as well as securing participant schools showing a range of pupil attainment and teacher turnover. We shall want to include schools which are already developing innovative practice and we also plan to ensure there is representation of some in challenging circumstances.

Student Poverty

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish information possessed by her Department which shows the proportion of students *(a)* on free school meals, *(b)* in families dependent on benefits, *(c)* considered to be from more deprived backgrounds as available indicators, in (i) specialist schools and (ii) non-specialist community and comprehensive schools; and if she will make a statement. [27048]

Mr. Timms: Information on the numbers and proportions of pupils eligible for a free school meal for specialist and non-specialist community and comprehensive schools is shown in the following table. Similar information on students in families dependent on benefits and considered to be from more deprived backgrounds is not available.

	England
Specialist secondary schools	
Number of day pupils	769,973
Number of pupils eligible for FSM	112,865
Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM	14.7
Other maintained secondary schools	
Number of day pupils	2,457,000
Number of pupils eligible for FSM	396,811
Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM	16.2

Source:

Annual Schools Census (amended December 2001)

Schools' Reserves

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the level of schools' reserves; whether the present level of reserves is in excess of guidelines; and if she will make a statement. [27050]

Mr. Timms: At the end of the financial year 1999–2000, balances held by maintained schools in England amounted in total to approximately £723 million: this figure is derived from the outturn statements prepared by local education authorities under section 52 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and represents surpluses net of deficits.

Prudent financial management will normally entail the retention by schools of reasonable reserves, whether on a contingency basis or by way of saving to meet large planned items of future expenditure. In view of the widely varying circumstances of individual schools, my right hon. Friend does not consider that the promulgation of specific guideline figures by the Department would be helpful. It is the responsibility of LEAs to monitor the level of balances in the schools which they maintain, and to challenge those schools whose balances appear, in all the circumstances, to be excessive. Where a school persistently retains a large balance for no clear reason, it is open to the LEA to consider whether delegation should be suspended under section 51 of the School Standards and Framework Act.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average starting salary is for newly qualified teachers in *(a)* London and *(b)* the rest of the UK; after how long a newly qualified teacher will receive a pay rise; and if she will make a statement on teachers' pay with special reference to rises they have had since 1997, and pay rises they will receive. [27673]

Mr. Timms: A newly qualified teacher in England and Wales with a second class honours degree or above currently starts at point two of the main scale on £17,001 pa. Others start on £16,038 pa. Schools may start teachers higher up the scale to recognise any other experience they consider relevant. Teachers working in inner London receive an extra £3,000 pa; those in outer London receive an extra £1,974 pa and those on the fringe receive an extra £765 pa. All teachers receive a pay increase in April of each year when the pay scales are revalorised. In the early part of their career, teachers will also receive an increment in September when, subject to satisfactory performance, they move up one point on the main qualified teachers' pay scale. Schools have discretion to advance excellent performers by two points in any year. Later in their career, any further pay advancement can be justified only by excellent performance or promotion.

As a result of the performance threshold system and other pay improvements, good experienced teachers in England and Wales have received an extra 25 per cent. in pay since 1997. This is 17 per cent. in real terms. We have established a new upper pay spine for teachers with a maximum of £31,128. The maximum pay for the advanced skills teacher grade we have introduced is £44,571. Our school leaders can now earn up to £78,783.

Teachers' pay in England and Wales is based on recommendations made by the independent School Teachers' Review Body (STRB). They are shortly due to publish their report detailing their recommendations for 2002–03. My right hon. Friend will consult key stakeholders before implementing any changes. Scotland and Northern Ireland are responsible for their own pay arrangements for their teachers.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Business Regulation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new regulations affecting business have been introduced since June 2001; and how many have been repealed. [26764]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has proposed 49 regulations to Parliament since June. Of these regulations, more than half were public telecommunications operator licences, amended or simplified regulations or preserved commercial electricity supply agreements.

Records relating to repealed regulations are not held centrally. The information requested could be obtained and collated only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parades

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was of policing each parade in Kilkeel and Annalong between 1 April 2001 and 30 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [25930]

Jane Kennedy: There were 19 parades in Kilkeel and Annalong between 1 April 2001 and 30 September 2001. The cost of policing each parade is as follows:

Parade	*Date*	*Cost (£)*
Rising Son of Valley	21 April	28,359
Annalong Single Star	18 May	11,269
Mourne LOL No. 6	27 May	436
Pride of Balinaran	23 June	42,791
St. Mary's GAC	1 July	269
Ballymartin LOL	2 July	1,458
Annalong	2 July	23,827
Mourne LOL No. 6	8 July	269
Apprentice/Schomberg	11 July	13,037
Kilkeel District LOL	12 July	43,630
Mourne Defenders	12 July	643
Orange Hall Committee	28 July	16,403
Mourne LOL No. 6	29 July	356
Mourne Defenders	3 August	12,814
Brunswick Accordion	10 August	14,954
AOH	15 August	85,636
Scrogg Road Community	19 August	1,106
Mourne District RBC	19 August	1,106
Mourne District RPB	25 August	2,192

Armed Theft (Belfast)

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 568W, to the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) on armed theft (Belfast), which Republican paramilitary groups the police believe were responsible. [26820]

Jane Kennedy: As I stated in my answer to the hon. Member for Belfast, North the police believe that those involved in the robberies had an association to republican paramilitary groups. It is not possible to attribute the robberies to any specific grouping.

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* shootings, *(b)* bombings and *(c)* beatings there were in each of the last six months by (i) Republican paramilitaries purported to be on ceasefire, (ii) Republican paramilitaries not on ceasefire, (iii) Loyalist paramilitaries claiming to be on ceasefire and (iv) Loyalist paramilitaries not on ceasefire. [26883]

Jane Kennedy: The following tables provide the security statistics attributed to all Republican and Loyalist groupings. It is not possible to provide attribution by specific groups, purportedly on ceasefire or otherwise.

Security situation statistics: July to December 2001—number of deaths as a result of the security situation

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Total*
July	2	0	2
August	0	0	0
September	1	0	1
October	1	1	2
November	1	0	1
December	2	1	3
Total	7	2	9

Number of shooting incidents

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Other N/K*	*Total*
July	27	10	2	39
August	8	12	4	24
September	32	16	0	48
October	20	7	1	28
November	19	7	2	28
December	13	4	3	20
Total	119	56	12	187

Notes:

1. The following types of incidents are included:

Shots fired by terrorists

Shots fired by the security forces

Paramilitary-style attacks involved shootings

Shots heard (and later confirmed)

Other violent incidents where shots are fired (eg armed robbery).

2. Statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor adjustment.

Number of bombing incidents

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Other N/K*	*Total*
July	50	6	2	58
August	28	8	3	39
September	54	4	1	59
October	41	2	5	48
November	15	3	1	19
December	5	1	1	7
Total	193	24	13	230

Notes:

1. An individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents recorded include explosions and defusings. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

2. Statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor adjustment.

Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style assaults

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Total*
July	13	2	15
August	3	2	5
September	7	2	9
October	6	3	9
November	4	4	8
December	8	2	10
Total	41	15	56

Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Total*
July	8	5	13
August	10	11	21
September	8	11	19
October	10	2	12
November	12	2	14
December	7	4	11
Total	55	35	90

Note:

Statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor adjustment.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26987]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 24W.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, its executive non-departmental public bodies and executive agency have routinely advertised in the domestic press for recruitment purposes. Other than that, expenditure incurred was:

2001–02: £2,650—*Metro* (London), *The Voice*, *Time Out*[1]

2000–01: £8,589—*Metro* (London)[2]

1999–2000: Nil

1998–99: Nil

1997–98: Nil.

[1] Promoting the "Know Before You Go" consular campaign.

[2] Publicising an FCO open day.

In addition, the British Council has advertised for such activities as teacher exchanges, language assistants and conference promotion. Accurate figures by year are not available. But from 1997 to 2001 the total expenditure was £16,400. The expenditure from April 2001 to date is £6,565. The titles used were *The Times Educational Supplement* (mainly) and *The Guardian* newspaper.

Correspondence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to reply to the letter of 12 September 2001 from the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East about Heathrow airport. [28010]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Unfortunately the letter dated 12 September 2001 from the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East about Heathrow airport was lost. Officials have requested a further copy. A reply will be sent as soon as possible.

Christian Minorities

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help his Department offers other Governments who are in the process of drafting new laws in the areas of *(a)* religious freedom and *(b)* cults to ensure that there is no discrimination against Christian minorities. [28314]

Peter Hain: Promotion of human rights is at the heart of our foreign policy and we regard freedom of thought, conscience and religion as very important human rights. We condemn instances where individuals are persecuted because of their faith or belief, wherever it happens and whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

We take every opportunity, often working with our EU partners, to urge states to pursue laws and practices which foster tolerance and mutual respect and to protect religious minorities against discrimination, intimidation and attacks. Where necessary, we remind Governments of the need to comply with their international obligations and to uphold freedom of religion.

We also support, including through financial assistance, the work of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights which, inter alia, offer technical assistance on legislation. For example, in 2001, their advisory panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion helped develop a package for Armenian schools on religious tolerance, prepared a draft law on the Status of Religious Associations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and expanded a website to gather and identify examples of legislative best practice on Freedom of Religion.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Profession (Ethics)

39. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent discussions the Lord Chancellor has had with the Home Secretary arising from his recent speech about the ethics of the legal profession; and if he will make a statement. [25054]

Mr. Wills: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor have regular meetings on a wide range of matters. As with previous Governments it is not the practice to provide details of confidential discussions.

Lay Magistrates (Essex)

Bob Spink: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what initiatives are planned to recruit more lay magistrates in Essex. [28417]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee for Essex undertakes a range of recruitment activities each year to attract people from across the community to become magistrates. Last year initiatives included adverts in the local press, contacting local trade unions, the Regional Employers Organisation, local ethnic minority groups and the Racial Equality Council, sending them leaflets and offering to give presentations, circulating leaflets and posters to local libraries. This year it plans to continue issuing leaflets to local organisations and include an advert on free street maps, as well as placing adverts in the local press.

HEALTH

IT Systems

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the SNOMED system for recording clinical details for all patient activity in other countries. [10282]

Ms Blears: The use of the SNOMED system produced by the College of American Pathologists, and in particular SNOMED RT, has been assessed in other countries. The clinical details that it contained were weak in the area of primary care. However, because the Clinical Terms Version 3 (Read Codes) produced by the national health service were strong in the area of primary care the opportunity to have a collaborative project between the NHS and the College of American Pathologists was seized. The combined product, SNOMED CT (Clinical Terms) will contain over 400,000 clinical terms. Other countries and healthcare organisations who have SNOMED RT systems will be upgrading their systems to SNOMED CT when it has been tested and released.

Social Workers

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers were employed in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales in each of the last 10 years. [9264]

Jacqui Smith: The whole-time equivalent number of social work staff employed by local authorities in England during the past 10 years is:

Whole-time equivalent[1]

Year (as at 30 September)	*Social work staff*
1991	25,538
1992	26,510
1993	28,333
1994	30,357
1995	31,925
1996	32,140
1997	32,990
1998	33,432
1999	33,912
2000	34,692

[1] Including team leaders/assistant team leaders and (from 1993) care managers.

Social work staff includes team leaders, assistant team leaders and (from 1993) care managers, as well as social workers. The Department does not collect just the number of social workers.

Information for Wales is a matter for the devolved Assembly.

Midwifery

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of midwife-led birthing units for low risk births; and if he will make a statement. [12008]

Yvette Cooper: There are a number of different ways of providing good quality woman-centred midwifery care including care in midwife-led birthing units for low risk births. It is a matter for local health authorities and national health service trusts to decide on the pattern of service provision taking into account the needs of local people, evidence of effectiveness and available resources. The Maternity Workforce Group is looking at alternative models of care.

NHS Information Authority

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to address staff turnover within the NHS Information Authority. [15397]

Ms Blears: The National Health Service Information Authority had a turnover during the last 12 months of 11.36 per cent. This is compared with a 23 per cent. increase in its staff over the same period. Therefore the overall staffing position was growth.

Over the past two years the authority has rationalised its offices from 23 to 11. This has invariably caused a need to relocate some staff from one site to another. However, very few staff with key technical skills left the authority because of this. The vast majority supported all staff through this process with appropriate actions—flexible working; home relocation arrangements; teleworking and transport services.

Significant effort has also been put into the development of a full induction process for new staff joining the authority to ensure, wherever they are located, that they gain an understanding of the purpose, nature and culture of the authority as quickly as possible.

NHS Dentists (Dorset)

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in Dorset were registered with an NHS dentist in April *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 2000. [15786]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 November 2001]:* The number of general dental service registrations in Dorset health authority is shown in the table at 30 April for the years 1995 and 2000. There were no registrations in April 1990; registrations were introduced in October 1990.

April	*Children*	*Adults*	*Total*
1995	100.015	325,207	425,222
2000	102,704	274,611	377,315

The figures for 1995 and 2000 cannot be compared. Registration rates were reduced by the shortening of the registration period for new registrations from 1996. For adults the period fell from 24 to 15 months. Children's registrations used to lapse at the end of the end of the following calendar year; they now last for 24 months.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in Dorset are taking new adult NHS patients; and how many were taking new adult NHS patients in April 1990. [15787]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 November 2001]:* Almost 66 general dental service dentists in Dorset are estimated to be taking on new adult patients. This is an estimate for August and is based on the number of dentists whose new registrations in August exceeded a minimum level.

Information for April 1990 about dentists taking on new patients is not available.

Teenage Pregnancy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policies have followed fulfilment of the Public Service Agreement target to complete and publish reports on teenage pregnancy for 16 to 18-year-olds not in education. [21260]

Yvette Cooper: There is no Public Service Agreement to complete and publish reports on teenage pregnancy for 16 to 18-year-olds not in education.

Our teenage pregnancy strategy aims to help more teenage parents into education, training or employment. 20 Sure Start Plus pilots are under way, providing personal support for pregnant teenagers and teenage parents on health, education, benefits and housing issues. Nine further pilots are testing how best to provide for child care for teenage parents, to help them access education or work. Teenage parents are also eligible for the education maintenance allowance in areas where this is being piloted, two of which (Cornwall and Stoke) are testing additional flexibilities to meet the needs of teenage parents, including a longer period of eligibility for the allowance. Every local area in England has in place a 10-year multi-agency strategy to tackle teenage pregnancy, including action to improve support for teenage parents. Between 1997 and 2001, the percentage of teenage mothers aged between 16 and 19 in education, training or employment increased from 16 per cent. to 29 per cent.

Aspergillus Fumigatus Infection

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans there are to increase funding available for research into Aspergillus fumigatus infection; [22456]

(2) what steps are being taken to fund research into *(a)* the prevention of and *(b)* diseases contracted via Aspergillus fumigatus infection. [22455]

Yvette Cooper: The Department is not funding specific research into the prevention and treatment of Aspergillus fumigatus infections.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of, and treatments for, disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department of Health funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service.

The Department of Health provides support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the NHS. Details of on-going and recently completed research projects are available on the National Research Register (NRR) at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

There are two on-going projects regarding Aspergillus infection:

Genome sequencing of Aspergillus fumigatus, supported by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease

Transcriptional Regulation of Chitinase Expression in Aspergillus fumigatus and the identification of novel targets for antifungal drugs supported by the Wellcome Trust.

The NRR also details 14 completed projects related to Aspergillus fumigatus, one of which was directly supported through the Department of Health's North West Regional Research Programme on DNA fingerprinting of Aspergillus.

The Public Health Laboratory Service, which receives funding from the Department of Health, recently reviewed all reports of Aspergillus infection between 1990 and 1999. Their findings were reported in the Journal of Epidemiology and Infection 2001, Volume 126, at pages 397 to 414.

The Department has no plans to increase funding available for research into Aspergillus fumigatus infection.

The Department keeps its priorities for research under review. Priorities for departmental research for the development of the policy are determined through discussion with policy colleagues, the Departmental Research Committee and Ministers. In the NHS, priorities are identified through widespread consultation with those using, delivering and managing services. They take account of the burden of disease, potential benefits and departmental objectives, as well as the responsibilities and work of other funders.

Drugs

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will break down by *(a)* interventions and *(b)* drugs for clinical condition and tumour type, the money announced on 5 December; and how many patients will be treated in each category. [22765]

Yvette Cooper: The revenue allocations announced on 6 December represent the latest stage in the Government's programme of sustained investment and reform in the national health service set out in the NHS Plan last year. There is only limited earmarking of funds within allocations so that the NHS locally can flexibly manage all the resources available. This means it is not possible to break down the allocations by interventions or by drugs.

£76 million will be earmarked for cancer services in 2002–03 to ensure that investment gets through to the front line to be spent on the priorities identified by doctors, nurses and other frontline staff. The priorities for action in 2002–03 on cancer were set out in the Priorities and Planning Framework published on 6 December.

Solihull Hospital

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a further statement on the future of accident and emergency provisions at Solihull hospital. [22914]

Yvette Cooper: The service review of the accident and emergency department at Solihull hospital is continuing.

The Service Review Group will report to Solihull health authority on its recommendations, with a view to the health authority then launching a public consultation on its preferred option. The review was originally due to report back by the end September, but this has now been extended until early this year.

Food Supplements

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications of omission from the proposed Annexe to the Food Supplements Directive on the future availability of products currently on sale in the UK. [23375]

Yvette Cooper: The implications of omission of substances currently used in products sold on the United Kingdom market from the proposed lists depend on future developments in updating these lists. The proposed directive would establish a seven year transitional period during which member states could allow continued use of all these substances. The annexes would then be amended to include additional substances cleared by the European Union Scientific Committee on Foods.

MMR Vaccine

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with *(a)* drug companies and *(b)* medical organisations on MMR-C; and what plans he has to introduce MMR-C into England and Wales. [24276]

Yvette Cooper: None.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of eligible children in Cheshire have been vaccinated with the MMR vaccine in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 1999–2000; and if he will fund a public campaign to promote the use of the MMR vaccine throughout the north-west of England. [26633]

Yvette Cooper: The percentage of children in Cheshire immunised against measles, mumps and rubella by their second birthday and fifth birthday is shown in the table. An England wide MMR information campaign was launched last summer, which provided a range of new material for parents and health professionals including posters, factsheets, videos and leaflets. The materials were also launched onto the national immunisation website www.immunisation.org.uk. The aim of this campaign is to meet parents wishes for clear, factual and accurate information about MMR.

Percentage of children immunised against MMR

		By their fifth birthday[1]	
At 31 March	*By their second birthday*	*First dose*	*First and second dose*
North Cheshire			
1999	90	—	—
2000	90	92	72
2001	88	92	75
South Cheshire			
1999	89	—	—
2000	88	90	65
2001	89	90	72

[1] Information about uptake of MMR immunisation at age five was collected for the first time in 1999–2000

Source:

Department of Health, Statistics Division SD2B

Cancer Nurses

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cancer nurse specialists there were in each year since 1997, broken down by type of cancer. [24597]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Cancer-related Illnesses

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients treated for cancer-related illnesses within the last 12 months were prescribed courses of treatment *(a)* approved and *(b)* awaiting approval by NICE. [25877]

Yvette Cooper: Over the last 12 months the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) have published appraisals on the use of new chemotherapy drugs to treat ovarian, brain, pancreatic, lung and breast cancers as well as leukaemia. Around 19,000 patients each year should now be benefiting from chemotherapy treatments appraised by NICE.

NICE is currently appraising further treatments for advanced ovarian, breast and colorectal cancers and chronic myeloid leukaemia.

Smoking Helpline

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have called the smoking helpline since it was set up. [24302]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* A total of 325,698 people have called the national health service smoking helpline in the inclusive period 1 June 2000 to 2 December 2001.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed on the smoking helpline; and at what cost. [24304]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 January 2001]:* A total of 213 staff, including 49 specialist advisers, are trained to work on the helpline services. The precise numbers engaged at any given time depends upon predicted call volumes.

The overall budget for the specialist adviser staff in 2001–02 is £285,000. Calls dealt with by the non-specialist service are charged on a per call basis with a budget ceiling of £239,000.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the smoking helpline cost to set up. [24301]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Set up costs of the national health service smoking helpline amounted to £37,420.

Media Injunctions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent in legal fees in each of the last five years in relation to obtaining injunctions against media organisations. [24320]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The Department has incurred no legal costs in relation to obtaining injunctions because we have not sought any injunctions against the media in the last five years.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the patients awaiting discharge in inappropriately occupied beds in Worcestershire hospitals will have their future care packages funded by *(a)* the health authority, *(b)* the county social services department and *(c)* a combination of both; what the equivalent figures were in January 2001; and if he will make a statement. [26403]

Yvette Cooper: Funding arrangements for the number of patients awaiting discharge in inappropriately occupied beds in Worcestershire hospitals 2000–01 are as follows.

	December 2000	*December 2001*
Health authority funded placements	11	19
Social Services funded placements	9	11
Jointly funded placements	9	5

Note:

The data for each year come from two different sources. The 2001 figures have been taken from the weekly SITREPs, and the 2000 figures have been taken from the 2000–01 Q3 CIC return. Both sets of figures cover the last day in December. The monthly figure is a snapshot for that day, the weekly figure is a snapshot for the week ending 31 December.

We are investing an extra £900 million in intermediate care to ensure that we can free up acute hospital beds which are being occupied by older people who could be cared for at home or elsewhere, which in turn will speed up accident and emergency admissions. The NHS Plan clearly states that by 2004 we will end widespread bed blocking. To achieve this we have a target of 5,000 extra intermediate care beds and an additional 1,700 non-residential intermediate care places by 2003–04, with 220,000 more people receiving intermediate care services.

I am advised that Worcestershire county council's allocation of £713,000 from the Government's "Cash for Change" initiative will be used to fund additional residential and nursing home placements, a home care discharge scheme and one off payments to support independent sector homes cost pressures. In addition, Worcestershire health authority received an extra £382,000 in April 2001 to help them prepare for winter pressures.

Kidderminster Hospital

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the arrangements for the alternative storage of the deceased following the closure of the mortuary at Kidderminster hospital; and if he will make a statement on the implications for costs to families. [26222]

Yvette Cooper: I am informed that the coroner, local funeral directors and the Kidderminster and district community health council have been involved in the planning of alternative arrangements for the storage and removal of the bodies of deceased patients from Kidderminster hospital.

Where the family have already decided upon a funeral director, then arrangements will go ahead as planned. In those cases where a decision has yet to be made, then arrangements have been made with a local funeral directors company for appropriate storage of the deceased, at no cost to the family, until a decision is reached.

The trust has confirmed that it sees as a priority the need to maintain a service which treats the deceased with respect and dignity, and which is compassionate in the manner in which it relates to the members of their family.

Haemophilia

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received concerning the availability of recombinant clotting factors to haemophilia patients in England; and if he will make a statement. [26423]

Yvette Cooper: Departmental officials discussed the availability of recombinant clotting factors with the Haemophilia Society on 30 November 2001.

We are actively considering extending the provision of recombinant clotting factors to all haemophilia patients in England when supplies allow. Currently the policy is to provide recombinant clotting factors for new haemophilia patients and children under 16.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authorities and trusts in England which provide recombinant clotting factors to haemophiliac patients aged over 16 years. [27244]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of human TB there have been in the United Kingdom since 1995, broken down by year and county. [26753]

Yvette Cooper: The number of reported cases of human tuberculosis in the United Kingdom from 1995 to 2000 is shown in the table.

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[1]
Northern and Yorkshire	624	605	617	642	611	573
Trent	520	544	484	498	497	456
Eastern	267	260	232	268	228	273
London	2,024	2,190	2,411	2,444	2,493	2,643
South East	484	457	483	503	495	527
South West	202	201	212	213	209	228
West Midlands	654	655	610	673	712	734
North West	633	581	615	674	693	623
Wales	180	161	195	172	205	174
Scotland	478	509	433	464	497	406
Northern Ireland	90	75	75	61	61	58
Total	6,174	6,238	6,367	6,612	6,701	6,695

[1] Provisional

Herceptin

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to receive the findings of NICE regarding the use of the drug Herceptin as treatment for breast cancer; and if he will make a statement; [26962]

(2) which health authorities in England and Wales have authorised the use of the drug Herceptin as treatment for breast cancer within the national health service. [26960]

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales have asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to appraise Herceptin for the treatment of advanced breast cancer, and to issue guidance on its use to the NHS in England and Wales. NICE expects to issue guidance on Herceptin in spring 2002.

Data on the number of health authorities in England and Wales currently authorising the use of Herceptin is not collected. However, as with all newly licensed treatments in advance of a NICE appraisal, the Department's advice is that funding authorities should consider the clinical evidence available for a specific treatment before making any decision.

Explosion (Sandhurst)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health of residents in Sandhurst, Gloucestershire, following the explosion at Cleansing Services Group Ltd.; and if he will make a statement. [26656]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Gloucestershire health authority has monitored the health of the residents of Sandhurst following the fire at Cleansing Services Group in October 2000.

The authority has found that the physical and/or psychological health of a significant proportion of Sandhurst residents was affected following the fire. The majority of physical symptoms experienced resolved within four weeks although a small number of people reported continuing physical symptoms seven months after the incident. The health authority has established a study to monitor the long-term effects of the incident on the community.

GP Surgeries (North Stoke)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the areas of unmet needs in respect of access to GP surgeries in North Stoke. [26932]

Yvette Cooper: There are 17 general practitioner practices in the locality, and I understand that capacity exists to accept more patients.

In addition, Stoke (Haywood) walk-in centre opened in June 2000 and has proved popular locally, seeing 21,000 patients in the first 12 months.

Private Finance Initiative (West Midlands)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health-related PFI proceeds are *(a)* under way and *(b)* being evaluated in the west midlands; and where they are located. [26746]

Yvette Cooper: the current private finance initiative schemes that are *(a)* under way and *(b)* being evaluated in the west midlands are as follows:

PFI schemes commissioned

Sedgley Community Centre (Dudley)

Black Country Mental Health in-patient facility (Sandwell)

Stoke-on-Trent Mental Health in-patient facility (Stoke-on-Trent)

Monyhull Learning Disability in-patient facility (South Birmingham)

PFI schemes in build

Hereford District General Hospital

Worcester District General Hospital

Northern Birmingham Mental Health in-patient facility

Dudley District General Hospital

PFI schemes in procurement

Walsgrave District General Hospital and Mental Health in-patient facility (Coventry)

City Hospital Ambulatory Care Centre (Birmingham)

Wolverhampton Managed Radiology scheme

Nationally prioritised schemes in fourth and fifth waves (preparing business cases and planning to place OJEC advertisements in 2002–03)

University Hospital Birmingham Acute Hospital and South Birmingham Mental Health in-patient facility

North Staffordshire redevelopment of Acute Hospital site and North Stoke Primary Care Centre (Stoke-on-Trent)

Walsall Women's and Children's Unit and Ambulatory Care Centre

Wolverhampton Acute Hospital site rationalisation.

Community Pharmacists

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further plans he has to review the fees paid to community pharmacists for dispensing NHS prescriptions. [26781]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* We are currently considering representations on this issue from the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee and others.

Hospital Investment (Shropshire)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of hospital investment in the last five years in Shropshire has been allocated to the hospitals in *(a)* Telford, *(b)* Shrewsbury and *(c)* Oswestry. [26750]

Yvette Cooper: The total capital allocations to the three national health service trusts in Shropshire during the four-year period 1998–99 to 2001–02 are shown in the table.

	£ million	*Percentage*
Telford (Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust)	10.9	37
Shrewsbury (Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust)	11.7	40
Oswestry (Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust)	6.6	23
Total	29.2	100

Note:

The information requested is only available for the last four financial years (1998–99 to 2001–02 inclusive).

Cancer Patients

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of patients in each cancer speciality referred by their general practitioners are referred *(a)* urgently and *(b)* non-urgently; [27233]

(2) how many patients in each cancer specialty were referred by their general practitioners, *(a)* urgently and *(b)* non-urgently, in the last year for which figures are available; [27231]

(3) what percentage of patients in each cancer speciality referred to by their general practitioners as *(a)* urgent and *(b)* non-urgent are seen within a month. [27232]

Yvette Cooper: The two-week out-patient waiting time standard was introduced for urgent cases of suspected breast cancer from April 1999 and was extended to all other urgent cases of suspected cancer during 2000. Performance data against the standard are shown in the table. Data for non-urgent referrals are not collected centrally.

Full implementation of the maximum target wait of one month from diagnosis to their first definitive treatment for breast cancer was introduced on 31 December 2001. Central monitoring began on 1 January 2002 and data will be published later in the year.

'Two week wait' performance: Percentage of patients seen within two weeks for first consultant out-patient appointment when referred urgently by their GP for suspected cancer, and the referral is received by the NHS trust within 24 hours: England

	2000–01					
	Quarter 3			*Quarter 4*		
Cancer site	*Number of referrals*	*Number seen within 14 days*	*Percentage seen within 14 days*	*Number of referrals*	*Number seen within 14 days*	*Percentage seen within 14 days*
Breast	20,540	19,697	95.9	20,356	19,513	95.9
Children's	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	127	125	98.4
Lung	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	4,359	4,141	95.0
Haematological malignancies including leukaemia	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	557	529	95.0
Upper Gastrointestinal	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	5,429	4,990	91.9
Lower Gastrointestinal	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	9,458	8,723	92.2
Skin	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	5,906	5,499	93.1
Gynaecological	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	3,722	3,441	92.5
Brain/Central Nervous System	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	185	169	91.4
Urological	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	4,714	4,034	85.6
Head and Neck	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	2,613	2,524	96.6
Sarcomas	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	122	114	93.4
Other Cancers	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	234	222	94.9

[1] Not collected

	2001–02					
	Quarter 1			Quarter 2		
Cancer site	*Number of referrals*	*Number seen within 14 days*	*Percentage seen within 14 days*	*Number of referrals*	*Number seen within 14 days*	*Percentage seen within 14 days*
Breast	21,918	21,001	95.8	23,039	21,624	93,9
Children's	107	107	100.0	105	102	97.1
Lung	4,328	4,028	93.1	4,217	3,991	94.6
Haematological malignancies including leukaemia	537	507	94.4	650	625	96.2
Upper Gastrointestinal	5,775	5,296	91.7	6,604	6,041	91.5
Lower Gastrointestinal	10.562	9,468	89.6	12.235	10,975	89.7
Skin	8,419	7,690	91.3	10,314	9,120	88.4
Gynaecological	4,400	4,035	91.7	5,423	4,960	91.5
Brain/Central Nervous System	199	180	90.5	260	241	92.7
Urological	5,185	4,444	85.7	6,596	5,573	84.5
Head and Neck	3.452	3,212	93.0	4,169	3,936	94.4
Sarcomas	138	130	94.2	139	125	89.9
Other Cancers	378	360	95.2	353	337	95.5

Source:
Department of Health form QMCW

Heart Disease

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the death rate per 100,000 among people aged under 65 years due to heart disease was in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [27364]

Yvette Cooper: The European age standardised death rates per 100,000 population from ischaemic heart disease aged under 65 in the United Kingdom is shown in the table.

Year	*Persons*
1996	41.7
1997	39.2
1998	37.3
1999	34.1
2000	32.1

Children's Hospices

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was given to each children's hospice in the last year by his Department. [27249]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Small Bowel Transplantation

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on developing and extending the availability of small bowel transplantation. [27349]

Yvette Cooper: We recognise this is a very important national service and good progress has been made in making it available to those who might benefit from the procedure. Both adult and paediatric small bowel transplantation services have been designated by the National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group and national centres identified since April 1997.

No transplants were performed before this date. In the case of children, 14 transplants have now been performed. In the case of adults, a number of patients have been assessed but to date transplantation has not been the preferred option for their care.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision he has made in his hospital building programme for additional costs resulting from the aggregates levy. [26511]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Any additional costs arising from the levy may be factored into bidders proposals under both the private finance initiative and public capital procurement routes. Such bids will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis by individual national health service trusts on the grounds of meeting service need, affordability and value for money.

NHS Appointments

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list appointments to chairs of NHS trusts made by the NHS Appointments Commissioner for the west midlands. [27408]

Yvette Cooper: The chair appointments made by the National Health Service Appointments Commission to NHS trusts in the west midlands are as follows:

Chair appointment	*NHS trust*
Professor Margaret Bamford	Dudley Priority Health
Mr. Charles Goody	Coventry Healthcare
Mr. Bryan Knight	Sandwell Healthcare
Mr. Francis McCarney	George Eliot Hospital
Mr. Michael O'Riorden	Worcestershire Acute Hospitals
Dr. Bransby Thomas	South Warwickshire Combined Care
Mr. Clive Wilkinson	Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull (Teaching)
Sir Bernard Zissman	Good Hope Hospital

BCG Vaccination

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his future policy is for BCG vaccination; and if he will make a statement on the availability of the vaccine. [27593]

Yvette Cooper: Our recommendation for the use of BCG vaccine is based on the advice of an independent expert advisory committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which is regularly reviewed.

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BCG vaccine is readily available to all those recommended to receive it. These include:

Health service staff who may have come in contact with infectious patients or their specimens.

Veterinary or other staff who handle animal species known to be susceptible to tuberculosis.

Staff of prisons, old people's homes, refugee hostels and hostels for the homeless.

Contacts of cases known to be suffering from active pulmonary tuberculosis.

Immigrants from countries with a high prevalence of TB, their children and infants wherever born.

Those intending to stay in Asia, Africa, central or south America for more than a month.

School children between the ages of 10 and 14 years.

This policy is set out in the booklet "Immunisation against Infectious Disease 1996".

Alternative Blood Therapies

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the appropriate use of blood working group will publish its report on the use of alternative blood therapies in place of transfusing blood. [27502]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The National Blood Service "appropriate use of blood" group is currently gathering evidence on alternatives to blood, bloodless surgery and autologous blood transfusion. Proposed guidance material will be considered by the Chief Medical Officer's National Blood Transfusion Committee later this year. It is anticipated that the guidance will be promulgated through regional and local hospital blood transfusion committees.

Avon/Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Health Authority

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make an announcement on the appointment of a chief executive for the new Avon/Gloucestershire and Wiltshire health authority; and for what reason it has not been possible to make that appointment already. [27314]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The appointment of Mr. Mark Outhwaite as chief executive was announced on 14 January. It was not possible to complete the process of making appointments to all 28 strategic health authorities before Christmas and the intervening holiday period inevitable imposed a delay. Now that the appointment has been made, work on setting up the new health authority and preparing it for its role will go ahead at the same speed as other areas.

Sodium Consumption

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Food Standards Agency's position is on the acceptable level of daily sodium intake for the general population; on what evidence the Food Standards Agency bases its policy on dietary salt consumption; and what recent advice the Food Standards Agency has given Ministers regarding the recommended daily sodium consumption. [27693]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency's advice on salt is that individuals should reduce their intake to 6 grammes per day (equivalent to 2.3 grammes of sodium). This is based on the recommendations made by the expert committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public awareness campaigns the Food Standards Agency is undertaking to reduce daily human consumption of salt; how the Food Standards Agency communicates its recommended daily intake of sodium to the public; and what media outlets the Food Standards Agency uses to highlight its policy on salt and its recommended daily intake of sodium. [27694]

Yvette Cooper: Advice to the general public on levels of salt intake is covered as an integral part of Food Standards Agency activity to provide information on a healthy balanced diet generally. This is done through a variety of routes which include FSA publications, the FSA website, and advice to the food industry on the nutritional labelling of foods.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that women who have suffered pre-menopausal breast cancer will be subject to automatic recall under the NHS breast cancer screening programme. [27756]

Yvette Cooper: National guidelines[1] state that women who have been treated for breast cancer should undergo mammography yearly during the first five years after surgery, and every two years afterwards, regardless of age. The national health service breast screening programme invites women aged 50 to 64 for mammography every three years, to be extended to the age of 70 by 2004. It is for a woman's clinical team to decide whether she enters the breast screening programme at age 50 or if she is monitored outside the programme.

[1] Improving Outcomes in Breast Cancer: The Manual (July 1996). This is being updated for publication in 2002.

NHS Complaints Procedure

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will alter the NHS complaints procedure so that independent review bodies can investigate a complaint relating to more than one NHS body. [26013]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* We are currently in the process of reforming the national health service complaints procedure and as part of that we are considering how best a second, "independent review" element of the procedure might work.

Food Allergies

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been conducted into the underlying causes of food allergies to commonly available ingredients, with particular reference to *(a)* wheat, *(b)* dairy products and *(c)* nuts. [27852]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency is currently spending £800,000 a year on research into food allergy. This research focuses both on the occurrence of food allergies and the mechanisms underlying the reactions with emphasis on severe allergy, in particular peanut and tree-nut allergies. The FSA currently funds 12 research projects on peanut allergy (the main cause of food allergy related deaths in the United Kingdom) and one on dairy products. The FSA does not currently fund any research into wheat allergy, although the research on mechanisms may be of relevance. Further detail on the food allergy research programme can be obtained from the FSA research programmes annual report 1999–2000 which has been placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the chairmanship of the South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust will be announced; and if he will make a statement. [28242]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Proposals for the establishment of the South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust are still being considered. A decision will be announced as soon as possible.

vCJD

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died from vCJD since August 1990; and how many were vegetarian. [28390]

Yvette Cooper: Up to 7 January 2002 there have been 104 deaths from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (VCJD) within the United Kingdom. Four out of the 104 were vegetarians during some period of their lives but none were lifelong vegetarians.

EU Health Council

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which representatives briefed his Department on devolved Scottish matters in preparation for the EU Health Council in Brussels on 15 November; and on what issues. [28682]

Yvette Cooper: Scotland's interests were represented at the November Health Council by the United Kingdom delegation led by the Minister of State for Health (Mr. Hutton), who represented all parts of the United Kingdom. There are regular communications between the Department of Health and the Scottish Executive on European Union health matters, but specific discussions are conducted on a confidential basis.

Correspondence

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the letter dated 30 July 2001 from the hon. and learned Member for Harborough concerning a constituent child protection social worker suspended by Leicester city social services department. [28583]

Jacqui Smith: We have transferred the letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and he will be responding shortly.

Nurses

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the starting annual salary is for newly qualified nurses in and *(a)* London *(b)* the rest of the UK; after how long a newly qualified nurse will receive a pay rise; and if he will make a statement on nurses' pay, with special reference to rises they have had since 1997, and pay rises they will receive. [27674]

Mr. Hutton: The annual starting salary for a newly qualified nurse working full-time in inner London is £19,178 (including London allowance and cost of living supplements). For staff working outside London and the south of England the annual starting salary for a newly qualified nurse working full-time is £15,445.

Newly qualified nurses normally enter the clinical grading structure on the first pay point on Grade D with annual progression through a further three points until they reach the scale maximum.

We accepted in full the recommendation of the Review Body for nursing staff, midwives and health visitors and professions allied to medicine for pay in 2002–03. From 1 April 2002 all nurses, midwives and health visitors will receive an increase of at least 3.6 per cent. Pay has increased across the board for all nurses by at least 26 per cent. in cash terms since 1997.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* budgeted, *(b)* actual and *(c)* projected expenditure by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in each year from 1995 to the end of the current comprehensive spending review period; and if he will make a statement. [25744]

Angela Eagle: The following sums have been allocated to and spent by the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate since 1994–95.

£ million

	Budgeted	*Actual expenditure*
1994–95	186	187
1995–96	207	202
1996–97	223	216
1997–98	226	207
1998–99	223	214
1999–2000	794	857
2000–01	1,199	1,251
2001–02	976	—
2002–03	990	—
2003–04	1,045	—

Figures include capital expenditure and are in cash terms until 2000–01 and resource terms thereafter.

A significant portion of the overall budget from 1999–2000 onwards relates to asylum support. Up to 1998–99, the budgets were assigned to and expenditure incurred by the Department of Social Security and the Department of Health and not by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. The sums spent are set down in a reply given by the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 9 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 331W. The budgets for this year and for the two following years are provisional and may be amended following the conclusion of on-going discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury.

I shall write to my hon. Friend when I have additional information on the budget and projected expenditure for this year.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the Immigration and Nationality Directorate is meeting its target for granting applications for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom as a spouse; and if he will make a statement; [22146]

(2) if the Immigration and Nationality Directorate is meeting its target for granting applications for extensions to visas to study in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [22147]

Angela Eagle: We aim to decide 70 per cent. of all new general and settlement applications within three weeks but at present it is taking up to eight weeks to consider new straightforward applications. The reasons for this are (i) the exceptionally high number of new applications received this year, and especially, in recent months; and (ii) process changes that are being introduced. We are working to reduce this to three weeks or less as soon as possible. Because of the high intake, those cases which require more detailed consideration are currently taking six months or a little more to complete.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on levels of employment at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at Croydon. [26784]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* At March 1999, an estimate of the full-time equivalent figure for the number of staff employed in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in Croydon was 1,920. On 1 October 2001, this figure had risen to 3,940. This includes staff dealing with immigration casework as well as those who work in a support function.

European Arrest Warrant

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the date on which legislation to introduce extradition under the European arrest warrant will be introduced. [26605]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have made our commitment to an Extradition Bill clear and measures will be brought before the House in the usual way.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for determining the competent authorities in each of the EU member states as to who are to be their issuing and executing judicial authorities in respect of Article 6 of the Council Framework Decision relating to the European arrest warrant. [26950]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between member states stipulates at Article 1(1) that

> "the European arrest warrant shall be a court decision."

At Article 6(1) it further stipulates that:

> "The issuing judicial authority shall be the judicial authority of the issuing state which is competent to issue an arrest warrant by virtue of the law of the issuing state";

and at Article 6(2) that:

> "The executing judicial authority shall be the judicial authority of the executing state which is competent by virtue of the law of the executing state".

By this the Framework Decision makes clear that the issuing and executing authorities must be judicial authorities, but the criteria that the member states may apply to determine which of their judicial authorities shall be responsible for the issuing and execution of European arrest warrants are left to each member state to decide upon. This is consistent with Article 34.2(b) of the Treaty on European Union, under which the Framework Decision has been negotiated, which states that:

> "Framework decisions shall be binding upon the member states as to the results to be achieved but shall leave to the national authorities the choice of the form and methods".

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the offences in English law to which Article 2(2) of the Council Framework Decision relating to the European arrest warrant refers which are punishable under the law of an issuing member state by a sentence of three years and where dual criminality is not required. [26951]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The list at Article 2(2) is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all the serious criminal offences under the national law of all member states. To answer this question in full would require listing all the offences in English law which might fall under one of the generic headings of offences in Article 2(2) of the Council Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant, and which are punishable by a maximum sentence of at least three years, and cross-referring them to all the offences in the penal codes of the other member states of the European Union (EU) which fall under these headings which are punishable by this sentence. The generic headings listed at Article 2(2) relate to conduct for which there are criminal sanctions in all the member states of the EU, even if the legal definitions of the offences do not precisely match. On any warrant, the offence for which surrender is sought will be framed by the issuing judicial authority under its national law.

Examples of such offences in English law, to which there is a likely equivalent in the law of other member states are: under the heading of "illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances"—drug trafficking offences involving Class A or Class B drugs; under the heading of "terrorism"—offences under the Explosive Substances Act 1883 and offences under the Terrorism Act 2000 as amended by the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; under the heading of "rape"—rape and serious sexual offences; under the heading of "swindling"—offences under the Theft Acts 1968 and 1978 that carry a sentence of at least three years; and under the heading of "racism and xenophobia", offences relating to incitement to racial hatred, racially aggravated offences and racial discrimination under the Race Relations Act, where a sentence of at least three years applies.

In-sourcing

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what work previously out-sourced from Government Departments to the private sector he plans to in-source back to Departments. [26032]

Mr. Blunkett: Where provision of a service has been contracted out to a private company, any decision on future delivery will be based on value for money considerations, including performance and departmental requirements. We currently have no plans to bring back into the core Home Office any services which have been contracted out.

Credit Card Fraud

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were found guilty of credit card fraud in each of the past 10 years; [27370]

(2) what the cost was of credit card fraud in each of the past 10 years. [27371]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Home Office Court Proceedings database is unable to distinguish offences of credit card fraud from other types of fraud as the circumstances of individual offences are not collected centrally.

The following table shows the number of persons found guilty or cautioned for all offences of 'other fraud' (as distinct from fraud by a company director or false accounting) for the years 1991 to 2000:

Persons found guilty or cautioned for 'other fraud' in England and Wales, 1991 to 2000

	Number
1991	22,775
1992	23,429
1993	21,178
1994	21,035
1995	19,807
1996	19,394
1997	19,442
1998	21,760
1999	22,191
2000	20,904

Information on the cost of credit card fraud is not collated by the Home Office. However, the Association of Payment Clearing Services has estimated the cost of reported losses due to credit card fraud over the last five years as:

	£ million
1996	97.1
1997	122.0
1998	135.0
1999	188.4
2000	292.6

Source:
APACS Fraud in Focus 2001

Work Permits

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to change the rules governing the issuing of work permits to Lithuanian citizens; and if he will make a statement. [27832]

Angela Eagle: There is no differential between nationalities when considering a work permit application. The decision is determined by whether the application meets the criteria of the work permit arrangements.

Ministerial Travel

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28090]

Mr. Blunkett: All arrangements for official travel are made in line with the guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code, and the accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers", using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations. My last official visit by train was on 11 December last year to address the Balsall Health Forum in the west midlands. For this visit I returned to London by rail from Birmingham New Street to London Euston. I intend to continue using the railway for official travel whenever this is practical.

I almost always travel to and from my constituency by rail, undertaking official duties in and around the area of Sheffield. The last official engagement on such a visit was on Friday 11 January.

Child Asylum Seekers

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the motivation of *(a)* child asylum seekers and *(b)* those who facilitate their journeys; and if he will make a statement. [28112]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* We have not assessed the motivation of child asylum seekers. All asylum applications, regardless of the applicant's age, will be considered in accordance with the criteria set out in the United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees.

There is no common motivation for those facilitating child asylum seekers. Some will act altruistically, others to improve the economic or educational prospects of family members. But there are many whose motivation is profit and the involvement of organised people smuggling gangs is becoming increasingly common.

Visas

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is given to applicants for a new student visa about the length of time that they may be without their passport. [23635]

Angela Eagle: Information about the likely time scale for considering applications for leave to remain is quoted in the relevant application form and on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website. The website is updated regularly. Since 1 January 2002, all new applications for leave to remain are being acknowledged. The acknowledgement letter indicates the likely time scale for the application to be considered. If, on initial consideration, the application cannot be decided for whatever reason, another letter giving a further indication of the likely time scale is sent to the applicant.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what standards of service he sets for processing individual applications for visa renewals; [23633]

(2) for what reasons the visa office estimate that the renewal of a one year student visa will take at least five weeks. [23636]

Angela Eagle: We aim to decide 70 per cent. of all new general and settlement applications within three weeks but at present it is taking up to eight weeks to consider new straightforward applications. The reasons for this are (i) the exceptionally high number of new applications received this year, and especially, in recent months; and (ii) process changes that are being introduced. We are working to reduce this to three weeks or less as soon as possible.

Passports

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the minimum period is within which a British passport holder can obtain an emergency replacement in the event of loss or theft; and what the minimum period was prior to 14 January. [28424]

Angela Eagle: On 14 January the Passport Service introduced two new guaranteed services at its public counters. These are a same day service at £75 for a standard passport and a one week service at £60 for a standard passport. The standard two week service (non-guaranteed) remains available for postal application. The same day service is not available for first passport applications because of the time needed to complete checks on identity. Applications to replace lost or stolen passports are dealt with in the same way as first applications, because the high incidence of fraud makes it necessary to check identity and records of the previous issue. This means that the fastest service normally available for replacement of a lost or stolen passport is the guaranteed one week service.

Exceptionally, in the case of a genuine emergency involving travel for compassionate reasons or business purposes, a same day service can be provided. Prior to 14 January, services were not guaranteed and turnaround times would depend on factors such as the volume of applications being dealt with and the relative difficulty of establishing identity in the individual case. The change is intended to help customers by providing a choice of services with guarantees for those who need a fast service, while protecting the integrity of the British passport.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in each of the last five years the Passport Office Agency has paid compensation to its customers; and what was the total sum of such compensation. [28423]

Angela Eagle: The total number of compensation payments made to customers of the United Kingdom Passport Service over the last five years is given in the table together with the amounts for each year.

	Number of payments	*Total amount of compensation (£)*
1997	1,557	42,303
1998	2,086	60,610
1999	5,142	344,984
2000	2,478	110,306
2001	2,193	71,955

Asylum Seekers

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide additional accommodation for asylum seekers in Essex; and in which towns. [28419]

Angela Eagle: It is current policy to disperse asylum seekers away from London and the south-east. In his statement on 29 October last year my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made it clear that the policy of dispersing asylum seekers away from London and the south-east would continue. I can confirm that to date the Immigration and Nationality Directorate has not identified any areas in Essex suitable for use as cluster areas for the dispersal of asylum seekers.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 21 January 2002

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [28000]

The Solicitor-General: I am not aware of any departmental property being stolen from or lost by the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers during the years 1998–2001.

The details of the other Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

1998–99

One computer valued at £2,000 (stolen). One laptop computer valued at £800 (stolen).

1999–2000

Two computers valued at £4,000 (stolen). One laptop computer valued at £2,842 (stolen).

2000–01

One mobile telephone valued at £170 (stolen).

2001–02

One mobile telephone valued at £150 (stolen).

Treasury Solicitor's Department

1998

One mobile telephone valued at £95 (stolen). Three dictaphone machines valued at £196 (stolen).

1999

Nil

2000

Nil

2001

One mobile telephone valued at £174 (stolen). One laptop computer valued at £850 (stolen). Five mobile telephones valued at £870 (lost).

Serious Fraud office

1998

One mobile telephone valued at £65 (lost)

1999

One dictation machine valued at £84 (lost).

2000

One mobile telephone valued at £65 (stolen). One mobile telephone valued at £65 (lost).

2001

Two mobile telephones valued at £130 (stolen). One laptop computer valued at £1,600 (stolen). One mobile telephone valued at £65 (lost).

DEFENCE

Victoria Cross

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about *(a)* the criteria and *(b)* the procedure for awarding the Victoria Cross. [28214]

Dr. Moonie: The Victoria Cross is awarded for most conspicuous gallantry of the highest order during active operations[1]. As such it is the highest award available for operational gallantry. Lesser degrees of operational gallantry are recognised by awards of the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross, Distinguished Service Cross, Military Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross and a Mention in Despatches. Recommendations for any of these awards are initiated by the service man's or service woman's Commanding Officer and considered by Committees at various levels in the Ministry of Defence. The Committees consist mainly of senior officers of all three services who will have had considerable operational experience. Successful recommendations are passed to the Queen for her approval. The awards are then published and recipients invited to a State Investiture where they are invested by the Queen or her representative.

The Victoria Cross along with the other awards for operational gallantry may be awarded to all ranks of the naval, military and air forces of the United Kingdom, all members of the Merchant Navy and civilians serving under the orders of any of the above forces. All these awards may be made posthumously.

Tanzania

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of benefits there are going to be to Tanzania from the deal to supply a military air traffic control system. [26045]

Dr. Moonie: Export licensing decisions are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary for Trade and Industry. The Ministry of Defence provides advice to the DTI, together with the other advisory Departments, as appropriate. Following the policy set out by previous Governments, the Government do not comment on individual export licence applications for reasons of commercial confidentiality. Details of export licensing decisions will continue to be published in the Government's annual report on strategic export controls and will be subject to retrospective scrutiny by the all-party Quadripartite Committee.

A400M/C130J

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the projected noise footprint of the A400M; and what is the noise footprint of the Hercules C130J. [26346]

Dr. Moonie: The A400M aircraft will meet all current international noise regulations, but exact noise characteristics will not be known until the aircraft's development and flight tests have been completed. The C130J aircraft meets all relevant US Federal Aviation

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[1] This is expanded on in the Third Clause of the Royal Warrant for The Victoria Cross which reads: "It is ordained that the Cross shall only be awarded for most conspicuous bravery, or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy".

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Authority civil noise regulations. The Ministry of Defence does not hold noise information on the C130J in the form requested. We expect the noise characteristics of the A400M and the C130J will be similar. But their overall noise impact should be less than that of the C130K aircraft they are replacing, because significantly greater usage of ground simulators for training will reduce the overall number of flights.

A400M

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the RAF will take delivery of the A400M; and if he will make a statement. [27165]

Dr. Moonie: The in-service date of the A400M, defined as acceptance into service of the seventh aircraft, is 2010. We expect delivery of the final (25th) aircraft to be in 2014.

Vehicles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the use of British-built vehicles by the MOD Police. [27415]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Purchases of vehicle for the Ministry of Defence Police are made on the basis of best value for money. We are pleased to procure British-built vehicles where they meet our requirements and offer best value for money. We have no plans designed to increase the proportion of British-built vehicles at the expense of these key criteria.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the benefits are of operating one Toyota and one Mitsubishi for the MOD Police; and what competition there was for this requirement. [27501]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The Toyota and Mitsubishi are used for specialist police operation and were selected primarily on the basis of operational requirements. As such the requirement was not subject to competition.

Territorial Army (Pay Awards)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what targets exist for settling arrears of pay for Territorial Army service men and women. [R] [28217]

Dr. Moonie: Arrears of pay claims for Territorial Army soldiers are actioned within a 10 day target of receipt of all supporting documentation.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about delays in paying Territorial Army soldiers. [R] [28216]

Dr. Moonie: I am unaware of any current delays existing with payments to Territorial Army soldiers.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army service men and women have arrears of pay outstanding in excess of *(a)* two months and *(b)* three months. [R] [28218]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently no cases recorded centrally for arrears of pay being outstanding in excess of two and three months.

Operation Veritas

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the procedure for considering gallantry awards in Operation Veritas. [28213]

Dr. Moonie: The procedure for considering gallantry awards for Operation Veritas will be identical to that used for all other operations. Recommendations for awards, whether they be for gallantry or meritorious service, are initiated by an individual's commanding officer and passed to the Ministry of Defence where they are considered by various Committees. Successful recommendations are then submitted to the Queen for her approval prior to publication. Lists of operational awards are published biannually each spring and autumn and notified to the press. The names of certain recipients may have to be withheld in the interests of personal security.

Ministry of Defence Police

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the complement, gender and ethnic balance of the Operational Support Unit of the Ministry of Defence Police is; what the OSU's annual running costs are for the current financial year; if he plans to increase the budget for running costs for 2002–03; if he will make a statement on the base of the OSU; and what changes are planned in these arrangements. [28587]

Dr. Moonie: The complement (as at 1 January 2002) of the Operational Support Unit was 50 and the strength 45, which included six female officers and one member of an ethnic minority. The budget allocated for the OSU, for the current financial year, is £2.651 million. While there are no plans to relocate the OSU based at MDP Wethersfield, approval has been given to form a second OSU (of 50 personnel) based at a location in the north of England.

Retirement Age

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change his Department's normal retirement age policy; and when he will make an announcement. [28586]

Dr. Moonie: In the Ministry of Defence some 60,000 civilian employees, two thirds of the work force, have the option to retire at any time between age 60 and 65. The MOD has been reviewing the case for giving the remainder, who have a normal retirement age of 60, the same option. Our review is nearing completion and we expect to be able to announce its findings in the next few weeks.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had on changes to the Government's position on nuclear test veterans following the decision of the Pensions Appeal Tribunal in the case of Tom Duggan. [28057]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* No such discussions have taken place.

Colchester Garrison

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the new living accommodation for soldiers at

Colchester Garrison will be ready for occupation; if he plans to allow the public to view the new buildings; and if there will be an official opening ceremony. [28523]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* We expect that the first of the new single living accommodation (SLA) will be ready for occupation by mid-2005, with the remainder, along with the rest of the garrison, completed two years later. There are no plans to invite the public to view either the SLA or the working accommodation. We intend to have an opening ceremony when phase 1 of the private finance initiative is completed.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [29045]

Dr. Moonie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence signed a policy statement dated 7 July 2000 on the Management of Safety and Environmental Protection in the Ministry of Defence. That policy statement requires that, within the United Kingdom, the MOD will carry out environmental policy appraisals of all new and revised policies and equipment acquisition programmes and environmental impact assessments of all new projects and training activities.

The policy statement, together with guidance on the conduct of environmental appraisal and environmental impact assessment, has been published recently as part of Amendment 4 to Joint Service Publication (JSP) 418, the MOD's Environmental Manual.

Copies of JSP 418 are in the Library of the House, and arrangements are in hand for copies of Amendment 4 to that publication to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last occasion was on which he requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29044]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officials from his Department have attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29047]

Dr. Moonie: No officials from the Ministry of Defence attended the first environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College in July 2001. Details of this course, and others provided by the Civil Service College to support the initiatives of sustainable development, have now been published as part of Amendment 4 to JSP 418, the MOD's Environmental Manual.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four. [29043]

Dr. Moonie: None. The last environmental appraisal published by the Ministry of Defence was the Strategic Environmental Appraisal of the Strategic Defence Review. This document was published in June 2000.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29046]

Dr. Moonie: Sustainable development has been identified as an overall theme for the Spending Review. In common with all other Government Departments with a Public Service Agreement, the Ministry of Defence will be reporting on the impact of its Spending Review proposals on sustainable development. That appraisal process will take an integrated approach to the environmental, social and economic elements of sustainable development.

West Freugh Airfield

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what external consultants he *(a)* has engaged and *(b)* plans to engage to assess the commercial potential of West Freugh airfield in Wigtownshire. [28427]

Dr. Moonie: No external consultants have been engaged by the Ministry of Defence to assess the commercial potential of West Freugh airfield. QinetiQ, which conducts day-to-day operations at the airfield on behalf of MOD, has, with its contractors, studied the opportunities for diversification. This work concluded that there are few commercial opportunities for development of the airfield. MOD has no plans to engage external consultants to assess the commercial potential of the airfield.

DERA (MOD Police)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's Police are employed at DERA establishments and facilities in the UK; and how many were employed in each year since the formation of DERA. [28431]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on replacing MOD Police with private security at DERA establishments. [28426]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has received the following representations concerning the withdrawal of Ministry of Defence Police officers from the QinetiQ sites at Pendine, Schoeburyness and West Freugh:

Two from the Defence Police Federation

One from a member of the public

Three in the form of MP's letters

One in the form of a parliamentary question.

Army Training Regiment Bases

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of Army Training Regiment bases in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland. [26014]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently five Army Training Regiments (ATRs) in England and Scotland; there are none in Northern Ireland although Depot Royal Irish conducts initial training for the Royal Irish Regiment and of very small numbers for other Irish Regiments. It is planned to transfer the training functions from the Glencorse site in Scotland to the School of Infantry at Catterick in north Yorkshire. There will be changes to the way in which training is conducted at the remaining four sites—Bassingbourn in Cambridgeshire, Pirbright in Surrey, Winchester in Hampshire and Lichfield in Staffordshire. ATR Bassingbourn will concentrate on junior entry training, and the others will conduct non-infantry adult entry training. These changes will take place during the course of this year.

Whittington Barracks

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to move the Army Training Regiment from the Whittington barracks near Lichfield; [26015]

f1(2) what plans he has to sell land occupied by the Whittington barracks near Lichfield. [26016]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has no plans to either move the Army Training Regiment from Whittington barracks, near Lichfield, or to sell the land occupied by the barracks.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Wind Farm (Cefn Croes)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the reasons are for the decision not to hold a public inquiry into the proposed wind farm at Cefn Croes in Ceredigion. [28132]

Ms Hewitt: As with any planning decision Ministers have to weigh up all aspects of an application, consider all representations—both for and against—and come to a decision. In the case of the Cefn Croes application it was concluded that there was sufficient information to approve the application in principle without sending it to a public inquiry.

Wind Turbines

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the criteria used by her Department for allowing the erection of wind turbines in upland areas, with particular reference to the importance she places on landscape and visual amenity. [28133]

Ms Hewitt: All relevant criteria set out in planning guidance and environmental assessment guidance are taken into account. I also have a duty under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 to have regard to the extent to which a person who formulates a proposal has complied with his duty of having regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty and do what he reasonably can to mitigate any effect the proposal would have on the natural beauty of the countryside. In addition the views of the local planning authority which will be familiar with the local terrain are also taken into account.

Local Post Office

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice she has received from the Postal Services Commission on transitional financial assistance to local post offices from 2003. [28372]

Mr. Alexander: The advice I received at the end of last year from the Postal Services Commission on transitional financial assistance to the rural network is currently under consideration.

Energy Sources

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on renewable sources of energy and on the funding which has been made available for such projects since 1997. [28018]

Mr. Wilson: In the four-year period 1997–2001, the Department of Trade and Industry provided a total of £61.1 million for the support of research and development in renewable energy. Over the same period, total indirect support for renewable energy provided through the Fossil Fuel Levy was £374.8 million.

For the three-year period 2001–04, provision for research and development in renewable energy is £80.6 million, and for the newly introduced capital grants for renewables projects, £191 million. It is estimated that indirect support to be provided through the renewables obligation, planned to come into effect on 1 April 2002, could total £687 million over its first two years of operation. Some continuing support through the Fossil Fuel Levy is also expected.

Looking ahead, introducing the new renewables obligation, exempting renewables from the Climate Change Levy and protecting existing non-fossil fuel obligation (NFFO) contracts will together create a long-term market incentive for renewables expected to be worth over £1 billion per year by 2010.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of Britain's energy requirements are found in *(a)* renewable and *(b)* non-renewable sources of energy. [28017]

Ms Hewitt: Renewable energy sources provided 1.3 per cent. of the United Kingdom's total primary energy requirements in 2000, and 2.8 per cent. of the electricity generated in the UK.

Fireworks

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many injuries involving fireworks have been reported since 1 September 2001; and if she will make a statement. [29393]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Figures from accident and emergency departments for the 2001 firework period are not yet available. We will publish the figures as soon as possible.

European Directive on Fixed Term Work

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her plans to implement the European Directive on Fixed Term Work. [29578]

Alan Johnson: I am today publishing a consultation on the draft Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of less favourable treatment) Regulations 2002. The consultation period will last for 12 weeks, until 15 April, and I look forward to receiving views from as many interested parties as possible by this date. A Government response to the consultation on the fixed term directive that took place from 9 March to 31 May 2001 is also being published today. Copies of both documents have been placed in the Library. The regulations will be made under clause 45 of the Employment Bill. They will prevent fixed term employees from being less favourably treated than comparable permanent employees and transpose the EC Fixed Term Work Directive.

Small Business Service

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions the Chief Executive of the Small Business Service has met the Prime Minister since 1997. [27634]

Ms Hewitt: He has met him six times: 16 December 1999; 30 March 2000; 11 May 2000; 27 November 2000; 17 July 2001; 6 November 2001.

He also has regular contact with No.10 via Private Office and No.10 Policy Unit.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will introduce measures to require the manufacturers of mobile phones to provide stronger deterrents to theft in their products. [27485]

Mr. Alexander: Mandating anti-theft measures in the short-term would be disproportionately expensive. In the longer term, the operators and manufacturers are working with the Home Office and the DTI to investigate ways in which mobile phone handset security might be improved.

Galileo Project

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has made to the European Commission concerning the Galileo project. [27483]

Ms Hewitt: I have made no representations to the Commission. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions leads for the UK in discussions with the European Commission on the Galileo project. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport attended the most recent Transport Council meeting on 7 December and I would refer my hon. Friend to his report on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 875W.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the concerns expressed to her by the United States Government on the Galileo global positioning system. [27888]

Ms Hewitt: The UK Government are aware of the US Government's concerns over technical, trade and security aspects of the Galileo project. Galileo is a European Union (EU) project, on which the European Commission leads in negotiations with the US. The UK participates fully in these and will continue to seek an acceptable way forward.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton dated 27 November 2001 with regard to Mr. J. McHugh. [27321]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend's letter of 27 November on behalf of his constituent Mr. J. McHugh has been transferred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the reply, as the subject falls within her responsibilities.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if she will make a statement. [27291]

Ms Hewitt: Cases of fraud and irregularity involving staff and direct contractors are reported annually to the Treasury for inclusion in the Treasury Fraud report which is laid before Parliament. From April 1997 to date the total value of losses reported as due to fraud and irregularities is £197,445. When taken as a proportion of DTI expenditure for the same period this represents a loss of less than 0.002 per cent.

No large organisation is totally free of fraud but we continue to promote an environment of zero tolerance and to act promptly in all suspected cases of impropriety.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last five years. [27386]

Ms Hewitt: Information on expenditure of this kind is not held centrally and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Consignia

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions in the last six months when *(a)* she, *(b)* her ministerial colleagues and *(c)* their private offices have had (i) meetings, (ii) telephone conversations and (iii) correspondence with executives of Consignia. [27718]

Ms Hewitt: Our records show that my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness and I have had five meetings with executives of Consignia in the last six months. In addition, supporting these meetings, there have been a number of telephone conversations and 12 items of correspondence with Consignia executives.

Export Licence Applications

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list, for each of the last five years, the number of export licence applications that have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected in respect of products that have a potential military end use. [28250]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of export licence applications in respect of items controlled for strategic reasons that have been approved and rejected since 1997 are published in the Government's annual reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 annual reports are available in the Libraries of the House.

The 2001 annual report on Strategic Export Controls will be published as soon as possible.

Scientific Research Budget

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for the Department's scientific research budget; and what impact this will have on *(a)* continuing research projects funded by her Department and *(b)* future schemes (i) earmarked for and (ii) hoping to receive departmental funding for scientific research and development. [27850]

Ms Hewitt: The Spending Review 2000 set the Science Budget provision for the years 2001–02 to 2003–04. My Department published an account of how the budget was to be allocated—principally among the research councils—over that period in November 2000 "Science Budget 2001–02 to 2003–04", Department of Trade and Industry. A copy was placed in the Libraries of the House and the document is available on my Department's website at http://www2.dti.gov.uk/ost/whatsnew/index.htm.

Like all Government Departments, my Department is at present planning its input to the next spending review which covers the period 2003–04 to 2005–06 and it is too soon to say what the level of provision for the science budget will be in those years.

Some of the funding allocated to the research councils in the last spending review was earmarked at a high level for specific areas of research: genomics, e-science and basic technology. However, decisions about funding of individual science research projects—whether in these earmarked areas or not—are, by long-established convention, matters for the research councils, not for my Department.

Distance Selling

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the regulation of distance selling. [27930]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Consumer protection laws, such as the Sale of Goods legislation, apply equally to distance selling as when shopping on the high street.

In addition, the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations came into force on 31 October 2000 and cover all forms of distance selling, including shopping over the internet, telephone or catalogue.

The main provisions of the regulations are:

The right to receive clear information about the goods or services before deciding to purchase;

Confirmation of this information in writing;

A cooling off period of seven working days during which the consumer can cancel the contract;

Unless agreed otherwise with the supplier, the right to receive goods or services within 30 days;

Protection against payment card fraud;

Protection against cold calling.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what expenditure has been incurred by her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if she will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27951]

Ms Hewitt: The Department does not centrally collect the information sought at the required level of detail, and to provide it would entail disproportionate cost. Where surveys are conducted which may be considered to contain an element relating to opinion polling; focus groups; or other forms of market research, it is not possible to identify separately the costs of that element.

Assisted Area Status

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will commence planning for the review of assisted area status due in 2006. [28650]

Alan Johnson: The assisted areas map is constrained by European Commission rules and guidelines which, based on past experience, are likely to change before the next review. If the timetable for the next map were to repeat that which led to the current map, detailed consideration of individual areas would start during 2005.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on areas of the removal of assisted area status by the implementation of the Assisted Area Order 2000. [28651]

Alan Johnson: None. Assisted area status allows, but does not require, public authorities to pay regional state aid to companies in those areas; in itself it does not affect an area.

Depleted Uranium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantity of depleted uranium is in use in civil non-nuclear applications in the United Kingdom; to what uses the DU is put; what disposal facilities exist for waste DU metal and its undiluted compounds; and in what quantities and where unused DU is stored. [28501]

Nigel Griffiths: A report on depleted uranium has recently been published by the Environment Agency: "Depleted Uranium: A Study of its Uses within the UK and Disposal Issues" (Reference R&D Technical Report

P3–088/TR), copies of which are available from the Environment Agency. This report provides details on the quantities, uses and storage of depleted uranium in civil non-nuclear applications in the United Kingdom, and describes, among other areas, the safeguards arrangements for the depleted uranium. Issues relating to the disposal of radioactive materials, including waste depleted uranium metal and its undiluted compounds, are a matter for the Environment Agency.

Carbon Monoxide

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to reduce accidents caused by the inhalation of carbon monoxide from coal and oil-fired appliances. [28054]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The DTI is continuing to work with other Government Departments and industry to increase awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide among consumers. Specifically our activity has included a mobile exhibition units road show targeted at areas with the highest occurrence of carbon monoxide related incidents and dissemination of advice through information toolkits and leaflets. This continues to be a priority area for consumer safety.

Ceramics

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the safeguard provisions and implementation relating to the phasing out of ceramic import quotas from China to the United Kingdom. [28775]

Nigel Griffiths: In bilateral negotiations on China's Accession to the WTO, the European Community and China agreed to phase-out existing import quotas. EU import quotas on Chinese ceramics will be eliminated on 1 January 2005. The terms of China's accession to the WTO include an additional safeguard mechanism available for 12 years to guard against damaging import surges.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action is being taken in the World Trade Organisation on tariffs on United Kingdom imports of pottery catering wares into the United States; and if she will make a statement. [28774]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 322W.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when a decision will be made on the future of the urban network for sub-post offices. [28680]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* Government have agreed in principle to support the compensation package negotiated between the Post Office Ltd. and the National Federation of SubPostmasters for a restructuring of the urban post office network. Detailed discussion continues on the programme and implementation will be carried forward in consultation with interested parties.

Maternity Leave

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of women who left full-time employment on maternity leave returned *(a)* by the end of and *(b)* after the end of the statutory maternity leave period to (i) full-time employment and (ii) part-time employment, in each of the last five years. [27739]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The latest information available is from a 1996 study entitled "Maternity Rights and Benefits in Britain 1996", Department of Social Security Research Report No. 67, published by the Stationery Office.

The study included a survey of mothers who had given birth in June 1995 and collected information on their economic activity in spring 1996, some 10 to 11 months after giving birth, and thus after the point at which any statutory entitlement to maternity leave had expired.

At this point, 34 per cent. of women employed full-time before taking maternity leave had returned to employment on a full-time basis and 35 per cent. had returned to employment on a part-time basis.

It is not possible to identify the proportions returning to employment before and after their entitlements to statutory maternity leave had expired.

The Department and the Department for Work and Pensions have commissioned a repeat survey in order to evaluate the impact of the changes to maternity leave arrangements introduced in 1999 and to provide a baseline for evaluation of the changes to maternity arrangements announced in the 2001 Budget and contained in the Employment Bill.

Radioactive Waste

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what records she has of the *(a)* number of containers, *(b)* total weight and *(c)* geographical extent of dumping of radioactive waste which was deposited approximately 250 miles off Land's End during the 1960s and 1970s. [27191]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Details of all UK radioactive waste disposals in the north-east Atlantic have been made public and are available from a number of sources, including the "Report of the Independent Review of Disposal of Radioactive Waste in the North East Atlantic" (HMSO, 1984), copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The report contains data on the location of dumpsites, weight of material dumped, levels of activity and numbers of containers. The information on weight and numbers of containers is aggregated in the report for the whole period from 1949–82 during which the UK disposed of radioactive waste at sea. We estimate that, during the 1960s and 70s, around 41,000 tonnes were dumped in the north-east Atlantic in around 75,000 containers of various sizes and types. Radioactive waste disposals were also carried out in the north-east Atlantic by a number of other countries during this period.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Women

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for Women what recent discussions she has had with her European Union counterparts on women's issues. [25512]

Ms Hewitt: I met Commissioner Diamantopoulou on 26 November 2001. We discussed a broad range of EU and UK social affairs policy issues, including child care provision, the gender pay gap, family friendly working and the Equal Treatment draft directive.

I am also looking forward to discussing employment issues with the French Employment Minister, Elizabeth Guigou, in London today. As Minister Guigou's area of responsibility also includes women and equality issues our discussions will cover issues of particular interest to women. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office will also be attending the EU Informal Meeting of Ministers for Women to be hosted by the Spanish Presidency at Santiago de Compostela on 18–19 February 2002.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Traffic Calming

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal powers local authorities have to introduce passive traffic calming on trunk roads. [26470]

Mr. Spellar: Trunk roads are the responsibility of the Highways Agency. Local authorities have no legal powers to introduce passive traffic calming measures on trunk roads.

Rolling Stock

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to establish a national test track for rolling stock. [26058]

Mr. Spellar: As the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, Richard Bowker, announced in his Strategic Plan published on 14 January, the SRA is carrying out a study of the case for a national test track. The study will report early this year.

Lord Birt

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met Lord Birt to discuss transport policy. [26724]

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the terms of engagement of Lord Birt are in relation to transport matters. [26308]

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will publish Lord Birt's study of Britain's transport needs; [26758]

(2) what terms of reference he has agreed with Lord Birt for his study of Britain's transport needs; [26760]

(3) on what date he first met Lord Birt to discuss the future of transport; [26763]

(4) what administrative support his Department is supplying Lord Birt for his study of Britain's transport needs; [26762]

(5) on what date he last met Lord Birt to discuss the future of transport, with specific reference to the railways; [26761]

(6) what timetable he has agreed with Lord Birt for the completion of his study of Britain's transport needs. [26759]

Mr. Byers: The role of the FSU is to provide internal long-term strategic analysis and policy thinking for the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers on a range of issues, including transport. Lord Birt is one of a number of external advisers assisting the FSU in its work. It is not our policy to publish Forward Strategy Unit reports. Internal policy advice to Ministers remains confidential.

The work of the FSU is being carried forward by a small and varying staff, drawn from the PIU and Government Departments. My Department keeps in close touch with the FSU.

Road Deaths

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many deaths there were in motor accidents in each of the last five years for which figures are available in which a contributory factor was *(a)* consumption of alcohol, *(b)* consumption of non-prescription drugs and *(c)* tiredness of driver. [27407]

Mr. Spellar: The numbers of deaths in motor accidents where one or more drivers involved tested positive for illegal levels of alcohol are shown for the most recent five years for which estimates are available, together with the provisional estimate for 2000.

Estimates of casualties in accidents involving illegal alcohol levels: Great Britain

	Number
1995	540
1996	580
1997	550
1998	460
1999	460
2000 (provisional)	520

The estimates do not, however, show the extent to which alcohol may have been a contributory factor in the accidents. Statistics are not compiled for drugs or tiredness as a factor.

National Rail Model

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 583W, on departmental consultants, when Oscar Faber are due to conclude their work on the development of a national rail model. [27334]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The original project specification issued in February 2001 set a completion date of 14 September 2001 for the initial version of the national rail model. The contract with Oscar Faber has since been extended to incorporate further development work and is likely to be extended further either with Oscar Faber or through competitive tender. The original project specification envisaged the further development phase would continue up to September 2002.

London Underground

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the performance indicators for *(a)* the Metropolitan Line and *(b)* other London Underground lines for (i) each of the last 12 months and (ii) the last seven years. [27712]

Mr. Spellar: Detailed in-year operational information of this nature is a matter for London Underground.

London Underground has provided the information in the following table giving a line by line breakdown of the percentage of scheduled train kilometres operated in each full financial year since 1995–96. During the same period, the total number of train kilometres operated has increased by 11.5 per cent. from 57.2 million kms in 1995–96 to 63.8 million kms in 2000–01.

London Underground—Percentage of scheduled train kilometres operated, by line, by financial year

Line	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Bakerloo	94.6	91.4	93.6	92.5	90.5	82.6
Central	97.5	95.3	95.1	95.2	96.5	96.6
Circle and Hammersmith and City	94.6	90.9	93.0	91.4	89.7	81.8
District	98.1	96.0	98.3	97.4	97.0	92.9
East London[1]	—	—	—	92.7	95.7	94.1
Jubilee	98.3	96.4	98.0	97.5	92.7	89.2
Metropolitan	98.1	95.9	98.0	97.5	96.7	95.0
Northern	93.6	94.4	95.5	90.2	94.9	96.5
Piccadilly	95.5	93.5	92.9	89.5	90.9	86.6
Victoria	96.0	95.0	95.1	96.1	97.4	95.8
Waterloo and City	96.3	94.5	98.2	96.9	98.4	96.8

[1] The East London Line was closed between March 1995 and March 1998

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many train breakdowns there were in each of the last seven years per underground line. [27713]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information in the table, showing, for each line on the underground, the number of delays of over two minutes attributed to problems with rolling stock.

London Underground—delays of over two minutes attributed to problems with rolling stock

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Bakerloo	1,208	1,216	1,075	1,144	1,237	879	968
Central[1]	2,121	1,739	2,605	2,423	2,165	2,304	2,864
Circle and Hammersmith and City	1,741	609	1,167	2,170	1,380	1,568	1,463
District	1,532	1,218	1,160	1,082	995	981	834
East London[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	106
Jubilee[2]	1,135	1,156	922	1,239	2,376	1,722	1,603
Metropolitan	1,685	1,687	1,363	1,238	1,065	1,047	1,247
Northern	3,405	3,964	3,505	4,229	5,942	3,727	1,674
Piccadilly	2,113	2,376	2,228	3,115	3,886	2,934	2,609
Victoria	1,290	997	757	994	821	920	1,053
Waterloo and City[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	27

[1] The figures for the Central line also include those for the Waterloo and City line to 1999–2000

[2] The figures for the Jubilee line also include those for the East London line to 1999–2000

Car Fuel Efficiency and Emissions

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to improve the clarity for consumers of the new car fuel efficiency and emissions labels. [27827]

Mr. Spellar: New requirements for labelling of passenger cars were recently introduced into UK law, in the form of regulations implementing EU directive 99/94/EC. This had the effect of adding information on CO_2 emissions to the information on fuel efficiency which was already displayed on labels in the UK. A new standardised format for labels was also introduced.

The directive requires member states to monitor and report on the effectiveness of these measures and the Government will be an active participant in the subsequent review by the European Commission. In order to better inform the UK position, the Department will shortly be conducting a consultation exercise on options for banded or comparative labelling.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27964]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Central) has carried out four major building refurbishments valued at more than £1 million which attracted expenditure in the last four years.

Details of the expenditure are:

£

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Relocation—Ashdown house (Victoria)	6,516,488	3,960,801	—	4,307,195
Relocation—Eland house	3,470,301	1,279,561	1,518,702	—
Romney House—GLA	—	—	1,685,842	—
Relocation—Hempstead house	—	240,960	716,497	50,870
Total	9,986,789	5,481,322	3,921,041	4,358,065

Ordnance Survey

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on the use of National Interest in Mapping Service Agreement funding of the Ordnance Survey. [28074]

Ms Keeble: Since the commencement of the National Interest Mapping Service Agreement (NIMSA) in April 1999 I have received two representations, from a Member of Parliament, which included references to the use of NIMSA funding to support colour imagery.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide a table showing the annual payments of National Interest in Mapping Service Agreement funding to the Ordnance Survey in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [28075]

Ms Keeble: The National Interest Mapping Service Agreement (NIMSA) commenced in April 1999 and is based on the financial year April to March. Detailed is a table indicating the payments made since April 1999. The final figure to be paid for activities carried out during financial year 2001–02 will not be finalised until April 2002.

£ million

Financial year	*Payment*
1999–2000	14.6
2000–01	13.5
2001–02[1]	12.0

[1] To end December only

Note:

All figures have been rounded to the nearest £0.1 million.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he has agreed that National Interest in Mapping Service Agreement funding for the Ordnance Survey should support aerial photography in colour. [28076]

Ms Keeble: No. National Interest Mapping Service Agreement (NIMSA) funding is directed towards the support of non-commercial database maintenance and other uneconomic national mapping activities that Ordnance Survey undertakes in the national interest.

Aerial photography is used as part of the database maintenance process and NIMSA has always contributed to its use for uneconomic data base maintenance activities.

The implications for NIMSA funding of Ordnance Survey's decision in May 2001 to change to colour photography, as part of a long term investment to improve services to customers, are currently under review.

Local Government Finance (Wiltshire)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with Wiltshire county council about an interim award for 2002–03; if he intends the teachers' pay award to be paid from the revenue support grant; if he will make an extra grant for Wiltshire to cover *(a)* the duties under the Education Act 1997 to provide full-time education for excluded pupils and *(b)* the new special educational needs duties in early years; and if he will make a statement on the local government settlement as it affects Wiltshire, with particular reference to education and social services. [27893]

Dr. Whitehead: The provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–03 continues to give priority to education and social services. Provision for spending on education overall will increase by £2.1 billion or 8.7 per cent. Personal social services will increase by £684 million or 6.5 per cent. Wiltshire benefits from this extra money. Wiltshire's provisional education standard spending assessment increase for 2002–03 is £11.58 million or 6.5 per cent. We have been consulting on our proposals and have not met individual councils during this time. We have been carefully considering all representations on the provisional settlement as we take final decisions.

Wiltshire will also benefit from the overall increase in standards fund grant of £160 million and an increase in the direct grant for schools of 2.75 per cent. The increase in the education SSA already takes account of the prospective increase in teachers' pay, the duties under the 1997 Act to provide full-time education for excluded pupils and the new special educational needs duties in early years.

Galileo Project

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 53W, on the Galileo Project, and following the EU Transport Council meeting of 7 December 2001, if he will make a statement on the UK's commitment to the Galileo project. [28024]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to my report of the Transport Council, which includes an account of discussions on Galileo, pursuant to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 875–77W.

Following the Transport Council, the Laeken European Council reaffirmed the strategic importance of Galileo. It also invited the Transport Council to continue its work on the project with a view to deciding on funding for, and management of the development phase by next March and June respectively. The council was asked to take account of a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) on the project, which the European Commission issued only on 22 November.

In principle the Government support Galileo, but, as my report of the Transport Council indicates, we and some other member states have outstanding concerns about cost-benefit, financial viability and management aspects of the project. Some of these issues are addressed by the PWC report. But PWC make clear that the system is likely to require more public funding than the Commission previously estimated, including ongoing support through the operational phase.

National Rail Academy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated annual running cost is of the proposed National Rail Academy. [28563]

Mr. Spellar: The concept of a National Rail Academy is still at a very early stage. The Strategic Rail Authority has commissioned the Rail Industry Training Council to consult with the industry on the establishment of such an academy and what form it might take. Until these facts are known it is premature to estimate running costs.

Trans-European Rail Network

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in what circumstances the European Commission would have decision-making rights over an application for a derogation under Directive 96/48/EC and 2001/16/EC. [28557]

Mr. Spellar: The European Commission, normally acting on a qualified majority vote of member states, will decide on all derogations sought on the grounds that application of the technical specifications for interoperability would compromise the economic viability of an upgrading project on the trans-European rail network. This covers both infrastructure and rolling stock related projects.

Light Rail Schemes

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what light rail schemes are under development and what their estimated completion dates are. [28483]

Ms Keeble: Two light rail schemes are currently under construction: the Sunderland extension to Tyne and Wear Metro, which is due to open in March 2002, and Nottingham Express Transit, which is due to open in November 2003.

Three extensions to the Manchester Metrolink, three lines for Leeds Supertram and South Hampshire Rapid Transit have also been approved. Construction of these lines will probably begin in 2003, and is likely to take around three years.

The City Airport extension of the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) in London is awaiting approval under the Transport and Works Act 1992 (TWA). An announcement on that is likely to be made shortly. Transport for London is also considering the possibility of extending the DLR to Woolwich.

The economic appraisal for two extensions to the Midland Metro was approved in December 2000 and I understand that the promoters will be submitting a TWA application shortly. Whether or not these extensions are built will depend on the outcome of the TWA process.

Transport for London is currently consulting on proposals for four intermediate mode corridors in London: Cross river, Uxbridge road, Greenwich waterfront and east London. Transport for London's Business Plan states that a light rail or tram scheme is an option on one of these routes.

There are also proposals for light rail schemes in Bristol, Merseyside, Medway and Hull, and for further extensions to existing systems. These proposals would have to satisfy the Government's appraisal process and obtain TWA powers before construction could begin.

Canvey Island

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what opportunity there will be for the Strategic Rail Authority to provide a passenger station for Canvey Island on an extension of the Stanford le Hope-Tilbury East goods rail link when that link is upgraded. [28131]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The SRA has no plans to provide a passenger station at Canvey Island. If there were a demand for a rail link it would be for the local authority, or other sponsoring party, to raise the matter with c2c and Railtrack in the first instance. If support were required from Government it may be available through the Rail Passenger Partnership scheme, administered by the SRA.

Benfleet Station

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what opportunity there will be to influence the plans of the Strategic Rail Authority to increase the capacity of Benfleet station. [28128]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Through the Incremental Outputs Statement (IOS) scheme the SRA is supporting work to increase the capacity of Benfleet station from 2005–06, allowing eight trains per hour in the peak direction. The IOS programme was designed by the SRA following detailed consultation with stakeholders and the industry, including Railtrack and the Train Operating Companies.

Bus and Rail Integration

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he will take to secure better integration of bus and rail services. [28129]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Our 10-Year Plan makes a commitment to looking at transport as a whole, matching solutions to specific problems.

The Strategic Rail Authority's new Strategic Plan describes a number of examples of better integration which are being taken forward and how further progress will be made. Copies of the Strategic Plan are available in the Library of the House.

The UK transport industry has developed "Journey Solutions", aimed at promoting and improving integration between bus and train. They aim to showcase the best examples of integration across the country as models from which further schemes can be developed.

At the local level, local authorities, within their five-year local transport plans and bus strategies, have been asked to consider the important contribution that better interchange can make in improving local transport provision. Our guidance to authorities makes clear the need for authorities, in conjunction with their local partners and the transport operators, to provide improvements to both infrastructure and services which can bring about better interchange between different modes of transport.

European/British Railways

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the railways in *(a)* other European countries and *(b)* Britain. [28739]

Mr. Spellar: Following decades of underinvestment, it is clear that the performance of Britain's railways needs to improve. The 10-Year Plan for Transport and the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan set out the strategy and resources to improve Britain's rail system and enable us to achieve our objective of benchmarking our performance against railways in other European countries.

Tenancy Deposit Scheme

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will extend the Tenancy Deposit Scheme nationally when the five local pilot schemes end; and which of the two piloted options will be used. [28599]

Ms Keeble: We hope shortly to reach a decision on the voluntary pilot tenancy deposit scheme and on such alternative options as there might be for safeguarding tenants' deposits from unjustified appropriation by landlords.

A14

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether in relation to the proposed major A14 improvements included in the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study, it is proposed that the opening of the new A14 bypass will be contemporaneous with the opening of the remainder of the works to the A14 road. [27736]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The phasing of the proposed improvements to the A14, included in the Preferred Plan of the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study, can only be addressed when work is more advanced.

Planning Appeals

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many planning appeals have been *(a)* upheld and *(b)* dismissed in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [28748]

Ms Keeble: The information for England on the number of planning appeals allowed and not allowed in 1996–97 to 2000–01 is given in the table.

	Planning appeals decided	*Planning appeals allowed*	*Planning appeals not allowed*
1996–97	12,029	4,210	7,819
1997–98	13,051	4,685	8,366
1998–99	12,991	4,561	8,430
1999–2000	12,575	4,545	8,030
2000–01	12,939	4,525	8,414

Radioactive Material

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy that accidents involving the transportation of radioactive material are made public. [28615]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* Information on accidents and incidents involving the transport of radioactive material in the UK is published annually and placed in the House Library.

The latest report, "Radiological Consequences resulting from Accidents and Incidents involving the Transport of Radioactive Materials in the UK—2000 Review, NRPB-M1320", was published in October 2001.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list incidents whereby trains carrying radioactive material have been involved in *(a)* accidents and *(b)* safety-related incidents in each of the last five years, indicating the (i) date and (ii) location of each incident. [28614]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* There have been no accidents or incidents with radiological safety implications involving trains carrying radioactive material in the UK during the last five years.

Information on accidents and incidents involving the transport of radioactive material by all modes in the UK, including rail, is published annually. The reports covering events in each year have been placed in the House Library.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regulations cover the transport of radioactive material in the UK. [28613]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The following regulations cover the transport of radioactive material in the UK:

Road

The Radioactive Material (Road Transport) (Great Britain) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No. 1350).

The Radioactive Substances (Carriage by Road) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1983 (SR 1983 No. 344).

The Radioactive Substances (Carriage by Road) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1986 (SR 1986 No. 61).

Sea

The Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997 No. 2367); Merchant Shipping Notice No. M 1755(M), "The Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants in Packaged Form—Amendment 30–00 to the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code". The Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Packaged Irradiated Nuclear Fuel etc.) (INF Code) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000 No. 3216).

Air

The Air Navigation Order 2000 SI No. 1562. The Air Navigation (Dangerous Goods) Regulations 1994 SI No. 3187 and Amendments 1996 SI No. 3100 and 1998 SI No. 2536.

Rail

The Packaging, Labelling and Carriage of Radioactive Material by Rail Regulations (RAMRail) 1996 (SI 1996 No. 2090): Approved Requirements for the packaging, labelling and carriage of radioactive material by rail 1996 Edition. The Carriage of Dangerous Goods (Classification, Packaging and Labelling) and Use of Transportable Pressure Receptacles Regulations (CDGCPL) 1996 (SI 1996 No. 2092). The Carriage of Dangerous Goods (Amendment) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No. 303).

The Packaging, Labelling and Carriage of Radioactive Material by Rail Regulations (Northern Ireland) (RAMRailNI) 1998 (SR 1998 No. 132).

Ports

The Dangerous Substances in Harbour Areas Regulations 1987 (SI 1987 No. 37).

Inland Waterways

British Waterways Board Terms and Conditions: Dangerous Goods BWB 1981, and Schedule of Dangerous Goods ("The Green Book") BWB 1981 (Class 7).

Indian Government Representatives

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he had to meet Indian Government representatives in early January. [28622]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* No meetings were fixed. The visit was entirely private and all the costs borne by my right hon. Friend.

Rail Safety

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* dates and locations and *(b)* materials involved in railway safety-related incidents in the last six months in the north-west of England. [28612]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advise that in the period from 1 July 2001 to 17 January 2002 there have been 174 incidents reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR) in Railtrack's north-west zone, which covers the north-west of England. However, these figures do not necessarily include all safety-related incidents or details of the materials involved in an incident. A more detailed breakdown of these figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made; [28986]

(2) how many officials from his Department have attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College; [28988]

(3) when the last occasion was on which he requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision; [28985]

(4) how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four; [28984]

(5) what plans his Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [28987]

Dr. Whitehead: My right hon. Friend receives environmental advice on all policy decisions for which environmental issues are relevant.

In 1998, the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions published "Policy Appraisal and the Environment: Policy Guidance" which gave advice to Departments on when and how to carry out an environmental appraisal.

The guidance made clear that environmental appraisal is part of the overall policy appraisal process. Accordingly, my Department does not now generally publish free-standing environmental appraisal documents. Environmental implications of the Department's policies and programmes are, where appropriate, set out in the various consultation documents and regulatory impact assessments that form part of our overall consideration of policy.

In terms of administrative actions, our activities are governed by the Department's greening operations policy statement, published on the DTLR website in December 2001. Proposals for specific projects are assessed in respect of operational need, compliance with policy, environmental benefit, and value for money.

Since the publication of the 1998 policy guidance, my Department, with others, has been developing an integrated policy appraisal methodology which will be used to assess the likely effect of proposed policies on a range of economic, environmental and social issues My Department is using a summary version of the methodology to consider the sustainable development implications of our Spending Review submission to the Treasury. Beyond the Spending Review process, and in the light of further development of the methodology, we hope to use the methodology to ensure that full account is taken of all relevant economic, environmental and social factors before policy decisions are made.

No officials from my Department have so far attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will reply to the letter of 4 September from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford with reference to Ms Dearns of Chelmsford. [28810]

Ms Keeble: I replied to the letter from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford on Tuesday 25 September 2001, in which I undertook to look into the issues raised. I sent a second, substantive, reply on Friday 18 January 2002. I have forwarded a further copy of this to the hon. Member.

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money Coventry city council will receive from the changes to the area cost adjustment; and if he will make a statement on the shortfall announced in July 2001 due to changes in the area cost adjustment. [28885]

Dr. Whitehead: The following table compares the provisional standard spending assessment (SSA) for Coventry city council, as announced for consultation on 4 December, with what it would have been if based on the area cost adjustment (ACA) for 2001–02. This shows the effect of updating the data underpinning the area cost adjustment between 2001–02 and 2002–03. The impact of changes to the area cost adjustment is relatively small, at 0.1 per cent. of SSA.

	Amount
2002–03 provisional SSA[1]	283.272
2002–03 provisional SSA using 2001–02 ACA[1]	283.520
Absolute difference[1]	–0.248
Percentage difference	–0.1

[1] £ million

The ACA data for 2002–03 that were announced in July 2001 was provisional. The Office for National Statistics subsequently revised the New Earnings Survey (NES) data for 2000 on which these provisional figures were based, in order to include a large number of additional records that had yet to be processed earlier in the year. The final ACA figures for 2002–03 are based on the revised NES data, as it is important that we use the most robust data that are available to us at the time the settlement is made.

Road Safety

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements there are to grant aid to non-governmental bodies, other than local authorities, to promote road safety. [29275]

Mr. Jamieson: I have today announced that the Government have decided to allocate around £200,000 per annum to a road safety grant challenge fund to assist with the cost of projects promoting road safety proposed by organisations other than local authorities. Grant funding is expected to support the Government's road safety strategy and casualty reduction targets for 2010. Individual grants are expected to be for sums up to £20,000.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed cameras were located in Yeovil constituency in each year from 1995 to 2002; how much fine revenue has been collected from these cameras in each year; what the net costs of operating the cameras in each year has been; and if he will make a statement. [27053]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally.

Home Sellers' Packs

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to introduce home sellers' packs. [28877]

Ms Keeble: Legislation will be introduced when parliamentary time allows. In the meantime we are pressing ahead, in consultation with consumer representatives and the professional bodies, with developing the detailed contents of the sellers' pack.

Millennium Dome

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of the Millennium Dome. [26180]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 220–221W.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal requirements are placed on the administrators of Railtrack under the Strategic Plan published by the Strategic Rail Authority on 14 January. [29122]

Mr. Byers: The administrator has been appointed by the court for the purposes set out in the Railways Administration Order made under the provisions of the Railways Act 1993. Those purposes remain unchanged by the Strategic Plan.

Train Operating Companies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the European Council's Broad Guidelines of the Economic Policies of the Member States and the Community on the future structure of the rail industry, with particular reference to the number of train operating companies. [29120]

Mr. Byers: The Government's policies for the railway industry, including those on rail passenger service competition and franchising, are consistent with the recommendations in these broad guidelines.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Non-career Civil Servants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many non-career civil servants are employed in his Department and at which grade; how many non-career civil servants have passed the ADC; and how many non-career civil servants he has appointed since 11 June 2001. [27480]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO recruits some members of staff on fixed term contracts, which is what we understand by the term "non-career civil servants". Staff on fixed term appointments are employed on civil service terms and conditions, but their contract of employment has a fixed end date. This category does not cover staff seconded from the private sector. 22 staff are employed on fixed term contracts: two in the senior management structure; 20 in the delegated grades.

No staff on fixed term appointments have attended an Assessment and Development Centre. Four such staff have been appointed since 11 June 2001.

Southern Rhodesia Act

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all orders made under section 3(1)(b)(i) of the Southern Rhodesia Act 1979, stating the purpose of each order and its duration. [27749]

Mr. Bradshaw: Four orders have been made under section 3 of the Southern Rhodesia Act 1979.

The Southern Rhodesia (Expiring Orders) (Consequential Provisions) Order 1979 (SI 1979 No.1445) made provision consequential on the lapse of a number of orders made under section 2 of the Southern Rhodesia Act 1965. The order contained provisions relating to the Reserve Bank of Rhodesia Orders 1965 and 1967, to proceedings against, and liabilities of, the Government of Rhodesia, to the liability of the registrar and trustees of the sinking fund of any stock issued by that Government or for which that Government were responsible and to the records relating to such stock. The order was revoked on 7 December 1979 and replaced by the Southern Rhodesia (Legal Proceedings and Public Liabilities) Order 1979 (SI 1979 No. 1601).

The Southern Rhodesia (Legal Proceedings and Public Liabilities) Order 1979 (SI 1979 No.1601) replaced the Southern Rhodesia (Expiring Orders) (Consequential Provisions) Order 1979; the subject matter being the same as the order it replaced. The order is still in force and was modified by the Zimbabwe (Independence and Membership of the Commonwealth) (Consequential Provisions) Order 1980 (SI 1980 No. 701) under powers in the Zimbabwe Act 1979.

The Southern Rhodesia Constitution (Interim Provisions) Order 1979 (SI 1979 No.1571) made temporary provision for the Government of Southern Rhodesia. The legislative and executive powers, and the prerogative of mercy, were vested in a Governor who could give directions as to the authorities by whom executive powers may be exercised. The order also made provision for the revocation or suspension of a number of earlier constitutional provisions and for the suspension of the appeals to Her Majesty in Council. The order was revoked on 20 March 1980 by the Zimbabwe Constitution (Transitional, Supplementary and Consequential Provisions) Order 1980 (SI 19870 No.395).

The Southern Rhodesia (Sanctions) (Amnesty) Order 1980 (SI 1980 No.565) makes provision for an amnesty, and for discontinuance of criminal proceedings, in respect of offences against certain measures under section 2 of the Southern Rhodesia Act 1965, the United Nations Act 1946 or the enactments specified in Part 2 of Schedule 2 of the order, by which effect is given to resolutions of the United Nations Security Council providing for the imposition of economic or other sanctions against Southern Rhodesia. The order is still in force.

Religious Persecution

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to produce an annual report on the observance of human rights worldwide, with particular reference to religious freedom; and if he will make a statement. [28606]

Peter Hain: Promotion of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion, is at the heart of our foreign policy. We condemn instances where individuals are persecuted because of their faith or belief, wherever they happen and whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

Human rights are inter-related and interdependent. In practice, violations of the right of freedom of religion are often accompanied by violations of other rights; for instance, of freedom of speech and association, freedom from torture and the right to a fair trial. Protecting and promoting freedom of religion is most effective when it is done in the context of the promotion and protection of other human rights.

The Government were pleased to lay before Parliament their fourth Annual Report on Human Rights on 17 September 2001. The report details what the UK has done to promote human rights abroad. It included a section on freedom of religion in the chapter dealing with democracy and diversity. The section sets out some of the action that we have taken to promote religious freedoms in, for example, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and China.

Iraq

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what goods on the Military List have recently been approved for export to Iraq. [29385]

Peter Hain: Following consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry recently approved a licence to export to Iraq two seal rings, which appear on the Military List, for use in a gas turbine engine at an oil pump station in Iraq. The UN Sanctions Committee approved the export to Iraq of this equipment under the Oil for Food Programme. The Oil for Food Programme allows the export to Iraq of equipment and spare parts required to improve its oil infrastructure. The revenue Iraq is able to generate from the sale of oil funds its purchases of humanitarian goods.

EU-Israel Association Agreement

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has on whether goods from settlements in occupied territories are imported to the EU as being of Israeli origin; and what discussions he has had with EU partners on action to deal with failings on the part of the Israeli authorities to honour commitments under the EU-Israel Association agreement. [29235]

Peter Hain: The General Affairs Council last considered this question on 19 November 2001. Their conclusion, taking into account the results of responses from Israel to inquiries from EU national customs authorities, was that there remained a requirement to resolve the rules of origin issue. The EU side consequently made clear at the 20 November EU-Israel Association Council that it attached great importance to correct application of the Association agreement and would do its best to find a sustainable solution to the rules of origin issue. It noted that, if the Association Council process was not able to find a solution, the EU would have to review its position, in accordance with the provisions of the agreement. Both sides agreed to pursue discussions on this issue.

Overseas Territories Bill

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the first British passports to be available to citizens of the Overseas Territories under the provisions of the Overseas Territories Bill. [28315]

Mr. Bradshaw: British passports will be made available to citizens of the Overseas Territories once two criteria have been met. First, that the Overseas Territories Bill has been passed and has received Royal Assent. Secondly, that a commencement date for the citizenship provisions of the Bill has been decided by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. This date will be set once satisfactory arrangements for practical implementation, such as passport issue, have been agreed and put in place.

Zambia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Zambia regarding alleged discrepancies in the electoral process in the recent elections in that country; and if he will make a statement. [26091]

Mr. Straw: The UK has not yet made any representations to the Government of Zambia about alleged discrepancies in the electoral process during the recent elections there. We await the final report of the EU Electoral Observer Mission, which we understand will be issued shortly, and will examine its findings carefully with our EU partners.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken in response to the recent report of the EU Observer Mission highlighting alleged shortcomings in the electoral process in the recent tripartite elections in Zambia; and if he will make a statement. [26092]

Mr. Straw: We are aware of reports of irregularities in the administration of the recent Zambian elections. The EU Electoral Observer Mission is working with domestic observer groups to examine these reports and will issue a joint final statement as soon as possible.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what lessons he has drawn from the report of EU observers into the recent Zambian presidential and general elections. [28945]

Mr. Bradshaw: The final report of the EU Electoral Observer Mission on the recent Zambian elections has not yet been issued. The EU team is working with domestic observer groups, and we understand that a joint final report will be issued shortly. We shall examine its findings carefully with our EU partners.

Islamabad

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the explanatory statement for Islamabad, reference ISB/N7692, will be forwarded to the Home Office. [29239]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Joint Entry Clearance Unit are seeking information on this case from the High Commission at Islamabad and will write to my hon. Friend about this case in the next few days.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British High Commission in Zimbabwe last met Mr. Mugabe; and what was discussed. [28858]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British High Commissioner last met President Mugabe on 25 October, when he accompanied my noble Friend Baroness Amos on a call, as part of the visit by Commonwealth Foreign Ministers to Zimbabwe from 25–27 October. The meeting focused on implementation of the Abuja agreement.

Kenya

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action he has taken to ensure that the EU observers will be in situ for the Kenyan elections later this year; [28944]

(2) what measures he intends to take to ensure fair and free elections in Kenya in 2002. [28964]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are working closely with our development partners, and in consultation with key Kenyan stakeholders, to establish a comprehensive monitoring effort for the elections.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a formal complaint to the High Commission for Kenya over the plans to deforest part of the Mau area in Kenya. [28957]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British High Commissioner and representatives from the Department for International Development have consistently raised with the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources and other members of the Kenyan Government UK concerns over plans to excise forest reserve.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Ring-fenced Funds

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funds allocated by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its executive agencies are ring-fenced for specific purposes; and if she will list the allocations of funds involved. [22955]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 18 December 2001]*: Most of the Department's funding is not ring-fenced for any particular programme. The exceptions to this are initiatives running with support from specifically targeted funds. Details of initiatives running in 2001–02 with funding which cannot be diverted into any other programme without Treasury permission are listed:

Initiative	*£ million*
Student Loans	818
New Deal for Schools	293
Capital Modernisation Fund	232
Of which:	
UK Online Centres	141
City Learning Centres	44
Computers for Teachers	5
School Laboratories	30
University for Industry	2
The Cybrarian	2.5
Specialist Schools	7
Child care	162
Sure Start	184
Children's Fund	100
Invest to Save Budget	2

The Department provides grant funding for local education authorities (LEAs) for targeted initiatives, such as literacy and numeracy strategies, the National Grid for Learning, and capital support for schools, through the Standards Fund.

The Department provides funding for non-departmental government bodies. In a number of cases there is a large amount of discretion for these bodies in how they deploy funds. Such organisations include the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Learning and Skills Council and the Teacher Training Agency.

Most support for schools and local education authorities (LEAs) flows through the Education Standard Spending Assessment and Revenue Support Grant. This funding is not ring-fenced.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1997. [26990]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: For details of the advertising spend of the Department from 1996–97 I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 26 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 379–80W. Department press expenditure during 2000–01 amounted to £7,323,331.

Each advertising campaign may use national and regional media. In addition to regional newspapers, advertising space may also be taken in a large number of local newspapers.

A breakdown on advertising by title could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Information on advertising expenditure by agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

School Internet Access

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in the north-east are equipped with internet access. [28067]

John Healey: Statistics published by the Department for Education and Skills in October 2001 show that 97 per cent. of schools in England were connected to the internet in April of that year; significant progress from a position where only 28 per cent. were connected in 1998. Our target is that every school should have access to the internet in 2002.

The Department does not maintain information about internet access in schools on a regional or local basis.

Education SSA (Swindon)

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much of Swindon's standard spending assessment per pupil was allocated on the basis of pupil numbers alone for the years *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02 and *(d)* 2002–03. [28356]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is in the following table.

Swindon

£

	SSA per pupil allocated on pupil numbers only[1]	*Total education SSA per pupil*[1]
1999–2000	1,871	2,513
2000–01	1,958	2,624
2001–02	2,024	2,681
2002–03	2,134	2,811

[1] For pupils aged four to 19

Data for 2002–03 are provisional.

Teacher Recruitment Agencies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collated on the costs of commission paid by schools to recruitment agencies. [28529]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Sixth-form Education (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will announce the amount of the additional payment she will make to the Worcestershire local education authority to compensate for the amount transferred to the Learning and Skills Council for sixth-form education in Worcestershire; and if she will make a statement. [28596]

Mr. Timms: The transfer of sixth-form funding to the LSC from April 2002 will be cost neutral at LEA level—the adjustments to individual SSAs to take account of the transfer will match the payments that LEAs get back from the LSC.

But we propose to pay a special grant to a minority of LEAs where the changes being made to the funding methodology would not fully eliminate the impact of the funding changes in 2002–03.

I expect details of the special grant to be released after consultation on the Local Government Finance Settlement has been completed at the end of the month.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance was given to local Learning and Skills Councils on the cost and location of their office accommodation. [28854]

Margaret Hodge: Decisions on the location of local LSC offices were taken by Ministers in February 2000, before the LSC became operational. Factors taken into consideration included the need to get best value for public money by using, where appropriate, premises then occupied by Training and Enterprise Councils, regard was also had to ensuring locations that would facilitate effective operation of the LSC. Since it became operational the LSC has been responsible for its local office locations and costs.

Standards Funds

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Standards Funds received by schools in Hampshire in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [28864]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows allocations for the Standards Fund for Hampshire local education authority in 2000–01 and 2001–02. The figures include both Government and local authority contributions. The amount actually paid to schools depends on local expenditure decisions by schools and the local authority.

2000–01 Standards Fund allocations for Hampshire county council

	£
Administrative Support for Small Schools	608,000
Advanced Skills Teachers	136,500
Beacon Schools	341,450
Best Practice Research Scholarships	75,675
Class Size Initiative	4,245,393
Developing and Extending Maintained Nursery School Services	24,945
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	7,605,169
Early Excellence Centres	98,228
Early Years Training and Development	303,077
Education and Health Partnerships	97,995
Ethnic Minority Pupils and Traveller Achievement	397,838
Key Stage 3 Numeracy: Secondary Schools Conference	61,812
Literacy and Numeracy: Summer Schools and Key Stage 3	176,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	1,085,380
Maintained Nursery Capital	11,613
National Grid for Learning	3,858,095
New Models for LEA Services	45,000
New National Curriculum	431,400
Performance Management Training	907,454
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	2,792,848
Qualifications	197,363
School Improvement	7,239,927
School Laboratories for the 21st Century	550,813
School Leadership	449,904
School Security	510,545
Secondary School Learning Support Units	239,741
Seed Capital Challenge	593,728
Small School Support Fund	440,681
Social Inclusion, Drugs and Youth	1,776,297
Special Educational Needs	741,547
Specialist Schools	756,016
Study Support	160,640
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Pupils	63,000
Support for Parent Governor Representatives	1,200
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	180,399
Teacher Incentives	82,555
Teaching Assistants	2,806,098
Working Environment Fund	485,925
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	873,277
Total	41,453,528

2001–02 Standards Fund allocations for Hampshire county council

	£
Advanced Skills Teachers	697,500
Beacon Schools	643,150
Child Protection Co-ordinators	39,600
Children in Public Care	136,330
Children of Asylum Seekers	1,000
Class Size Initiative	5,520,194
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	11,928,266
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco	275,510
Early Excellence Centres	89,030
Early Professional Development	950,400
Early Years Training and Development	350,537
Education Health Partnerships	86,634
Ethnic Minority Achievement	250,513
Gifted and Talented Children	72,000
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	1,478,967
Information Management Strategy	691,163
Learning Support Units	640,155
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	420,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	882,200
Maintained Nursery School Service	53,663
National Curriculum	427,613
National Grid for Learning	5,595,910
NDS Condition Funding	7,824,772
New Models for Local Education Authority Services	100,000
Performance Management	624,554
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	3,279,526
Qualifications	66,279
Recruitment and Retention Fund	1,652,000
School Achievement Awards	1,254,260
School Improvement	4,528,000

2001–02 Standards Fund allocations for Hampshire county council

	£
School Laboratories	1,101,626
School Leadership	721,262
School Security	506,853
Seed Capital Challenge	687,914
Sick Children	38,951
Small Schools Fund	1,739,130
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	1,768,300
Special Educational Needs	1,421,726
Specialist Schools	854,715
Study Support	1,302,976
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	240,000
Teaching Assistants	4,184,795
Transforming Key Stage 3	918,789
Traveller Children Achievement	177,231
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	975,740
Year 9 Booster Classes	319,500
Total	67,519,234

Grants (Hampshire)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* category and *(b)* amount of each grant outside the revenue support grant which her Department provided to Hampshire county council in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [28865]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows the Department's allocated grants to Hampshire local education authority in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

		£
	2000–01	*2001–02*
Standards Fund	18,843,776	26,224,965
Teachers Pay Reform Grant	5,881,466	7,727,856
Nursery Education Grant (3-year-olds)[1]	1,701,150	[1]—
Nursery Education Grant (4-year-olds)	4,742,626	—
Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (Early Years)	—	105,037
Early Years Training and Support	162,700	720,251
Childcare Grant	1,386,320	3,650,169
School Standards Grant[2]	6,701,000	14,593,500
School Budget Support Grant	1,246,115	—
Education Budget Support Grant	—	100,000
Education Action Zone[3]	702,000	[3]—
Transitional Funding and Transitional Grant Insurance (former GM Schools)	575,891	358,349
Capital Grant	29,386,000	27,272,000

[1] In 2001–02 Hampshire has received funding for the summer and autumn terms 2001 which amounts to £300,823. For the spring term 2002 it has been allocated up to £3,476,088 to fund early education places for 3-year-olds. This is as a result of a funding re-allocation exercise at the end of the autumn term 2001.

[2] 2001–02 figures may be subject to change.

[3] Funding made directly to the Education Action Zone in Hampshire (Leigh Park). Up to £550,000 grant is available to the zone in 2001–02, conditional on the zone receiving £250,000 in eligible private sector sponsorship.

Note:

Amounts are in cash terms.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the direct grants for schools in Hampshire in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [28866]

Mr. Timms: A table listing the School Standards Grant payable in respect of each Hampshire school in 2000–01 and 2001–02 has been placed in the Library.

School Statistics

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils there were aged 15 years broken down by ethnic group; what were the average percentage GCSE/GNVQ results of *(a)* over 5A* to C, *(b)* over 5A* to G and *(c)* no passes; what was the average number of (i) authorised and (ii) unauthorised absences for each English parliamentary constituency in the academic year 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [28958]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The overall number of pupils in maintained secondary schools broken down by ethnic group is given in the following table; there are no figures for individual ages.

Maintained secondary schools: number of pupils by ethnic group England—January 2000

	Number
White	2,780,167
Black—Caribbean	44,561
Black—African	37,466
Black—Other	25,397
Indian	83,177
Pakistani	76,131
Bangladeshi	29,876
Chinese	12,318
Any other minority group	79,259
Unclassified	63,475
Total	3,231,827

The primary source of information on GCSE attainment by ethnic group is the Youth Cohort Study (YCS). The YCS is run in alternate years and estimates from the latest survey are provided in the following table.

GCSE/GNVQ achievements by ethnic group England and Wales—1998–99

			Percentage
	5+ Grades A-C*	*5+ Grades A*-G*	*No passes reported*
White	50	91	4
Black	39	86	5
Indian	60	95	[1]—
Pakistani	29	91	4
Bangladeshi	29	88	5
Other Asian	72	93	4
Other minority group	43	89	9
Not stated	26	66	23
Total	49	91	5

[1] Not available (too small sample size)

Note:

Estimates exclude pupils in special schools

Neither of the breakdowns is available for parliamentary constituencies.

The data collected on authorised and unauthorised absences do not include ethnic group.

Autonomous Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools she expects to have earned autonomy by the end of the current Parliament. [28959]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mr. Timms: We intend to consult widely on the criteria for earned autonomy before regulations are laid. We envisage that these criteria will enable around 10 per cent. of schools, including those succeeding in challenging circumstances, to qualify. At this stage, we are not in a position to say how many schools will qualify by the end of the current Parliament.

Under-performing Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of schools are *(a)* deemed to have serious weaknesses, *(b)* under special measures and *(c)* deemed to be under-achieving by Ofsted inspectors. [28960]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools and I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will list for each local education authority the level of protected funding given by the LEA over that given by her Department as transitional funding to former grant maintained schools in each of the years 1998–99 to 2001–02; [28961]

(2) if she will list for each year from 1998–99, the transitional funding made available by her Department to former grant maintained schools in England. [28962]

Mr. Timms: The Department has not itself provided transitional funding for former grant-maintained schools. Such funding was provided in 1998–99 by the Funding Agency for Schools as part of the schools' annual maintenance grants, and has been provided in subsequent years by local education authorities in accordance with regulations made under section 47 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, with the assistance (in 2000–01 and 2001–02) of a special grant from the Department.

WALES

Standard Spending Assessment (Monmouth)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much SSA per head Monmouth receives; and what the equivalent average figure is for English local government areas. [28008]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Distribution of the revenue support grant in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Democratic Process

35. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what assessment the Committee has made of the Electoral Commission's plans to encourage greater participation in the democratic process. [26157]

Mr. Beith: The committee has approved the commission's five-year plan for 2001–06, which provides for research and advertising campaigns directed at the promotion of voter awareness. It was laid before Parliament on 8 January 2002 and copies are available in the Vote Office. I understand that the commission intends to set out its strategy for promoting voter awareness in more detail in its next five-year plan, covering the period 2002–07, which is due to be considered by the Speaker's Committee next month and published later in the spring.

Euro

40. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what the anticipated cost would be of conducting a referendum on entry into the euro. [26163]

Mr. Beith: The Electoral Commission has not to date provided the Speaker's Committee with any estimate for the cost of running a national referendum.

The commission's five-year plan for the period 2001–06 makes clear that the commission will need to seek additional resources in the event of a referendum being called, but does not attempt to identify the scale of those costs.

However, I understand from the Chairman that the commission, as part of its normal work, has recently begun to develop its contingency plans for any national or regional referendum, and will be looking at the issue of costs as part of this work.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Compensation Agency

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the future plans of the Compensation Agency are; and when they will be published. [29363]

Dr. John Reid: The Compensation Agency will publish today its corporate plan for 2001–04 and business plan for 2001–02. I have set the agency the following 11 key performance targets for 2001–02:

(i) To process criminal injuries claims for an average unit cost of £290.

(ii) To process criminal damage and Terrorism Act 2000 claims for an average unit cost of £140.

(iii) To maintain the average time taken to reach decisions on criminal injuries claims at 45 weeks for claims received from 1 April 2000.

(iv) To maintain the average time taken to reach decisions on criminal damage claims at 19 weeks for claims received from 1 April 2001.

(v) To maintain the average time taken to reach decisions on Terrorism Act 2000 claims at 35 days for claims received from 1 April 2001.

(vi) To reduce by 85 per cent. the number of criminal injuries claims in hand at 31 March 2000 on which no decision had been reached.

(vii) To reduce by 85 per cent. the number of criminal damage claims in hand at 31 March 2001 on which no decision had been reached.

(viii) To reduce by 95 per cent. the number of Terrorism Act 2000 claims in hand at 31 March 2001 on which no decision had been reached.

(ix) To manage the agency's work load in 2001–02 within a running costs budget (to cover salaries and administrative expenditure) to financial limits agreed with the Department (including in-year adjustments).

(x) To achieve an improvement in the level of satisfaction with the agency's service as evidenced by a further survey, to be conducted by December 2001, of a representative sample of applicants and their legal advisers.

(xi) To assess claims in accordance with the requirements of the legislation and ensure that the standards of assessment are fair and objective.

PRIME MINISTER

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 289, if he will publish the documentation to support his reference to the uncovering by the Railtrack administrator of more financial difficulties at the company. [26409]

The Prime Minister: No. These are matters for Railtrack plc and its administrator. The administrator will lodge a Statement of Proposals with the Registrar of Companies and others, including creditors of Railtrack plc, at a time to be agreed by the court. The statement will therefore be widely available. It will contain the administrator's proposals and strategy for transferring the business to another company or companies and the carrying on of the relevant activities before making the transfer. And as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions told the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee on 16 January this will include a statement of affairs from the Directors of Railtrack, that will

> "disclose the level of debt that Railtrack had to serve"

and people will then

> "understand why the High Court judge . . . took the decision which he did".

Interception of Communications

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Lewes, of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 367W, whether his policy in respect of telephone tapping of hon. Members extends to *(a)* other methods of interception of communications and *(b)* bugging. [27518]

The Prime Minister: The policy extends to all forms of warranted interception of communications.

As to bugging, the position remains as I informed the House on 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 321, the policy applies in relation to the use of electronic surveillance by any of the three security and intelligence agencies as well as to telephone interception.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Prime Minister when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28094]

The Prime Minister: I last travelled by train on 6 December 2001 from Paddington to Reading. I travel making the most efficient and cost-effective arrangements, and will continue to use the railway service regularly when appropriate. My travel arrangements are in accordance with the arrangements for official travel set out in chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code, and the accompanying guidance document, Travel by Ministers.

Special Advisers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Prime Minister which special advisers have the authority to give directions to civil servants. [28355]

The Prime Minister: Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what the average time is that the Head of his Department has recommended since May 1997 between a special adviser leaving his Department and taking up outside employment; and if he will make a statement. [28908]

The Prime Minister: All special advisers are covered by the Business Appointment rules which are set out in full in the Civil Service Management Code. Each case is considered on its own individual merit, and an average of the outcomes would therefore be meaningless and potentially misleading. Individual applications submitted to the independent Advisory Committee on Business Appointments for advice are reported on in the committee's annual report.

Russia

Chris Grayling: To ask the Prime Minister what matters in respect of United Kingdom assistance to Russia in its weapons dismantlement and nuclear materials management programmes were discussed in his meeting with President Putin in December 2001. [28538]

The Prime Minister: At our joint press conference, President Putin and I announced the signature of an agreement to provide £12 million to help destroy Russia's stock of chemical weapons.

I also said we hope this year to be in a position to complete agreement on assistance for the clean-up of nuclear submarines.

Staff (Terms of Employment)

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what the *(a)* date and period of appointment, *(b)* qualification and *(c)* status of the contract is of each person appointed to (i) the Forward Strategy Unit and (ii) the Performance and Innovation Unit. [28500]

The Prime Minister: Details of the terms of employment of individual members of staff are confidential.

SCOTLAND

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when the last occasion was on which she requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision; [29039]

(2) how many environmental appraisals have been published by her Department since 1 January 2001; and if she will list the last four; [29038]

(3) what procedures her Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made; [29040]

(4) what plans her Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29041]

Mr. Foulkes: The Scotland Office is a small Government Department with limited programme expenditure and procurement capacity. It has therefore not been necessary for it to carry out any environmental appraisals since its establishment in July 1999. The Scotland Office's management board take environmental considerations into account as part of its normal decision-taking process, including its Spending Review submission to the Treasury.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many officials from her Department have attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29042]

Mr. Foulkes: None.

Attendance Allowance

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans she has to make representations to the Department for Work and Pensions to reconsider its decision to withdraw attendance allowance to those recipients who will be entitled to receive free personal care in Scotland; [28954]

(2) if the Scottish Executive received the support of the Scotland Office in its recent dialogue with the Department for Work and Pensions and other Whitehall Departments on the subject of the payment of attendance allowance to those recipients who will be entitled to receive free personal care in Scotland; [28955]

(3) pursuant to her answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 141, on the Barnett formula, what views of Whitehall were made clear to the Scottish Health Minister by her Office during the consideration by the care development review of the subject of the payment of attendance allowance to those recipients who will be entitled to receive free personal care in Scotland; [28956]

(4) what plans she has to make representations to the Department for Work and Pensions to secure the continued allocation to Scotland of the attendance allowance money withdrawn from recipients who will be entitled to receive free personal care; [28953]

(5) pursuant to her answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 141, on the Barnett formula, which other Whitehall Departments were involved in the dialogue with the Scottish Executive and the Department for Work and Pensions on the subject of the payment of attendance allowance to those recipients who will be entitled to receive free personal care in Scotland. [28952]

Mr. Foulkes: The Scottish Executive, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Treasury and the Scotland Office had a number of discussions on this matter. These discussions were amicable. Throughout, it was recognised that decisions on care services are devolved and those on benefits are reserved. The Government have made it clear that they are not prepared to transfer resources in this area to the Scottish Executive. The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, Mr. Malcolm Chisholm, said on 15 January that the discussions were concluded and the matter would not be taken any further.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Human Reproductive Cloning Act

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General, pursuant to her answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 169W, under what powers the Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001 was extended to Scotland. [28798]

The Advocate-General: The Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001 is an Act of the United Kingdom Parliament. This Parliament can legislate on any subject for the whole of the United Kingdom. A United Kingdom Act applies to Scotland unless stated otherwise. As this Act is not expressly restricted in its extent it applies to Scotland. The subject matter of the Act is in any case reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament by section J3 of schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church of England Children's Society

36. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations the Church Commissioners have made to the Church of England Children's Society in respect of its decision to cease its activities in Wales. [26158]

Mr. Bell: The Church Commissioners' primary legal responsibility is to manage their assets for the financial support of the Church of England's serving and retired ministry. It would not fall to the Commissioners to make any such representations.

Clergy Pensions

37. **Bob Spink:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how much was paid by the Church Commissioners for clergy pensions in the last financial year; and what the estimate is for the current financial year. [26159]

Mr. Bell: In the year ended 31 December 2000, the Commissioners paid £90.6 million for clergy pensions and a further £11.3 million in transitional relief to offset dioceses' costs under the new pensions scheme. The Commissioners also paid pension contributions for bishops and cathedral clergy totalling £1.0 million.

According to the latest estimate for the year ending 31 December 2001 the Commissioners expect to pay £94.1 million for past service clergy pensions and contribute £7.2 million to dioceses in transitional relief. Pension contributions for bishops and cathedral clergy are estimated to be £1.1 million.

Clergy Safety

38. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what financial provision is made for improving the personal safety of the clergy on working duty. [26160]

Mr. Bell: Financial provision for improving the personal security of the clergy is largely the responsibility of the dioceses. The Church Commissioners offer guidance on security aspects of parsonage house design.

The Archbishops' Council is currently making inquiries of dioceses about the measures they have in place. Early replies show that local police forces have provided training for clergy on how to recognise and deal with potentially difficult circumstances and that diocesan surveyors are giving renewed attention to the security of parsonage houses.

Clergy Pay

39. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on clergy pay and pensions. [26162]

Mr. Bell: The National Stipend Benchmark for clergy of incumbent status with effect from 1 April 2002 is £17,420, an increase of 3 per cent. on the previous year. The full service pension from 1 April 2002 will be £10,693.

Consultations are currently taking place with dioceses about stipend levels and pensions arrangements. Proposals for change will be discussed by the General Synod in November. Further details can be found in the Central Stipends Authority's forthcoming report for 2001, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Churches (VAT)

Ms Walley: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what is the estimated take-up of VAT concessions by churches with listed building status; and what guidance has been issued to assist eligible churches to claim. [27373]

Mr. Bell: This scheme is a Government initiative and responsibility rests with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. I understand that the scheme contractor, reporting to the Department, has issued well over 1,000 application forms since the scheme was launched in December last year. The Department has publicised the scheme which includes information available on the internet. The Church of England has issued publicity to parishes and dioceses about the scheme, including contact details for the scheme contractor.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Council what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27304]

Mr. Robin Cook: No fraud has been recorded in the Privy Council Office during this period.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27393]

Mr. Robin Cook: None. My Department is not responsible for any other bodies.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26967]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have no plans to do so.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Register of Members' Interests

Lady Hermon: To ask the President of the Council if he will support an amendment to the rules governing the Register of Members' Interests to oblige all Members to make entries within three months of being elected. [25255]

Mr. Robin Cook: This is a matter for the House. We would consider carefully any views Members put forward.

Equitable Life

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Council if the pension scheme for hon. Members will benefit from special arrangements vis-à-vis transferring out of Equitable Life. [28851]

Mr. Robin Cook: Equitable Life is one of the providers appointed to provide an Additional Voluntary Contribution (AVC) facility for members of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund (PCPF). This appointment is made and overseen by the Trustees of the PCPF. I understand that the Trustees have sought clarification from Equitable Life of the terms that will apply if members wish to transfer their funds out of the with-profits fund. The Trustees expect shortly to advise members of the terms offered, so that they can decide whether or not to transfer their funds.

Office Costs Allowance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Council how many staff paid from the office costs allowance have full time contracts and claim *(a)* below £15,000, *(b)* between £15,000 and £20,000, *(c)* between £20,000 and £25,000, *(d)* between £25,000 and £30,000 and *(e)* above £30,000 a year at the latest date for which figures are available; if he will break down these figures to indicate whether the person holds (i) a secretarial personal assistant post and (ii) a research post; and how many people in each pay band are spouses or of the Member's immediate family. [24379]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested on pay levels and job titles, and whether staff are part-time or full-time is not at present readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Fees Office do not record whether Members' employees are spouses or family members.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, which recent letters to the Commission from the Commissioner for Standards have not been published to hon. Members. [25062]

Mr. Kirkwood *[pursuant to his reply, 15 January 2002, c. 152–53]:* Following a request from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, the Commission has decided to release recent correspondence between Mr. Speaker and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. I will place copies in the Library.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Properties

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the properties used by Ministers for *(a)* residential and *(b)* business purposes that are owned by Government organisations. [28280]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The official residential properties used by Ministers are as follows:

The flats above Nos. 10 and 11 Downing street;

The flat in 1 Carlton Gardens;

Flats 1, 2 and 3 in Admiralty house;

Government House in Pimlico.

Accommodation in Hillsborough Castle is available for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and other Northern Ireland Ministers while on duty in Northern Ireland.

The Lord Chancellor has an official residence in the House of Lords which is provided in his capacity as Speaker of the House of Lords. The running costs are met by the House of Lords authorities and do not fall to the Government.

In addition, Chequers, Dorneywood, Chevening, none of which is owned by the Government, are also available to the Prime Minister, me, as Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary at no cost to the public purse.

Properties used by Ministers for departmental purposes are set out in the List of Ministerial Responsibilities. A copy of the List is in the Library of the House and is available on-line on the Cabinet Office website.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the last occasion was on which she requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29014]

Clare Short: As answers to parliamentary questions 29013 and 29015 make clear, environmental appraisal is built in as part of the normal project or programme management cycle. Therefore environmental issues would routinely have been fully discussed before policy decisions are made.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29016]

Clare Short: Our approach to the Spending Review and our Public Service Agreement is driven by our commitment to the millennium development goals. One of these goals is to ensure environmental sustainability. We therefore seek to integrate environmental considerations into all aspects of our policy and expenditure.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many officials from her Department have attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29017]

Clare Short: No one from the Department for International Development has attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College.

Over the past three years DFID has delivered its own environmental awareness training which has been delivered in both the UK and overseas offices to over 250 staff.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what procedures her Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [29015]

Clare Short: It is a mandatory requirement that all policies, programmes and projects are subject to environmental screening at the concept note stage. Screening aims to ensure that environmental issues are taken into consideration at the earliest opportunity and to initiate, where appropriate, more comprehensive environmental appraisal and, if necessary, a full environmental impact assessment.

In 1999, DFID produced an environmental guide. It emphasises that environmental appraisal is concerned just as much with identifying environmental opportunities for improving development outcomes as it is with identifying environmental risks. It also stresses that environmental appraisal is applicable at policy and programme levels as well as at the project level. The guide complements the more detailed 1996 Manual of Environmental Appraisal.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many environmental appraisals have been published by her Department since 1 January 2001; and if she will list the last four. [29013]

Clare Short: DFID's regular environmental appraisal procedures are described in response to PQ 2127. It is mandatory within DFID that policies, programmes and projects are subject to environmental screening at the concept stage, with further environmental appraisal to identify risks and opportunities being conducted as required. This work then becomes an integral part of the project documentation, which although not formally published, can be made available to the public on a case by case basis.

In situations where the environmental screening reveals the need for a formal environmental impact assessment (EIA), the assessment will be undertaken by consultants for the national government of the partner country, with funding and, if necessary, additional international technical assistance from DFID. Publication of the EIA is the responsibility of the partner Government, in accordance with their legislation.

Examples of formal EIAs since January 2001 include:

Ngamiland veterinary fences, Government of Botswana, March 2001.

Impacts of Tsetse Fly Control in Okavango, May 2001.

Strategic Environmental Assessment for the "Rehabilitation of Feeder Roads in 9 Districts", Ghana Department of Feeder Roads, July 2001.

Terms of Reference for full EIA of Gerald's Park Airstrip, Government of Montserrat, January 2002.

DFID development spending has increasingly focused upon resource transfers to sectoral and general budgets. There has therefore been a corresponding decrease in infrastructure work requiring a formal EIA.

In addition, as part of DFID's commitment to green housekeeping, environmental appraisals were undertaken for the relocation of the DFID London HQ; the consolidation of four DFID offices into one in Delhi, India; and environmental audit was voluntarily undertaken of the DFID Caribbean office; and the DFID Uganda office is to commence an audit in February 2002.

Foreign Aid

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much foreign aid was given by the UK Government to *(a)* Israel and *(b)* the Palestinians in the last three years. [27433]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

(a) Israel is a prosperous country that does not need or require our development assistance.

(b) The people of the West Bank and Gaza and Palestinian refugees are suffering considerable poverty, and are in need of development assistance. We have disbursed through our bilateral programme to the West Bank and Gaza Strip £5.2 million, £8 million, and £9 million in the last three financial years. We have also contributed £3.4 million, £13 million, and £18.7 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees during the same period. In addition we contribute 5 per cent. of the World bank's resources (about £13 million since 1994), and 17 per cent. of the European Commission's development budget (about £30 million in 2001) to the Palestinians.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27978]

Clare Short: The estimated cost to DFID's budget of theft and fraud in the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2001 is some £250,000 of which £175,000 can be attributed to contractor fraud. Of the remaining sum, £22,000 relates to the theft of assets which, in line with Treasury guidance, has been classified as involving departmental staff either directly or through collusion. Details of suspected or proven fraud are provided to the Treasury on an annual basis. The annual report that the Treasury prepares on fraud is deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Kenya

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what investigations the World bank has undertaken to ensure that senior members of the Government of Kenya and their family members have not laundered money through *(a)* the City of London and *(b)* Switzerland. [29119]

Clare Short: It is not within the remit of the World bank to undertake such investigations.

Zimbabwe

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the money committed for development assistance in Zimbabwe has already been spent. [28416]

Clare Short: DFID plans to provide up to £18 million in development assistance for the 2001–02 financial year. This figure has been fully committed. Over £10 million has already been spent.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [28005]

Clare Short: Since 1 April 1997 the following items have been stolen or lost from DFID:

14 laptop computers with a total value of £15,732. The value of each piece of equipment ranges from £730 to £1,642. Computer chips (£1,100), computer equipment (£8,500), one video camera (value unknown), one calculator (£108), one notebook computer (£1,880) and two mobile telephones (£250).

Sudan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her recent visit to the Sudan; and what recent discussions she has had with the Sudanese authorities on the implementation of a strategy for peace in that country. [27342]

Clare Short: I visited Sudan from 6–11 January and discussed the possibility of taking forward the peace process with the full range of Sudanese political leaders, north and south. I concluded that the time was right for a major international effort to help the parties resolve Africa's most costly and longest running civil conflict. All whom I met expressed their strong commitment to progress on peace, agreed that there was a window of opportunity and expressed their willingness to engage in negotiations. But all doubted they would succeed, given the legacy of mistrust, without outside help, which they thought should include major UK input. I confirmed that we stood ready to play our part. I also emphasised the potential economic benefits for all, and UK readiness to engage in development if stability can be achieved.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last used the railway service in connection with her official duties; what station she left from and what was the destination; and whether it is her intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28101]

Clare Short: I last used the railway service on official duty when I took the Eurostar leaving Waterloo International for a meeting of the Development Ministers of Europe in Brussels on 8 December.

The majority of my work outside London is overseas. However I make use of the railway service if it is the quickest way to a destination.

International Aid

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make education a higher priority within the international aid budget. [27864]

Clare Short: Education is a precondition of development and poverty reduction and is given high priority within our development assistance programme. The Government are strongly committed to achieving the millennium development goals of universal primary education (UPE) in all countries by the year 2015 and gender equity in primary and secondary schooling by 2005. DFID's education strategy paper, "The Challenge of Universal Primary Education", sets out our overall approach and three-fold strategy for achieving these goals. Our recent paper "Children out of School" identifies the different circumstances of children who are not in school and proposes an eight-point plan of international action for accelerating progress towards the 2015 target.

European Commission Payments

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the European Commission on delays in payments of money owed by the commission to charities and NGOs. [28879]

Clare Short: Delays in payments by the European Commission to NGOs have been discussed on many occasions by member states, including the UK, and the commission. We and others have urged the commission to take the steps needed to improve the handling of such payments since the delays are often excessive and cause real hardship to the organisations and individuals concerned. The commission has improved the management systems used to process those payments and we understand that the delays have been reduced but remain of concern. This is also the case with many payments for implementation of EC programmes in developing countries, where we are also promoting reform. We stay in close touch with UK NGOs about this issue and will continue to monitor the position with them.

Education Charges

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she will take to secure the abolition of education charges in developing countries. [27865]

Clare Short: The Government are committed to the principle that primary education should be made free. No child should be denied access to a basic education because the costs, direct or indirect, cannot be met by the household. School fees are an example of a direct cost, but there may be indirect charges for books, uniforms and exams which can make education unaffordable to many.

The equitable financing of education is a key issue for achieving universal primary education by 2015. Governments of developing countries need to demonstrate the political commitment to abolish education charges. The abolition of primary tuition fees in Malawi and Uganda, brought about by strong political leadership, resulted in enrolment increases of up to 3 million in Uganda and 1.9 million in Malawi. The impact was greatest on the enrolment of girls. Education budgets for proving effective primary education for all should be developed within national poverty reduction strategies and factor in the costs of introducing free primary education.

In our dialogue with partner Governments, civil society and the international community on poverty reduction and education sector programmes, we will continue to argue for the reduction of the financial barriers that exclude large numbers of the poorest children.

CDC

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) when she expects CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, to meet its target of 50 per cent. of its investment in Africa and poorer countries in Asia; [27701]

(2) which Minister is responsible for the CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation; [27700]

(3) whether CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, submits an annual corporate plan for ministerial approval. [27702]

Clare Short: I am the Minister responsible for CDC. CDC have an investment policy set by Government, which provides the framework within which the board formulates its business plans. The Government do not require these plans to be submitted for approval by Ministers. CDC met the investment policy target for sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia in 2001, when 52 per cent. of the aggregate cost of its investments were for the benefit of these countries.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what expenditure has been incurred by her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if she will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27946]

Clare Short: Expenditure in relation to surveys of public attitudes is as follows:

	£000
1997–98	43
1998–99	0
1999–2000	45
2000–01	58
2001–02	35

Surveys commissioned

Public Attitudes on Development, conducted by the Office for National Statistics, surveys conducted in July 1999, 2000 and 2001 and results published in November 1999, 2000, November 2001 respectively.

Attitudes of School Children to International Development, conducted by MORI Schools Omnibus Research, published in July 2000 and 2001.

In addition we conducted a readership survey in 2000 of "Developments Magazine" in order to test the impact and reach of the magazine.

We are committed to regular monitoring of public and young people's attitudes to development in order to inform and monitor the impact of the public education work of the Department. All the aforementioned reports are accessible through the Department's internet site and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

None of our current non-department public bodies have incurred expenditure in relation to opinion bodies and/or focus groups.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Statistics (Wales)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recorded crimes for *(a)* violence against the person, *(b)* sexual offences, *(c)* robbery, *(d)* burglary in a dwelling, *(e)* theft of a motor vehicle and *(f)* theft from a vehicle per 1,000 population there were in (i) Wales and (ii) the Cynon Valley in the last 12 months. [26870]

Mr. Denham: The latest available information covers the 12 months to March 2001 and is given in the table. Separate figures are not available centrally for the Cynon Valley area, which comes within the Rhondda Cynon Taff police Basic Command Unit (BCU). The BCU figures are taken from the Home Office Statistical Bulletin no. 12/01 "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 Months to March 2001", which gives details of all BCU and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas in England and Wales.

Recorded crimes per 1,000 population for Wales and the Rhondda Cynon Taff basic command unit, April 2000 to March 2001:

	Wales	*Rhonnda Cynon Taff BCU*
Violence against the person	13.0	8.3
Sexual offences	0.6	0.3
Robbery	0.3	0.2
Burglary in a dwelling	4.1	5.2
Theft of a motor vehicle	6.1	7.4
Theft from a vehicle	8.8	6.5

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27302]

Mr. Blunkett: The estimated costs of losses to the Home Office from reported fraud is summarised in the table.

	£000
Accounting periods	*Estimated fraud*
1997–98	13
1998–99	84
1999–2000	140
2000–01	90
Total	327

Anti-terrorism Legislation

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the part police forces will play in the implementation of the new anti-terrorism legislation. [16882]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* The police will be at the forefront of the legislation's implementation and additional police powers included in the new legislation will enhance their capability to enforce the law effectively. I am in close contact with the police over on-going action to counter terrorism, using both the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and existing legislation.

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of individuals in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26314]

Mr. Blunkett: The annual remuneration costs including benefits in kind cover basic salary, bonuses and any additional allowances payable including recruitment and retention and any allowance's payable as a result of relocation costs.

(a) The number of individuals within the Home Office receiving remuneration costs exceeding (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000, was:

	(i) £100,000	*(ii) £200,000*
1 April 2001	7	0
1 April 2000	3	0
1 April 1999	2	0
1 April 1998	1	0

(b) The number of individual within the related agencies of the Home Office receiving remuneration costs exceeding (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 was:

	(i) £100,000	*(ii) £200,000*
1 April 2001	4	0
1 April 2000	2	0
1 April 1999	2	0
1 April 1998	1	0

(c) The information requested relating to remuneration levels in related non-departmental public bodies is available in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies".

Drugs

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many heroin addicts are on the methadone programme in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; what the financial cost is of the programme in each country; and how many deaths have occurred while addicts are on a methadone programme in each country in each of the last three years. [23878]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Since the Home Office addicts index closed in 1997, the regional drug misuse databases (RDMDs) have been the main source of information on persons presenting to drug treatment services with a drug problem. During the six month period ending 30 September 2000, around 21,200 people were reported to the RDMDs in England as presenting for treatment, with heroin recorded as their main drug of misuse. Around 6,200 of these people were reported as being prescribed methadone for treatment at the time they presented; other heroin users may subsequently have been prescribed methadone.

In terms of financial costs, in 2001 the net ingredient cost (the basic cost of the drug, excluding dispensing cost, fees or prescription charges income) of methadone for use in substance dependence is £6.87 per preparation.

The number of deaths in England and Wales where methadone was mentioned on death certificates in 1999 were 298.

Information relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved Assemblies.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Access Land

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to begin consultation on proposals for regulations on the dedication of access land under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [29577]

Alun Michael: I have today published a consultation paper which sets out the Government's proposals for regulations on the dedication of access land under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The regulations, which we expect to lay before Parliament later this year, will enable the owner of any land, or a lessee with a long lease, to irrevocably dedicate that land for public access. The Forestry Commission has already announced its intention in principle to dedicate the national forestry estate under section 16.

I am also writing today to Green Minister colleagues about the considerable scope for dedication of land held by Government Departments and sponsored non-departmental public bodies, where dedication is compatible with the purpose for which the land is held. We will work with other Departments to explore the opportunities for dedication through the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate.

Copies of the consultation paper are being sent to organisations representing local authorities, recreational users and land managers, and others with an interest; the consultation paper is also being published on the DEFRA website. A copy of the consultation paper has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Foot and Mouth

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the *(a)* Youth Hostels Association and *(b)* the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers about financial losses caused by the foot and mouth crisis; what proposals she has to compensate these organisations; and if she will make a statement. [26230]

Alun Michael: I have corresponded with the Youth Hostels Association and met their Chairman and Chief Executive, as has my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting I have also received around 200 letters from hon. Members on behalf of constituents concerned about the impact on the YHA's income of foot and mouth disease and the measures taken to control it. The YHA estimate that they lost £5 million 2001 out of an annual income of £30 million.

I have also met representatives from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and discussed the impact of foot and mouth disease on their activities. I understand that the losses they suffered are in the region of £250,000 out of an annual income in the order of £23 million.

I am well aware of the impact that foot and mouth disease had on a range of charities, especially those involved in promoting countryside access. The measures we put in place to help affected businesses were mainly focused on small businesses, and were not well adapted to helping national organisations such as the YHA or BTCV. During later stages we modified the guidelines for the

Business recovery fund to clarify that charities' individual business units may be treated as separate business entities and may receive assistance in their own right if their applications meet the fund's other criteria. Charities may also benefit from rate relief granted by local authorities (for which we raised the rate of central subsidy from 75 per cent. to 95 or 98 per cent. in rural areas) and from the deferral of tax payments due. We have also put a lot of effort into encouraging local authorities into reopening footpaths as soon as possible to attract visitors back to the countryside, and put extra resources into tourism promotion via the British Tourist Authority and English Tourism Council.

I accept that the help available is modest compared with the losses that organisations such as the YHA have suffered. It is not possible to provide compensation to charities for loss of income, any more than to farming or non-farming businesses affected by the disease and by the measures to control it. As explained in "England's Rural Future" published on 13 December, we are looking urgently and sympathetically at further measures to help charities—especially those involved in promoting countryside access—to recover from the impact of foot and mouth disease.

Rural Development Plan

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role national park authorities in England will have in delivery of the rural development plan; and what additional resources will be made available by her Department for the authorities concerned. [26897]

Alun Michael: National park authorities make a significant contribution to the operation of the National Rural Development Programme (ERDP), not least through participation in the national and regional consultation groups which advise on the strategic direction of the programme. National park authorities are also encouraged to work with DEFRA's Rural Development Service to ensure that effective delivery of the ERDP contributes to the aims and objectives of national parks. The national park authorities also play a positive role in encouraging uptake of the agri-environment schemes which now form part of the ERDP. In particular they can use their detailed knowledge of the parks to ensure that the Countryside Stewardship Scheme is utilised positively and appropriately within the individual parks.

Birds of Prey

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase the number of British birds of prey. [26061]

Mr. Meacher: All wild bird populations (including birds of prey) are included in the wild bird population indicator, which is one of the 15 headline indicators of sustainable development. These indicators are a "quality of life barometer" measuring everyday concerns like health, jobs and air quality.

Populations of birds of prey have increased as a result of better protection from persecution and restrictions on the use of persistent pesticides.

There are three projects aimed at increasing the population of a bird of prey species:

1. The Red Kite Reintroduction Programme
2. The Hen Harrier Recovery Project
3. The 'Wash Harriers' Recovery Project.

Although these projects are focused primarily on individual species, their overall objectives are far wider. The work involves tackling problems that affect a range of different birds of prey, and in so doing, contributing to recovery in their populations or at least to maintaining populations.

English Nature are also involved with the Osprey reintroduction project that has been undertaken at Rutland Water in central England.

Environmental Appraisals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many published environmental appraisals have been notified to the Sustainable Development Unit since February 2001; and by which Departments. [27536]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The Third Annual Report on Greening Government, published in November 2001, included a list of published environmental appraisals up to 31 March 2001. This can be found in Part 1 of the report at www.sustainable-development.gov.uk. We have been notified of the following published environmental appraisals in the period since:

	Number
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	2
Export Credit Guarantee Department	1
Inland Revenue	1

The table may not, however, give the complete picture of the extent of environmental appraisal undertaken by Departments as it only covers published free-standing environmental appraisals.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she has taken, pursuant to the recommendation of the Environmental Audit Committee to ensure that departmental environmental appraisals assess the impact of competing options. [27543]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* This recommendation was included in the EAC's assessment of the First Annual Report of the Green Ministers Committee. In our Second Annual Report, all Departments made commitments to: maintain a record of the outcome of each screening they undertake; publish all free-standing environmental appraisals of policies unless there are overriding reasons for not doing so; and to produce their own guidance or training on screening of options by March 2001. The onus is on individual Departments to ensure they are operating these procedures properly, in particular getting their approach to the initial screening of policies for environmental impacts right.

The Third Annual Report on Greening Government, published in November 2001, reported that Departments, where applicable, had systems in place to maintain a record of environmental screenings and had produced guidance or training on the screening of options. Detailed information on the systems in place in each Department can be found in Part 2 of the report at www.sustainable-development.gov.uk.

Air Pollution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in Buckinghamshire towards meeting the National Air Quality Strategy targets. [27788]

Mr. Meacher: National and local air quality modelling suggests that the objectives prescribed in the Air Quality Strategy will all be met across all of Buckinghamshire with the following two main exceptions:

1. There is a risk that the nitrogen dioxide annual objective may not be met alongside parts of the M40 motorway. Wycombe district council has declared an air quality management area between junctions 3 and 5 of the M40, and is carrying out further modelling and monitoring in this area which is due to be completed by 31 July 2002.
2. There is a risk that the national ozone objective may not be met across parts of Buckinghamshire. The Air Quality Strategy sets out the actions that are being taken at national and international level to tackle this issue, since, because of its transboundary nature with major contributions from outside the UK, ozone is a pollutant over which local authorities have little control.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many air pollution *(a)* passive diffusion tubes and *(b)* automatic monitoring sites were based in Buckinghamshire in each year since 1977. [27789]

Mr. Meacher: There are passive nitrogen dioxide diffusion tubes sites in the UK network in Aylesbury and Milton Keynes. Both towns have four sites each, which have been running since 1993. DEFRA has not funded any automatic monitoring sites based in Buckinghamshire at any time since 1977.

In addition to these, each of the three local authorities in Buckinghamshire operates its own network of air quality monitors. Details of these are not held centrally.

	Eaga Partnership	*TXU Warm Front*	*Total*
HEES budget 2001–02[1] (£ million)	139	54	193
Percentage of budget already spent	65	67	—
Percentage likely to be spent by year end	100	100	—

[1] The budget for 2001–02 includes the moneys not used in the previous financial year

The scheme managers have sufficient resources to meet demand in this financial year. The major difficulty that they continue to face is the national shortage of gas heating engineers. Both scheme managers continue to recruit installers and thereby improve the quality of service provided to householders.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the EU funding that would be lost if the landfill tax credit scheme were to be redefined as public instead of private money. [15946]

Mr. Meacher: None. However, I understand that two studies are currently looking into this issue. One from Glasgow Caledonian University commissioned by ENTRUST, the LTCS regulator, and an Environmental Bodies Council (ebco) survey.

We have recently announced that we will be consulting later this year on possible changes to the existing scheme. We expect the issue of EU funding will be raised during this consultation.

Home Energy Efficiency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the total budget for the warm front schemes in the *(a)* Eaga area and *(b)* eastern area during 2001–02; and (i) how much and (ii) what percentage of these budgets (1) has already been spent and (2) is projected to be spent by the end of the year given present trends; and what measures Eaga and eastern are expected to take to bring budgets back into line if they are depleted before the end of the year. [25354]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* The home energy efficiency scheme (HEES), now marketed as the warm front team, is administered by two scheme managers, TXU Warm Front Ltd. (responsible for the eastern, east midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber) and Eaga Partnership Ltd. (responsible for the rest of England). The table provides the information requested.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the Government are helping to promote more energy efficient homes; and how many people in the Midlothian constituency have benefited from this. [27182]

Mr. Meacher: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for energy efficiency in England. In Scotland, and therefore for Midlothian this is a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

The Government are committed to energy efficiency for its significant environmental, business and social benefits and have announced a range of policies to promote energy efficiency and reduce emissions in the domestic sector, including:

A new Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) for 2002–05 will place an obligation on gas and electricity suppliers to make energy efficiency improvements, through measures provided to domestic consumers.

The Energy Saving Trust promotes the sustainable and efficient use of energy in the domestic sector. The trust is also active in encouraging local authorities to develop and improve domestic energy efficiency.

New Building Regulations to come into effect from April 2002 will include improved standards of energy efficiency for new houses and those undergoing refurbishment.

The new home energy efficiency scheme (HEES) is designed to tackle fuel poverty among those most vulnerable to cold-related ill health. Access to the scheme is through receipt of a qualifying income or disability related benefit. By 2004, HEES is expected to have assisted some 800,000 householders.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many houses in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Wales lack (i) insulation and (ii) draught-proofing; and what measures the Government are taking to lower this figure. [25626]

Mr. Meacher: As fuel poverty is a devolved matter, it is the responsibility of the respective Parliament and Assemblies to comment on the situation in their countries.

The information is set out in respect of England:

Insulation of households in England 1999

Households	*Number*
With no insulation[1]	2,600,000
Without full insulation[2]	18,100,000
With no draught-proofing[3]	4,400,000
Without full draught-proofing[4]	7,290,000
Total	20,800,000

[1] No insulation is taken to mean the following: no loft insulation (where there is a loft); no cavity insulation (if there is a cavity wall); no double glazing.

[2] Full insulation is taken to mean the following: at least four inches of loft insulation (where there is a loft); cavity walls insulated (where there are cavity walls); at least 80 per cent. of windows double glazed.

[3] Double glazing is taken to include draught proofing.

[4] Full draught-proofing is taken to mean 80 per cent. or more of rooms draught-proofed.

The Government's main programme for private sector households in England is the home energy efficiency scheme (HEES), marketed as the warm front team, which is designed to tackle fuel poverty among those most vulnerable to cold related ill health—older householders, families with children and the disabled or those with long term illness. The scheme provides grants for a package of insulation and heating improvements. Separate programmes are in place to bring social sector housing up to a decent standard.

The Government have recently set a target of 62 fuel-standardised terawatt hours for improvements in energy efficiency to be achieved by electricity and gas suppliers under the Energy Efficiency Commitment for 2002 to 2005 (EEC). Suppliers' EEC programmes are expected to include significant numbers of insulation measures.

The Government also provide funding to the Energy Saving Trust to run a wide ranging programme of work to promote energy efficiency in homes. This includes promotion of cavity wall insulation and draught-proofing via advertising, advice centres and a database of available grants.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the average installation cost of an Eaga central heating system in the *(a)* north-west and *(b)* UK. [22898]

Mr. Meacher: The two scheme managers, Eaga and TXU Warm Front Ltd., are responsible for recruiting heating contractors through an open tender in accordance with the UK Public Procurement Regulations. At present they are in the process of re-tendering contracts for the next two years. Therefore it is not possible to publish the current average installation prices without seriously distorting this tender process.

However the average cost of providing a central heating system together with appropriate insulation is some £2,000.

As fuel poverty is a devolved matter, it is the responsibility of the respective Parliament and Assemblies to comment on the situation in Scotland and Wales.

Take-back Schemes

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of domestic appliance retailers who will cease take-back schemes because of a lack of recycling and processing facilities for domestic appliances containing CFCs and HCFCs. [27611]

Mr. Meacher: It is estimated that virtually all retailers have ceased their take-back schemes for fridges and freezers. However, this is not due to a lack of a disposal route. Fridges and freezers collected from householders may be re-used, disposed of via high temperature incineration in the UK, exported for recycling in other member states, or stored pending recycling in the UK.

Refrigerators

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what storage facilities she has identified for the storage of fridges and deep freezers containing CFCs prior to their reprocessing. [27608]

Mr. Meacher: The location of storage facilities is a matter for the waste management industry and local authorities. A number of companies and local authorities have identified suitable storage facilities and I understand that sufficient capacity is available for all fridges and freezers that would be disposed of in a typical year.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what advice she has given to local authorities regarding the increased cost of collecting domestic appliances containing CFCs from 1 January; and when she plans to announce additional resources to be made available to local authorities under the New Burdens Procedures; [27609]

(2) what estimate she has made of additional costs to local authorities of collecting white goods from 1 January. [27610]

Mr. Meacher: In December we announced a payment of £6 million funding for local authorities to cover their costs until March 2002. We are continuing to assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action is required beyond that. As part of this process, my officials are in contact with local authorities and their representatives to gather additional information about costs.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimates she has made of the cost to local authorities per refrigerator of the collection, storage and processing of CFC-containing refrigerators. [27607]

Mr. Meacher: Collection costs will vary between local authorities and waste collection authorities may levy a charge to cover the costs of collection. I understand that the current charges levied by waste management companies for storage and processing of fridges are in the range of £22 to £35, but that these are likely to fall once more plants are operational. We expect new plants to come on-line in the spring.

Many local authorities will choose to store fridges until prices are lower. The cost of storage will depend on whether local authorities have suitable land available, and the period for which fridges are stored.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if it was her policy to ensure that liquid processing facilities existed for the processing of CFC-containing refrigerators and refrigerators when EC Regulation 2037/2000 came into force on the 1 January. [27612]

Mr. Meacher: The UK only received clarification of the requirements of the regulation with regards to ozone depleting substances in insulation foam in June 2001. As soon as this was received, officials worked, with stakeholders, on a package of measures, including funding for local authorities, technical standards for removal of ODS from fridges and standards for storage pending treatment. This package enabled companies to make the necessary investment decisions. Given the extremely tight time scale, it was always unlikely that processing plant would come on-line for 1 January. However, I understand that the first new plant is likely to be operational in spring 2002.

Waste Refrigeration Equipment (Scotland)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with Scottish Ministers regarding managing waste refrigeration equipment in Scotland. [26715]

Mr. Meacher: None. However, my officials have been working closely on this issue with colleagues in the Devolved Administrations.

GM Crops

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on a five-year moratorium on genetically engineered crops. [20356]

Mr. Meacher: European Union Directive 90/220 lays down strict controls on the release of genetically modified (GM) organisms. It requires proposed releases to be considered on a case-by-case basis, with a detailed assessment of the potential risks to human health and the environment. The Government agree with this approach. At the same time, we have a voluntary agreement with the industry that GM crops will not be grown here commercially at least until the results of the Farm Scale Evaluations have been assessed.

Sewerage Services

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many residential properties in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Sheffield, Hillsborough were newly connected to mains sewerage in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and how many residential properties in the constituency of Sheffield, Hillsborough remain unconnected; [23922]

(2) how many residential properties in the UK were not connected to mains sewerage in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 2000. [23921]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 December 2001]:* The information requested is not available. We do not hold any figures about the type or number of properties connected or not connected to mains sewers. Water UK publish data annually about the UK water industry. They estimate that 6 per cent. of the population in the UK are not connected to mains sewerage. They do not have data for 1980 or 1990.

Water Sports

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she intends to take on the research report, "Water-based Sport and Recreation: The Facts" commissioned by her Department; and if she will make a statement. [27855]

Alun Michael: Officials will be meeting the other sponsors of the research (British Waterways, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and Sport England) shortly, along with other interested Government Departments to consider what action we need to take in the light of the reports findings.

Village Halls

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has in relation to the funding of village halls. [28874]

Alun Michael: Village halls are funded in a variety of ways, most of the sources of finance being very local in nature. DEFRA has inherited a small funding stream for aid to village halls, while currently there are no plans to alter the way in which the Department assists the funding of village halls through the Countryside Agency.

We are supporting local communities and parish and town councils in a variety of ways which complement the work of village halls. Currently, the Village Halls Loan Fund is administered by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) on behalf of the Countryside Agency and can provide loans towards capital improvements such as maintenance, extensions or rebuilding costs. The total loan fund value is £700,000 and £244,000 has been loaned out to date this year.

In addition, the Countryside Agency can offer help through the Community Service Grants Scheme delivered through the Vital Villages Programme. It can help fund an alteration/extension of a village hall or other community building where it provides a new or extended service to the community.

Other sources of public funding for village halls include local authorities, regional development agencies, the community fund and the sports council.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measurements are made of the radiation above background level around intermediate and high level nuclear waste storage facilities at Sellafield and Dounreay. [25895]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Measurements of all major types of radiation in the environment around the Sellafield site are undertaken routinely by BNFL, the Environment Agency and the Foods Standards Agency[1]. The data are published annually in respective environmental monitoring reports. The measurements cover the marine and terrestrial environments and reflect both present and past operations on site. It is not possible to identify separately monitoring data relating specifically to waste storage facilities from those relating to other operations on site. Assessed doses to those most likely to be exposed to radiation (the critical group) are based on these measurements. These estimated doses reflect total risk from the site, and are within national and international dose limits for members of the public.

Radiation measurements taken within the Sellafield and Dounreay sites, around the waste storage facilities (and other facilities), are carried out by BNFL and UKAES respectively. The results of these measurements are available to Inspectors of the Health and Safety Executive. Both of these operators have a duty to ensure that the radiation doses arising from, among other things, their waste storage facilities are below statutory limits and are kept as low as reasonably practicable.

Responsibility for environmental protection policy in Scotland (Dounreay) is a matter for the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

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[1] Environmental reports referred to in the response:

1. Discharges and monitoring of the environment in the UK: annual report for 2000, BNFL
2. Radioactivity in the Environment, Report for 2000: Environment Agency
3. Radioactivity in Food and the Environment, 2000: Food Standards Agency and Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Planning Reform White Paper

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations she has had with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in respect of the implications of the Planning Reform White Paper for her Department's White Paper on radioactive waste management. [25166]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has had several contacts with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on this issue. That Department's 12 December paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" proposes reforms to the planning system, and its consultation paper of 17 December sets out new parliamentary procedures for processing major infrastructure projects. Radioactive waste facilities are among the projects to which these procedures could apply.

Our 12 September consultation paper "Managing radioactive waste safely" asks the public for comments, by 12 March 2002, on a proposed programme for reaching decisions on managing solid radioactive waste over thousands of years. Each Department consulted the other before publishing its paper. The Department's paper is not a White Paper as such and does not itself propose any infrastructure projects, but such proposals may one day result from our decision-making process. Our Departments will therefore continue to discuss planning and radioactive waste policy issues.

Waste Management Scheme

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which schemes give financial assistance to local authorities in England and Wales to encourage waste management and recycling of waste; and which schemes give financial assistance to local authorities in the county of Essex for this purpose. [26846]

Mr. Meacher: The Spending Review 2000 announced the framework for the Government's support to local authorities for the next three years up to 2003–04. This included an annual increase in the revenue support to local authorities for Environmental Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS), which includes waste management services. By 2003–04 this support will have risen by £1.1 billion over the 2000–01 provision. Consistent with the general local authority financial framework, it is for Essex county council to decide the proportion of their budget that should be directed to waste management work.

In addition to general support to local authority revenue expenditure, the spending review provided £140 million of Government grant for waste management work and £220 million for Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) resources, for waste projects. We are currently in consultation on how the £140 million fund should be distributed. At this stage it is not possible to identify what funding Essex county council might receive from this source.

The next tranche of lottery funding from the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) will include a £159 million fund for transforming communities, of which £49.5 million will be directed towards community sector reuse, recycling and composting schemes across the UK. This will benefit local authorities seeking to work in partnership with local community groups.

Copies of the consultation on the distribution of £140 million fund are available from the House Libraries and from the DEFRA website: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consult/wastefund/index.htm.

Domestic Refuse (Recycling)

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she provides to local authorities on the operation of schemes to recycle domestic refuse. [27212]

Mr. Meacher: All local authorities in England and Wales have been set statutory performance standards, under the best value regime, for recycling and composting household waste. It is up to individual authorities to decide how best to meet these standards, according to local circumstances. However, guidance was issued in March 2001, by the then DETR, on the development of joint Municipal Waste Management Strategies (MWMS) for waste collection and waste disposal authorities to encourage all authorities to set out integrated plans for meeting their recycling/composting targets. This guidance contains some case studies of local authority waste management schemes.

In July 2000 guidance was issued to local authorities on applying the best value framework to all waste management services "Waste Strategy Guidance—Best Value and Waste Management".

The Department also encourages the pooling of local authority experience and the promotion of best practice schemes, through the Beacon Council scheme, local Public Service Agreements and Best Value Networks.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) is currently preparing a pilot training scheme, to begin in March this year, for local authority recycling officers, and for waste managers within the private and community sector. This scheme will aim to provide information on best practice from the UK and from around the world, information on the costs of recycling schemes, and advice on tools and techniques. Those involved will also be encouraged to identify and address areas where existing schemes could be improved, for example by looking at other recyclable materials or by targeting in other sectors of the community.

WRAP hopes to make this training scheme available across the UK from September this year and intends to provide further training and development for chief officers and elected members in local authorities to raise their awareness of recycling issues. Collection operators, who come into direct contact with the public, will also be given further training so that they are better able to deal with public inquiries.

WRAP also intends to invite tenders for assessing best practice guidance.

Fox Population

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what impact the foot and mouth hunt restrictions have had on the fox population in the United Kingdom. [28362]

Alun Michael: There is no information which could provide the basis for an answer to this question.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tourism

4. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to promote tourism at industrial heritage sites with world heritage status. [26167]

Dr. Howells: I am delighted that Derwent Valley Mills, Saltaire and New Lanark, three outstanding examples of UK industrial heritage, and Dorset and East Devon coast were awarded World Heritage status last month.

Many of the UK's World Heritage Sites are world renowned and feature prominently in BTA's overseas' campaigns. My Department takes an active role in establishing comprehensive Management Plans for UK World Heritage sites which include sustainable tourism policies.

20. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will increase financial support for tourism in England. [26187]

Dr. Howells: Support for English tourism is set to increase from £10 million in 2001–02 to £12 million in 2002–03 and to £12.5 million in 2003–04. In addition, £3.8 million has also been made available to the English Tourism Council this financial year in response to the foot and mouth outbreak.

Gambling

13. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she is taking to reduce gambling. [26177]

Mr. Caborn: As I stated earlier today to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), we published the report of the independent Gambling Review Body in July last year. We are now considering all the comments which we have received on it since then, and we will announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Foot and Mouth

15. **Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the effect of the foot and mouth crisis on tourism. [26181]

Dr. Howells: The estimated loss to the tourism industry as a result of foot and mouth disease is between £2.9 billion and £3.6 billion in the months from March to October 2001.

Meridian Television

16. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received with respect to Meridian Television's proposal to shut its Newbury studio. [26183]

Dr. Howells: I have received a letter from one hon. Member. I have also noted the early-day Motion of 21 November.

Regional Theatres

17. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future of regional theatres. [26184]

Tessa Jowell: Funding for theatre remains a matter for the Arts Council of England and the Regional Arts Boards. In March last year, the Arts Council announced a significant increase in funding for theatre in 2002–03 and 2003–04, including a 51 per cent. increase for subsidised theatre throughout the west midlands by the end of the period.

29. **Mr. Lepper:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to increase support to regional theatres and arts venues in Brighton. [26196]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Arts Council of England in collaboration with South East Arts as the regional arts board for Brighton. The Arts Council's theatre review published last year allocated flexible funding of £150,000 to Brighton Production Development with the aim of developing the new city as a hub of theatre activity, benefiting audiences and theatre practitioners throughout the region. Komedia, based in Brighton, will also see its funding increased by £95,000 over the next two years.

International Film School

18. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to visit the International Film School at University College of Wales, Newport. [26185]

Dr. Howells: I met the Director of the School in October, but I have no current plans to visit the school.

School Sports

19. **Dr. Stoate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what consideration has been given to extending the school sports co-ordinators scheme beyond its target of 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [26186]

Mr. Caborn: We are considering extending the school sports co-ordinators scheme beyond the current target of 2003–04 as a means of helping to deliver the Government's commitment to entitlement to a minimum of two hours high quality PE and school sport per week for all children. We shall be discussing this in more detail with DfES Ministers.

Licensing Laws

21. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to bring forward licensing reform legislation. [26188]

23. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to bring forward licensing reform legislation. [26190]

Dr. Howells: We plan to present legislation to implement the proposals set out in the White Paper "Time for Reform" as soon as parliamentary time permits. In addition, we are taking forward a series of regulatory reform proposals, including the one which allowed pubs and clubs to open continuously for up to 36 hours at new year's eve. The Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales has said that the resulting phasing of closing times was welcomed by the police service.

Cultural Commission

22. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what basis she selected the members of the Cultural Commission for the east of England. [26189]

Tessa Jowell: The Chair of the East of England Regional Cultural Consortium, known as Living East, was appointed by me following consultation within the region and advice from an independent appointments panel.

Consortium members are either nominated by the relevant cultural bodies or by local government, or appointed by the Chair in consultation with others in the region. Ministers are not involved with the appointment of any Consortium members other than the Chairs.

Women (Sport)

24. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what encouragement she has given to women's participation in sport. [26191]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are determined to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all in every area including sport. Our policy of 'Sport for All' is aimed at encouraging everyone, including women into sport. Sport England provides over £6 million of Exchequer funding to sports governing bodies and all are required to ensure that they have proposals for the development of women as part of the condition of funding. Sport England also fund the Womens Sports Foundation (WSF) which is the only organisation in the UK that is solely committed to improving and promoting opportunities for women and girls in sport at every level. More women than ever are finding that regular physical exercise can lead to improvements in health, self-confidence and well-being. Women's team sports such as football and rugby are among the fastest-growing sports in the country.

Libraries

25. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals she has to increase Library use among low income and socially excluded groups. [26192]

Tessa Jowell: Policy guidance on the contribution that libraries can make to tackling social inclusion was issued in January last year in the document "Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives For All".

Over the past two years, my Department has supported 49 library schemes which contribute to tackling social inclusion under the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund.

We are working with Resource (the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives) to ensure that library services are made as widely available as possible to all sections of society.

Through lottery funding, all public libraries will offer public internet access by December 2002.

Dorset and East Devon Coast

26. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what meetings she has had with the English Tourist Council regarding the granting of world heritage status to the Dorset and east Devon coast. [26193]

Dr. Howells: I am delighted that the Dorset and East Devon coast was awarded World Heritage status last month.

I have not met with the English Tourism Council to discuss this matter. The ETC offers leadership and guidance to the tourism industry and reported recently on the heritage sector in Action for Attractions. My Department takes an active role in establishing comprehensive Management Plans for UK World Heritage sites which include sustainable tourism policies.

Football (Crowd Control)

27. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to meet representatives of the Football Association to discuss crowd control. [26194]

Tessa Jowell: The Government look to the football authorities to act quickly to prevent any recurrence of recent crowd disorder at matches. The Football Association and the FA of Wales are conducting detailed inquiries into events at the cup ties played at Cardiff and Aston Villa on 6 January. I expect that these inquiries will consider the extent to which local police forces made use of the extensive public order powers available to them under the Football Offences Act 1991 and other legislation. I have made it clear that the Government stand ready to assist with these inquiries, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport would be happy to facilitate meetings between the football authorities and Ministers, if these are considered necessary.

Euro

28. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she has met the English Tourist Council to discuss the acceptance of euro notes and coins. [26195]

Dr. Howells: I have not met with the English Tourism Council to discuss this matter.

The British Tourist Authority has recently issued revised guidance for the tourism industry on the euro which includes a checklist of action points and advice on authenticating banknotes. Further guidance will be issued if it is needed.

Derwent Valley Mills

30. **Mr. Laxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she has met the English Tourist Council to discuss the granting of world heritage status to Derwent Valley mills. [26197]

Tessa Jowell: I am delighted that Derwent Valley Mills was awarded World Heritage status last month.

I have not met with the English Tourism Council to discuss this matter. The ETC offers leadership and guidance to the tourism industry and reported recently on the heritage sector in Action for Attractions. My Department takes an active role in establishing comprehensive Management Plans for UK World Heritage sites which include sustainable tourism policies.

National Museums

31. **Mr. Hopkins:** To ask [illegible] Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people visited national museums in December. [26198]

Tessa Jowell: Overall some 200,000 more people visited in December 2001 than in December 2000 taking the total to 1.8 million. Visitors to those that went free on or just prior to 1 December doubled. This clearly demonstrates the success of our policy to abolish admission charges.

Golden Jubilee

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to celebrate the Golden anniversary of the Queen's accession on 6 February 2002. [24963]

Tessa Jowell: Although the actual anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen's accession to the throne is 6 February, the Prime Minister announced on 23 November 2000, *Official Report,* column 294W, that the Queen had approved his recommendation that the anniversary should be celebrated during the summer of this year, the focal point of which will be the celebrations during the 'Jubilee Weekend' of 1 to 4 June.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26989]

Dr. Howells: The Department's total expenditure on newspaper advertising over the years in question is shown in the table. The Department uses newspaper advertising mainly to attract candidates for the many public appointments for which the Department is responsible but it also includes the cost of external recruitment exercises for the Department itself. Expenditure by title is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	£
1997–98[1]	0
1998–99[1]	244,377
1999–2000[1]	139,501
2001–01[1]	121,012
2001–02[2]	83,514

[1] Outturn

[2] To date

The Department has 66 non-departmental public bodies and does not keep central records of their newspaper advertising. The cost of tracing and listing each public body's advertising and promotional campaigns could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27398]

Dr. Howells: The Department has only let one contract with external public relations consultants during the period in question. In order to preserve commercial confidentiality I am unable to provide details of the cost. Information relating to the bodies for which my Department is responsible is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Heritage Lottery Fund

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what expert advice the Heritage Lottery Fund seeks when making policy changes. [27752]

Dr. Howells: The Heritage Lottery Fund's standard practice is to consult with a range of organisations and individuals, including statutory agencies and practitioners, in advance of policy developments. For example, in reaching a new policy statement on skills and training for the heritage sector, to be published later this month, the Heritage Lottery Fund commissioned a MORI survey, and discussed findings with heritage organisations and employers to inform policy making. The fund's new strategic plan is being considered against the background of extensive consultation undertaken during summer 2001. The consultation process was UK wide, and included heritage practitioners and representatives of non-heritage organisations, members of the public and community leaders. The Heritage Lottery Fund received some 315 responses to its consultation document, and took the views of nearly 600 people who attended workshops, seminars and focus groups into account. The Heritage Lottery Fund follows the Cabinet Office's Code of Practice on written consultation.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for her Department in each of the last four years. [27913]

Dr. Howells: The question concerning ministerial cars will be dealt with centrally, by the Cabinet Office. The information requested concerning all types of taxis used by the Department is shown in the table.

£

	2001–02[1]	*2000–01*[2]	*1999–2000*[2]	*1998–99*[2]
Other ministerial car services (non-Government car service)	8,649	5,726	3,203	4,230
Taxis	18,468	28,669	21,917	15,367

[1] To date

[2] Outturn

National Lottery

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much unclaimed money is held in the National Lottery Distribution Fund which is not committed to projects. [28066]

Mr. Caborn: At the end of September 2001 (the latest figures available), approximately £264 million of the total amount available for distribution was uncommitted to projects.

Horse Racing Industry

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will introduce a betting levy for the financial year 2002–03 to help support the horse racing industry. [28309]

Mr. Caborn: The Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963, as amended, provides that if the Horserace Betting Levy Board does not approve, by 31 October each year, a scheme for the following financial year under which bookmakers pay a levy on betting on horse racing, the Secretary of State has a duty to determine a scheme. Such a duty has now arisen, and consideration is being given to a scheme in accordance with the requirements of the Act. An announcement will be made as soon as practicable.

Digital Television

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of United Kingdom homes have digital television services; when she expects *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 70 per cent. and *(c)* 90 per cent. of homes to have digital television services; what recent discussions she has had with the retail sector about the promotion of digital television; and if she will make a statement. [28381]

Dr. Howells: I understand that over one third of UK homes are now accessing digital television services. I am not in a position to predict when digital television take up will reach specific levels. A Digital Television Action Plan was issued on 20 December 2001, following consultation on a Draft Plan with stakeholders from all sectors of the broadcasting industry, including the retail sector, and with representatives of consumers. The Action Plan sets out a series of actions to be taken by Government and industry, in partnership, to achieve the aim for the UK to have the most dynamic and competitive market for digital TV in the G7, as measured by take up, choice and cost, and to meet the criteria announced in September 1999 which must be met before analogue terrestrial transmissions could be switched off.

UK Sports Institute (Regional Centres)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress she has made in the development of facilities at the regional centres of excellence for the UK Sports Institute. [28605]

Mr. Caborn: The Government remain committed to the development of the United Kingdom Sports Institute (UKSI) and good progress is being made in its establishment. Centres in Scotland and Wales are now operational; the English Institute is developing apace and it is hoped that work on the Northern Ireland Institute will begin soon.

Encouraging progress is being made with the development of the English Institute of Sport (EIS) facilities. To date 17 facilities are now open, with a further 10 on-site and under construction, over £100 million of lottery investment is now secured by funding agreements and large sites in Bath and Sheffield are secured and going on-site in early 2002. The majority of EIS facilities should be fully operational by the end of 2002.

Supporters Direct

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much she is making available to Supporters Direct in 2001–02; how much she will be giving in 2002–03; how many supporters trusts have been established by Supporters Direct; and what plans she has to fund Supporters Direct after 2003. [28604]

Mr. Caborn: Supporters Direct has assisted in the formation of 43 supporters trusts to date, which puts it well ahead of the targets included in its original Business Plan. Under its three-year funding agreement, Supporters Direct received £250,000 from the Reduction in Pool Betting Duty for 2000–01, and will receive the same amount in 2001–02 and 2002–03. My Department and Supporters Direct are currently discussing the funding arrangements which will follow the end of the current agreement.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what procedures her Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [29055]

Dr. Howells: Environmental considerations are fully established as part of administrative decisions about the procurement of any goods for my Department, and are set out in the Department's procurement manual. My Department has also established an on-going Environmental Management System with the assistance of environmental consultants WSP, who scrutinised the environmental impact of the Department's procurement practices, use of energy and disposal of waste. The policy makers checklist, which includes reference to environmental and sustainable development considerations, is held on the Department's intranet to inform policy decisions.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many officials from her Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29057]

Dr. Howells: None of my officials have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans her Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29056]

Dr. Howells: Officials in my Department are aware that they have to produce a sustainable development report due at the end of February, as part of SR 2002.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the last occasion was on which she requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29054]

Dr. Howells: Policy makers in my Department are aware of the policy makers checklist which includes the recommendation to consider any environmental implications; however my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts has not had occasion to request a formal environmental appraisal since her appointment.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many environmental appraisals have been published by her Department since 1 January 2001; and if she will list the last four. [29053]

Dr. Howells: No environmental appraisals have been published by my Department since 1 January 2001.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her oral answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 6, what discussions she has had with the British Tourist Authority on the impact on tourism of maintenance problems concerning the Forth Rail Bridge. [26557]

Dr. Howells: I have not had discussions on this as transport is a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive.

Channel 5

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if it is her policy that Channel 5 should be available to all terrestrial analogue television users in the United Kingdom. [28861]

Dr. Howells: It was clear at its inception that the fifth channel could not be available in all parts of the United Kingdom because of spectrum constraints. I do not expect analogue terrestrial Channel 5 services to be extended to all analogue terrestrial television users because our priority is to use available spectrum for developing digital terrestrial television.

Regional Museums

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she plans to meet the Council for Museums and Libraries to discuss the funding of regional museums, with specific reference to those in north-east England. [26182]

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts will shortly be meeting Lord Evans of Temple Guiting, the Chairman of Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, to discuss the report by the Regional Museum Task Force "Renaissance in the Regions: a new vision for England's museums" which was published last October.

The report makes recommendations for a new framework for museums and galleries in England's regions, including the north-east.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the reformed Child Support Agency has a section dedicated to counter fraud work; and what the budget is of that section for the first year of operation. [22892]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Frank Field, dated 10 January 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply.

Mr. Smith is unavailable and therefore I am writing to you on his behalf.

You asked if the reformed Child Support Agency has a section dedicated to counter fraud work; and what the budget is of that section for the first year of operation.

We have set up sections dedicated to counter fraud as part of the implementation of changes to child support legislation. These units investigate cases where individuals appear to have deliberately provided incorrect or misleading information. They also consider cases where information might properly be referred for investigation elsewhere.

The budget for this section in its first year was £3.5 million.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the extent of benefit fraud through the use of bank accounts set up by members or supporters of Shariah and Al Muhajaroon. [26772]

Malcolm Wicks: We are implementing our strategy to tackle fraud and error by tightening up the system and making sure that, from the first claim, the right benefits are going to the right people. Due to the nature of fraud, it is not possible to give an estimate of the level of fraud committed by particular groups or their supporters.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been spent in total on the Targeting Fraud website. [27760]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not possible to provide a specific cost for the Targeting Fraud website, as it was built and is maintained on the departmental web server from existing resources.

Shareholders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the adult population owned one or more shares in *(a)* the latest year for which figures are available and *(b)* each year since 1997. [25292]

Malcolm Wicks: The information available is in the table:

Percentage of adult population owning one or more stocks/shares, unit trusts, PEPs, ISAs

	Stocks/shares	*Stocks/shares/unit trusts/PEPs/ISAs*
1997–98	22	27
1998–99	21	27
1999–2000	20	29
2000–01	19	32

Notes:

1. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for tenure, Council Tax Band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.
2. Questions on assets are a sensitive part of the FRS questionnaire and have relatively low level of response, and hence higher levels of imputation, compared to other parts of the survey. Responses are imputed in around one in 10 cases. Evidence also suggests some under reporting of capital by respondents.
3. The final column of the table shows the percentage of adults reporting one or more of the categories: stocks and shares, unit trusts, PEPs and ISAs.
4. The results are for financial years.

Source:

Family Resources Survey (FRS)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide a breakdown of share ownership by occupational status for the most recent date available. [26140]

Malcolm Wicks: The information available is in the following table:

Breakdown of adult population owning one or more stocks/shares, unit trusts, PEPs, ISAs by occupational status

Occupation	*Stocks/ shares*	*Stocks/shares/unit trusts/PEPs/ISAs*
Undefined	33	32
Managers and administrators	16	15
Professionals	11	11
Associate professionals and technical	9	9
Clerical and secretarial	10	11
Craft and related	6	6
Personal and protective service	4	5
Sales	3	4
Plant and machine operatives	4	4
Other occupations	2	3
Total percentage of adults	19	32

Notes:

1. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for tenure, council tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.
2. Questions on assets are a sensitive part of the FRS questionnaire and have relatively low level of response, and hence higher levels of imputation, compared to other parts of the survey. Responses are imputed in around one in 10 cases. Evidence also suggest some under reporting of capital by respondents.
3. The final column of the table shows the percentage of adults reporting one or more of the categories: stocks and shares, unit trusts, PEPs and ISAs.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 2000–01

Child Support Agency

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the final maintenance assessment accuracy figure is for the Child Support Agency in each year since 1997. [24211]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. David Willetts, dated 10 January 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply.

Mr. Smith is unavailable and therefore I am writing to you on his behalf.

You asked what the final maintenance assessment accuracy figure is for the Child Support Agency in each year since 1997.

The information requested is in the attached table.

Until this year our target measured the accuracy of our assessments to the nearest penny and required us to revisit the whole of the current assessment, including those elements which may have been in place for some considerable time. The measure therefore reflected historical mistakes rather than our current performance.

The target for this year focuses on improving the accuracy of the last action we have taken on a case. On that basis our achievement last year was 78.5%. We have continued to focus on accuracy and so far this year we have further improved that figure to 82.8%.

I hope this is helpful.

CSA: cash value accuracy of maintenance assessment

Percentage

	Achievement against the cash value accuracy target for the last four years			
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Target	85	75	78	78
Achievement	85.6	77.2	70.5	67.4

Source:

Agency Annual Reports 1999–2000 and 2000–01

Cold Weather Payments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cold weather payments have been triggered this winter as a result of low temperatures, broken down by *(a)* weather station and *(b)* nation and region of the United Kingdom. [25948]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Cold weather payments are a key part of our strategy to tackle fuel poverty. They provide extra help towards heating costs for the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society in periods of exceptionally cold weather. They are paid to pensioners receiving the minimum income guarantee, and to people receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance who have children under the age of five or who have a premium for disability or long term sickness.

The payments are made automatically and are triggered when the average temperature is recorded as, or forecast to be, 0 degrees Centigrade or below over seven consecutive days at the weather station linked to the customer's postcode. So far this year we estimate that payments to the value of almost £16.8 million have been triggered. Available information on the breakdown of the payments is in the tables.

Estimated number and value of cold weather payments triggered by weather station

Weather station	*Estimated number of payments triggered from 1 November 2001 to 14 January 2002*	*Estimated value of payments triggered (£)*
Andrewsfield	39,790	338,215.00
Aviemore	3,099	26,341.50
Bedford	60,529	514,496.50
Bingley	86,283	733,405.50
Bishopton	178,525	1,517,462.50
Boltshope Park	9,370	79,645.00
Boulmer	10,793	91,740.50
Bracknell	53,193	452,140.50
Braemar	152	1,292.00
Brize Norton	22,139	188,181.50
Carlisle	9,896	84,116.00
Cassley	208	1,768.00
Coleshill	249,130	2,117,605.00
Coltishall	34,663	294,635.50
Dumfries	5,128	43,588.00
Dyce	22,024	187,204.00
Edinburgh Gogarbank	65,607	557,659.50
Eskdalemuir	4,356	37,026.00
Fylingdales	25,142	213,707.00
Great Malvern	37,578	319,413.00
Lake Vyrnwy	1,398	11,883.00
Leeds	143,964	1,223,694.00
Lerwick	829	7,046.50
Leuchars	32,244	274,074.00
Linton on Ouse	62,637	532,414.50
Loch Glascarnoch	525	4,462.50
Lyneham	24,040	204,340.00
Marham	14,914	126,769.00
Newcastle	122,657	1,042,584.50
Nottingham	147,861	1,256,818.50
Redhill	32,551	276,683.50
Ringway	199,291	1,693,973.50
Salsburgh	12,027	102,229.50
Sennybridge	47,119	400,511.50
Shawbury	48,288	410,448.00
Tulloch Bridge	1,931	16,413.50
Waddington	95,223	809,395.50
Wattisham	35,582	302,447.00
Wick Airport	1,956	16,626.00
Wittering	30,163	256,385.50
Total	1,972,805	16,768,842.50

Estimated number and value of cold weather payments triggered by country

Country	*Estimated number of payments triggered from 1 November 2001 to 14 January 2002*	*Estimated value of payments triggered (£)*
England	1,595,677	13,563,254.50
Scotland	328,611	2,793,193.50
Wales	48,517	412,394.50
Total	1,972,805	16,768,842.50

Notes:

1. Figures are not available by Government Office Region.
2. Those weather stations where cold weather payments have not been triggered are excluded from the tables.
3. Cold weather payments are payable for periods of cold weather between 1 November and 31 March each winter.
4. Social security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.
5. The figures provided are estimates. The final number and value of actual payments made will be reconciled after 31 March 2002.

Source:

Estimates are based on a scan in November 2001 of income support and jobseeker's allowance live load linked to Weather Station postcodes.

Benefits Agency (Freecall Service)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how the determination is made as to whether a benefit applicant faces significant difficulties such that a freecall number is provided by the Benefits Agency. [28799]

Malcolm Wicks: In deciding whether a freecall service ought to be provided, a variety of factors are considered, e.g. the anticipated length of calls, location of the customer and their likely financial circumstances. Guidance to staff within the Department tells them to make a return telephone call to a customer in the UK on request.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many freecall numbers have been provided by the Benefits Agency to such benefit applicants since 1997 *(a)* in Scotland and *(b)* in the rest of the United Kingdom. [28800]

Malcolm Wicks: Since 1997 the Benefits Agency has provided two freecall numbers for benefit applications. Both services are available to all UK customers. The first was provided for the benefits inquiry line and the second for minimum income guarantee claims.

ME

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what effect the NHS recognition of ME as a medical condition will have on the operation of the physical capability assessment; and if he will make a statement. [28801]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We recognise chronic fatigue syndromes, including ME, as potentially debilitating illnesses and the Department's Chief Medical Adviser constantly evaluates the latest developments in the understanding of these conditions. The personal capability assessment which is used in determining entitlement to incapacity benefit is a functional assessment which looks at the extent to which a person's ability to carry out certain everyday activities is affected by their medical condition. In general, it is the effect of the condition that is important, not the specific diagnosis.

The application of the assessment to people who have a medical condition that fluctuates or varies in its severity (such as ME) is already covered in the training and guidance given to Medical Services doctors who provide advice for Decision Makers. The doctors are trained to base their advice on the level of function that the person is capable of most of the time taking into account such factors as pain, fatigue and variability of symptoms.

Attendance Allowance

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how much of the attendance allowance money withdrawn from recipients in Scotland will be spent in Scotland; [28802]

(2) when his Department notified the Scottish Executive that the payment of attendance allowance to those recipients who will qualify for free personal care would be withdrawn; [28803]

(3) whether attendance allowance payments contribute to the funding of free nursing care in England; [28804]

(4) how the attendance allowance money withdrawn from recipients in Scotland will be allocated by his Department. [28805]

Mr. Darling: To avoid duplicate provision from public funds, the Great Britain-wide social security benefit rules have always precluded payment of attendance allowance to people in residential care homes and nursing homes who receive help with the cost of their place in the home from a local authority or a health authority. Benefit spending is determined by the number of claimants who satisfy the qualifying conditions that apply to a particular benefit. A reduction in forecast benefit expenditure will increase the funds available for public expenditure as a whole, and issues regarding their allocation will be dealt with in the usual way. The funding arrangements for free nursing care have always been entirely separate from those for attendance allowance.

Universal Bank

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he plans for the services of the Universal bank to be in operation by April 2003. [28937]

Malcolm Wicks: While there are still issues to be resolved, substantial progress is being made towards delivery of the project as planned.

Benefits Agency (ACT)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice will be available to benefit claimants who do not have a bank account when the move to ACT takes place. [28938]

Malcolm Wicks: If claimants do not have a bank account, staff will discuss options with them to help them make the best choice for their circumstances.

Benefit Payments (ACT)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of benefit recipients have received their benefits by automated credit transfer in each year since ACT was introduced. [24240]

Malcolm Wicks: Comprehensive statistics on customers paid by Automated Credit Transfer (ACT) date back to 1993. The table reflects the average take up across all benefits apart from job seekers allowance (JSA) as take-up data are not currently available.

Year	*Percentage of benefit recipients receiving their benefit by ACT*
1993	18.5
1994	23.5
1995	24.0
1996[1]	28.0
1997	30.5
1998[2]	33.0
1999	36.0
2000[3]	38.0
2001 (August)	40.0

[1] Includes IIDB from June 1996

[2] Includes ICA from June 1998

[3] Includes guardians allowance from June 2000

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the costs that the Government will incur in servicing Post Office card accounts for *(a)* 3 million, *(b)* 4 million, *(c)* 5 million and *(d)* 6 million benefit claimants. [28940]

Malcolm Wicks: This will depend on the outcome of contractual negotiations between the Government and the Post Office, which will remain commercially in confidence between the parties.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research his Department has carried out into the numbers of benefit claimants who already have a bank account; and if he has estimated how many of these claimants will choose to transfer to a Post Office card account when they start to be paid by ACT. [28941]

Malcolm Wicks: Around 85 per cent. of benefit claimants have an account into which they can be paid directly. In general, we expect that they will choose to use these accounts when moving to payment by ACT.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what information the Government based its assumption that around 3 million benefit and tax credit recipients will open a Post Office card account and what provision is being made available should this figure rise following the introduction of the Universal Bank. [28942]

Malcolm Wicks: Our assumption was derived from the number of benefit and tax credit recipients without bank accounts, recognising that some of these customers will open basic accounts with a high street bank. The commercial arrangements between the Government and the Post Office will provide for the possibility that the actual number of Post Office card accounts may be higher or lower than our 3 million operational assumption.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with the Post Office about the provision of the Post Office card account; what the outcome of these discussions was; and if he will make a statement. [28943]

Malcolm Wicks: Officials, together with officials from the Inland Revenue and the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency, have had extensive discussions with the Post Office. These are still continuing.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four; [29018]

(2) when the last occasion was on which he requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision; [29019]

(3) what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made; [29020]

(4) what plans his Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury; [29021]

(5) how many officials from his Department have attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29022]

Maria Eagle: With the creation of the Department for Work and Pensions arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the new Department continues to meet the Government's sustainable development objectives.

We have actively embraced the social, economic and environmental elements of sustainable development, and are taking these aspects forward together within an integrated strategy. The Department has a Grade 2 Senior Accountable Official for sustainable development (SD) and has established an SD steering group to take ownership of, and drive forward, sustainability across the Department. The steering group includes senior "SD Champions" from each area of the Department's business.

A corporate SD team has been established also to own the Department's SD policy, and to establish targets and monitor progress. Representatives from the six main business areas of the Department and the SD team all attended a specifically tailored SD training course on environmental appraisal run by the Civil Service College in November 2001.

A mechanism has been put in place to ensure that all major initiatives are assessed for SD impacts and benefits through the Department's projects approvals process. A further proposal is under development which will provide appraisals of new and revised policies. DWP internal auditors will include these appraisals within its audit programme.

We are preparing a Sustainable Development report to accompany our Spending Review submission to Treasury, and are working with our client groups and Business Management Division to ensure that the Department's bid accords with the objectives within the UK strategy for SD.

We have published a free-standing SD annual report which has been placed in the Library.

Jobseeker's Allowance

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people claimed jobseeker's allowance in the Hornchurch constituency in *(a)* September 1997, *(b)* September 1999 and *(c)* September 2001. [27221]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to John Cryer, dated 21 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question regarding the number of people claiming job seeker's allowance (JSA) in the Hornchurch constituency in September 1997, September 1999 and September 2001. I am replying in his absence. (27221)

The claimant count consists of all people claiming JSA or NI credits at Employment Service local offices. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which their claim is made

The information is given in the table below.

Claimant Court level (not seasonally adjusted—in the Hornchurch Parliamentary Constituency

Date	*Number*
September 1997	1,337
September 1999	1,125
September 2001	748

Benefits (Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the claimant count in York and north Yorkshire in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [28195]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Miss Anne McIntosh, dated 21 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question regarding the number of claimants in York and North Yorkshire in 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2001. I am replying in his absence (28195)

The table below shows the annual average claimant count level for the York unitary authority local district and North Yorkshire County for the years 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2001.

The annual average levels of claimants (not seasonally adjusted) in the York (UA) and the North Yorkshire county

Number

	York UA	*North Yorkshire County*
1997	3,786	13,495
1999	2,762	10,380
2000	2,367	8,940
2001	2,120	8,038

Child Asylum Seekers

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the Government are doing to safeguard the welfare of unaccompanied asylum seeking children when they are given leave to remain in the UK; how the Government are helping social care agencies protect and aid those children deemed most at risk; and how many children are at risk in the Midlothian constituency. [27177]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are assessed by local authorities in accordance with their duties under the Children Act 1989, and are provided with help and support on the basis of that needs assessment. The position is unchanged when they receive leave to remain in the United Kingdom. While the young people are under 18 the local authority is able to claim grant funding from the Home Office to meet the costs of support. The Quality Protects programme, designed to improve services to children in local authority care, applies to local authorities' services for these young people as for other children in need.

Matters relating to Scotland are for the devolved Administration.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what procedures the Lord Chancellor's Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [29060]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No formal environmental appraisal process is in place for administrative decision making, but reference is made to the Department's Environmental Strategy, which addresses the environmental impact of the Department's operations. This specifically targets construction of new courts and office buildings, the maintenance of our diverse estate, energy efficiency and water management, procurement of goods and services; training and education of staff; waste management; and the impact of travel to and from our buildings.

Policy decisions are subject to environmental screening, and policy makers use the Cabinet Office's Policy Makers Checklist.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the last occasion was on which the Lord Chancellor requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29059]

Ms Rosie Winterton: To date there have been no policy decisions that have required the Lord Chancellor to request an environmental appraisal.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many officials from the Lord Chancellor's Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29062]

Ms Rosie Winterton: As yet no officials from my Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many environmental appraisals have been published by the Lord Chancellor's Department since 1 January 2001; and if she will list the last four. [29058]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There have been no environmental appraisals published by my Department since 1 January 2001. No environmental impacts were identified in any of the policies or programmes considered since that date.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans the Lord Chancellor's Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29061]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My Department's spending review team is collaborating with our Energy and Environment Branch on the environmental implications of the spending review, and the production of a free-standing sustainable development report. They will be using the guidance provided by HM Treasury on the conduct of the review, including advice on sustainable development.

Immigration Appellate Authority

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many adjudicators in the Immigration Appellate Authority have *(a)* been dismissed and *(b)* resigned in each of the last five years. [29243]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No Immigration adjudicators have been dismissed during the last five years. The Lord Chancellor's Department does not have definitive records of resignations during the last five years but estimates that 26 Immigration adjudicators have resigned during that period.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the minimum qualification to serve as an adjudicator for the Immigration Appellate Authority. [29240]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All appointments are made under Schedule 3 to the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. All appointees must hold a seven year qualification within the meaning of section 71 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990, which is a right of audience in any class of proceedings in any part of the Supreme Court or in all proceedings in the county court or magistrates courts, or they should be an advocate or solicitor in Scotland of at least seven years' standing, a member of the Bar of Northern Ireland or a solicitor of the Supreme Court of Northern Ireland of at seven years' standing or have such legal or other experience as appears to the Lord Chancellor to make him or her suited for appointment.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training is given to adjudicators in the Immigration Appellate Authority. [29241]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Qualification for appointment for adjudicators is laid out in Paragraph 2, Schedule 3 to the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. For adjudicators new to the jurisdiction there is a structured four-day induction programme of training. This includes judicial practice, immigration and asylum law, discussion groups and practical exercises. Inductees are mentored and sit in with an experienced adjudicator for at least three hearing days.

For existing adjudicators there is a regular series of training events. All adjudicators receive a minimum of three days training per annum. Such training covers new developments as well as providing opportunities to refresh existing knowledge and skills.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what written guidance is given to adjudicators in the Immigration Appellate Authority on the conduct and management of appeal hearings. [29242]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All adjudicators receive an extensive Bench Book covering all aspects of relevant law and practice. They are also provided with equal treatment guidance, standard legal texts and extensive guidance on determination writing. IAA Legal and Research support further provides regular updates on issues and developments in the immigration and asylum field.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [27995]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The figures are as in the table:

Date of incident	*Items stolen/lost*	*Value (£)*
Financial year 1997–98		
11 April 1997	Cash	200.00
26 April 1997	Cash	55.00
1 May 1997	TV/video	450.00
11 May 1997	Cash	500.00
11 May 1997	Printers x 4	1,000.00
16 May 1997	Video recorder	350.00
20 May 1997	Printer	250.00
22 May 1997	Laser printer and fax machine	250.00
3 June 1997	Laptop	1,000.00
1 July 1997	Recorder and CD	1,000.00
17 August 1997	Laser printer	250.00
18 August 1997	Pen	150.00
9 September 1997	Laptop	1,500.00
15 September 1997	Video recorder	250.00
7 November 1997	Desk tops x 5 and printer	300.00
22 November 1997	Video recorder	250.00
16 December 1997	PC	1,500.00
22 December 1997	Laptop	1,500.00
6 January 1998	Laptop	1,000.00
9 January 1998	PC	1,000.00
12 January 1998	Printer, keyboard and telephone	250.00
17 February 1998	Answering machine	73.00
5 March 1998	Assorted cutlery	65.00
12 March 1998	External security light	100.00
19 March 1998	Laptop	50.00
19 March 1998	Colour TV and file server	50.00
20 March 1998	File server and chips	3,000.00
21 March 1998	Cufflinks	50.00
27 March 1998	Cash	160.00
29 March 1998	Keyboards x 4, mouse and barcode reader	300.00
Total		16,853.00
Financial year 1998–99		
3 April 1998	Cash	230.00
14 April 1998	Contents of payphone	80.00
18 May 1998	PC	150.00
19 May 1998	CPU's missing	1,000.00
29 May 1998	Video recorder	200.00
2 June 1998	Mobile phone	100.00
12 June 1998	Computers x 4	4,000.00
12 June 1998	PC	250.00
24 June 1998	Laptop	1,300.00
27 June 1998	TV and CD radio	800.00
29 June 1998	TV/video, TV, radio	800.00
10 June 1998	Wallet	130.00
11 July 1998	Safe and laser printer	50.00
14 July 1998	Laptop	2,000.00
15 July 1998	Safe	1,015.00
20 July 1998	Cash	102.00
21 July 1998	Roof lead	1,500.00
21 July 1998	External security camera	200.00
24 July 1998	Laptop	1,300.00
27 July 1998	First aid boxes	148.00
5 August 1998	Pen and lighter	90.00
6 August 1998	Office CD	350.00
12 August 1998	CD/radio	129.00
20 August 1998	Mobile phone	95.00
17 September 1998	Video recorder	350.00
24 September 1998	Printer	200.00
21 October 1998	Handbag and contents	110.00
29 October 1998	Printer	700.00
10 December 1998	Laptop	2,500.00
14 December 1998	Handbag and contents	50.00
16 December 1998	Vacuum cleaner	100.00
29 March 1999	Specialist phone	50.00
1 April 1999	Payphone and cash	500.00
Total		20,628.00
Financial year 1999–2000		
10 April 1999	Cash	67.00
26 April 1999	Payphone	505.00
9 May 1999	Roof lead	500.00
15 June 1999	Mobile phone	113.00
4 July 1999	Union flag and rope	65.00
11 August 1999	PC	1,500.00
17 August 1999	Payphone	340.00
20 August 1999	Laptop	1,500.00
20 August 1999	Laptop	1,500.00
24 August 1999	Payphone	340.00
15 September 1999	Cash	340.00
16 September 1999	Payphone	200.00
26 September 1999	TV and CD player	318.85
13 October 1999	Mobile phone	158.25
21 October 1999	Mobile phone	50.00
29 November 1999	Wallet and contents	120.00
9 December 1999	Laptop	200.00
10 January 2000	Hard drives x 3	600.00
13 January 2000	Video camera	500.00

Date of incident	*Items stolen/lost*	*Value (£)*
2 February 2000	Payphone	50.00
16 March 2000	Dictaphone	69.81
19 March 2000	Vending machine	340.00
Total		9,376.91
Financial year 2000–01		
3 April 2000	Barrier rope	116.00
3 April 2000	Rope	116.32
12 April 2000	Cash and cheques	73,000.00
21 April 2000	Electronic postal scales	500.00
18 May 2000	PC base units x 15	15,000.00
13 June 2000	Handbag and personal palm pilot	400.00
22 June 2000	TV/video	250.00
28 June 2000	PC's x 54	16,000.00
1 July 2000	Laptop	1,500.00
3 July 2000	Mobile phone	50.00
3 July 2000	Mobile phone	50.00
27 July 2000	Cash	2,300.00
8 August 2000	Mobile phone	117.50
10 August 2000	Laptop	1,000.00
30 August 2000	Union flag	109.24
20 September 2000	Payphone	550.00
21 September 2000	Laptop	500.00
27 September 2000	Laptop	1,500.00
27 September 2000	Laptop	1,500.00
28 September 2000	TV/video	160.00
28 September 2000	TV/video	160.00
6 October 2000	PC	150.00
11 November 2000	Laptops x 9, keyboards x 2, projector and mobile phone	25,000.00
15 November 2000	Laptop	500.00
16 December 2000	Cash	140.00
11 January 2001	Department mobile phone	100.00
2 February 2001	CCTV camera	600.00
Total		151,369.06

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27983]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is not possible to distinguish the figures between the Department and its agencies. Available figures for the cost of theft and fraud for each of the last financial years are:

	Department and agencies (£)	*NDPBs (£ million)*
1997–98	21,721.52	1.08
1998–99	79,923.02	0.8
1999–2000	21,558.40	3.2
2000–01	159,817.87	4.1

Figures for the current financial years are not yet available.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the expenditure of the Lord Chancellors *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1997. [26981]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Newspaper advertising is used for a very wide range of public information and recruiting purposes across the national, regional and local press of England and Wales. While some recruitment has been handled centrally since August 2001, the bulk is delegated to Communications, People and Learning Centres on behalf of group managers and records of expenditure on advertising are only available from individual court and group managers' offices. A breakdown of advertising per year by title since 1997 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Crown Court Proceedings

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the annual costs of Crown court proceedings where the defendant has elected trial by jury were in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [28429]

Mr. Wills: This information is not available in the format requested. However, the most recent estimate of the average cost of contested Crown court proceedings is £21,250 per case, falling to £3,550 in proceedings where a guilty plea is entered. 15,500 defendants elected to be tried by a jury in the year to September 2001, and it is known that many who so elect later enter a guilty plea.

Unified Criminal Court

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what assessment he has made of the net change in the number of magistrates which would be needed to implement the creation of a new district division of a unified criminal court and associated changes as proposed in Lord Justice Auld's report "Review of the Criminal Courts"; and if he will make a statement; [28525]

(2) what assessment he has made of the net cost of establishing a new district division of a unified criminal court and associated changes as proposed in Lord Justice Auld's report "Review of the Criminal Courts"; if he will give a breakdown of available figures; and if he will make a statement. [28524]

Mr. Wills: The Government have taken no decisions on Sir Robin Auld's Review report. The period of comment closes on 31 January. The Government will then be considering the recommendations in detail, including assessments of costs, benefits, and associated factors such as the numbers of magistrates needed to implement them. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Census Website

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what quality checks were built into the contract between the Public Record Office and QinetiQ. [26803]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The contract between the Public Record Office and QinetiQ Ltd. makes comprehensive provision for quality checks, which are covered by commercial confidentiality. These checks have been carried out, and will continue to be carried out, at the appropriate times.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the final tender price of the contract won by QinetiQ from the Public Record Office to design, build and maintain the website for the 1901 Census was. [26801]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The final tender price of the contract is commercially sensitive information, which it would be inappropriate to put into the public domain.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor last used the railway service in connection with this official duties; what station he left from and to what destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28103]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor last used the railway service in connection with his official duties on 11 January—the date of his most recent official visit. The journey was between Gatwick Airport and London Victoria. The Lord Chancellor will continue to use the railway for official travel as appropriate. All arrangements for official travel are made in line with the guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the "Ministerial Code", and the accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers", using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations.

TREASURY

Overseas Dividends

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers receive income from overseas dividends; and what was the gross sum received before tax in the last year for which figures are available. [26114]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate.

Income Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross income is paid in income tax, national insurance contributions and VAT by *(a)* a married man with a non-earning wife and two children and *(b)* a married man with an earning wife and two children at (i) half, (ii) one and a half, (iii) two, (iv) three, (v) five, (vi) 10 and (vii) 50 times national average earnings in 2001–02; and what were the comparative figures for 1997–98. [26208]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The available information is given in the table. Estimating the impact of indirect taxes on these very specific family types is meaningless because spending patterns vary considerably between households of the same type and income.

	Multiples of median earnings						
	50 per cent.	*150 per cent.*	*200 per cent.*	*300 per cent.*	*500 per cent.*	*1,000 per cent.*	*5,000 per cent.*
Single-earner married couple, two children							
1997–98							
£ per week							
Gross income	160.37	481.10	641.46	962.19	1,603.65	3,207.30	16,036.50
Income tax	11.35	85.12	132.50	260.79	517.37	1,158.83	6,290.51
NICs	11.08	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54
Child benefit (CB)	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05
Percentage of gross earnings							
Net income tax	7.1	17.7	20.7	27.1	32.3	36.1	39.2
NICs	6.9	8.6	6.5	4.3	2.6	1.3	0.3
Net income tax + NICs-CB	1.5	22.2	24.0	29.3	33.6	36.8	39.4
2001–02							
£ per week							
Gross income	188.07	564.22	752.30	1,128.44	1,880.74	3,761.48	18,807.40
Income tax	7.85	90.60	156.57	310.39	611.30	1,363.60	7,381.97
NICs	10.11	47.72	48.80	48.80	48.80	48.80	48.80
Child benefit (CB)	25.85	25.85	25.85	25.85	25.85	25.85	25.85
WFTC	79.98	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Percentage of gross earnings							
Net income tax	–38.4	16.1	20.8	27.5	32.5	36.3	39.3
NICs	5.4	8.5	6.5	4.3	2.6	1.3	0.3
Net income tax + NICs-CB	–46.7	19.9	23.9	29.5	33.7	36.9	39.4
Two-earner married couple, two children							
1997–98							
£ per week							
Gross income	160.37	481.10	641.46	962.19	1,603.65	3,207.30	16,036.50
Income tax	0.00	64.86	101.74	175.51	398.57	1,040.03	6,171.71
NICs	6.12	38.19	54.23	75.07	83.08	83.08	83.08
Child benefit (CB)	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05
Percentage of gross earnings							
Net income tax	0.00	13.5	15.9	18.2	24.9	32.4	38.5
NICs	3.8	7.9	8.5	7.8	5.2	2.6	0.5
Net income tax + NICs-CB	–8.7	17.3	21.2	24.0	28.8	34.4	38.9
2001–02							
£ per week							
Gross income	188.07	564.22	752.30	1,128.44	1,880.74	3,761.48	18,807.40
Income tax	0.00	67.08	108.46	197.24	470.31	1,222.61	7,240.98
NICs	2.58	39.02	57.83	85.24	97.60	97.60	97.60
Child benefit (CB)	25.85	25.85	25.85	25.85	25.85	25.85	25.85
WFTC	60.08	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Percentage of gross earnings							
Net income tax	–31.9	11.9	14.4	17.5	25.0	32.5	38.5
NICs	1.4	6.9	7.7	7.6	5.2	2.6	0.5
Net income tax + NICs-CB	–44.3	14.2	18.7	22.7	28.8	34.4	38.9

Notes:

1. Income tax payments are calculated on the basis that the households receive no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and only have income from employment. All earners are assumed to pay Class 1 national insurance contributions at the contracted-in rate.

2. Earnings are taken to be the median gross weekly earnings of all full-time employees on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence.

3. In line with the convention in the Tax Benefit Reference Manual, child benefit is treated as negative income tax.

4. For the two-earner family it is assumed that earnings are split 60/40 per cent.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of people of pensionable age are liable for income tax; what the total tax yield from people of pensionable age is; what the average income is of people of pensionable age before and after tax; and what the average percentage of income paid in tax by people of pensionable age is. [26279]

Dawn Primarolo: In 2001–02, 4.3 million (four in 10) people of pensionable age are liable to income tax. Pensionable age taxpayers have a total tax liability of £8.5 billion in 2001–02. The mean before tax income for pensioner taxpayers in 2001–02 is £15,800 pa and the mean after tax income is £23,850 pa. Tax as a percentage of total income for pensionable age taxpayers is 12.6 per cent.

These estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report. Non-taxable income such as ISA income is excluded from the analysis as individual details are not known.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals in each of the last four years have been granted exemption from inheritance tax in relation to chattels declared to be open to inspection by the public. [26108]

Dawn Primarolo: Exemption is not generally granted to individuals, but to executors of a deceased person's estate and/or to the trustees of trusts in which the deceased person was involved. On that basis, exemption was granted to chattels in their own right in 59, 74, 39 and 21 cases in the years 1997–98 to 2000–01 respectively. Exemption was also granted in three, six, two and no cases respectively for chattels which are historically associated with a heritage building. Exemption claims often cover more than one chattel or collection of chattels.

Incomes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many tax units in 2001–02 will be on *(a)* twice, *(b)* five times and *(c)* 10 times average earnings or more; [26207]

(2) how many and what proportion of taxpayers earn less than *(a)* three-quarters and *(b)* two-thirds of median male earnings in the most recent year for which figures are available. [26266]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates for the numbers of individual taxpayers in 2000–01 and proportions in the income ranges specified are given.

Employee taxpayers in 2000–01 with earnings in the range	*Number*	*Proportion of all employee taxpayers*
Over twice average earnings (million)	1.04	—
Over five times average earnings (thousand)	150	—
Over 10 times average earnings (thousand)	14	—
Less than three-quarters of median male earnings (million)	10.2	48
Less than two-thirds of median male earnings (million)	11.7	55

Average earnings and male median earnings are based on the New Earnings Survey first release.

Estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the net change in the annual income of a married couple with one earner and two school age children living in rented accommodation for which they pay average council house rent and average rates of a 1 per cent. cut in the basic rate of tax before and after taking account of any change in entitlement to housing benefit and WFTC, assuming that the earner is on *(a)* half and *(b)* one and a half times average earnings. [26215]

Dawn Primarolo: A married couple with one earner on half median earnings (£9,800 per annum) and two school age children would benefit by £34 a year from a 1 per cent. cut in the basic rate of income tax before taking account of working families tax credit and by £15 a year after taking account of working families tax credit. On one and a half times median earnings (£29,400 per annum) this family would not be eligible for working families tax credit and would benefit by £230 a year from a 1 per cent. cut in the basic rate of income tax. A single earner family with two school age children and paying average council house rents would not be eligible for housing benefit on either half median earnings or one and a half times median earnings.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* average and *(b)* median income is of (i) married couples and (ii) single people, whether liable to income tax or not, in 2001–02; and what percentage of (A) married couples and (B) single people fall below the average for their group. [26285]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Works of Art (Access)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what actions his Department has taken in each of the last four years to make the public aware of their rights of access to homes containing works of art granted exemption from inheritance tax. [26338]

Dawn Primarolo: The Revenue website dedicated to information about tax-exempt works of art remains the primary vehicle for informing the public, as it has been since its launch in 1996. The site was redesigned in 2000 to make it more user-friendly and to give fuller information about public access to heritage assets. The number of hits on the site has increased from less than 1,000 per month at the beginning of 1998 to around 15,000 per month currently.

Owners of tax-exempt heritage assets, particularly historic houses and their contents, increasingly maintain their own websites or have some other presence on the internet: we now offer such owners the facility of a link from the Revenue website.

The Revenue website can be accessed direct at www.cto.eds.co.uk or through the Revenue's main website at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the savings in a full year at 2001–02 rates of restricting all allowances and reliefs to the standard rate of tax broken down by category of allowance and relief; [26209]

(2) what extra revenue would result from allowing all tax allowances at the standard rate of tax only. [26235]

Dawn Primarolo: The full year yield in 2001–02 from restricting the personal allowances (including the blind person's allowance) to 22 per cent. is estimated at £2.6 billion.

I regret that estimates for the effect of restricting all allowances and reliefs to the standard rate of tax broken down by category of allowance and relief could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher rate taxpayers paid capital gains tax in 2000–01; [26211]

(2) what the projected increase or reduction in capital gains tax liability is of the *(a)* top 1 per cent., *(b)* top 5 per cent., *(c)* top 10 per cent., *(d)* bottom 25 per cent. and *(e)* bottom 10 per cent. in 2001–02; and what the total number was of tax units estimated to be liable. [26258]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest available information on the distribution of the income and gains of capital gains taxpayers is in table 14.3 and projections of taxpayer numbers are in table 1.4 of the online edition of "Inland Revenue Statistics" which can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats.

Tax Receipts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the total revenue from income tax was paid by the top five per cent. of taxpayers in each of the last four years. [26281]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to "Inland Revenue Statistics" table 2.4, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/it_t04_1.htm.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the capital gains tax receipts and the corporation tax receipts were for each of the Inland Revenue districts in *(a)* Greater London, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland in current and in constant prices for each of the last four years. [26225]

Dawn Primarolo: Total receipts of capital gains tax and of corporation tax in each of the last four years are given on the Inland Revenue website at: http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax_t02_1.htm.

Receipts information in the detail requested is not available.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people paid inheritance tax in each of the last 10 years; and how much tax was paid in each year; [26340]

(2) what the total annual revenue yield was from stamp duty on property purchases in each of the last 10 years; [26336]

(3) what the total payments were of capital gains tax; and how many people made them in each of the last five years. [26262]

Dawn Primarolo: The requested information on receipts of tax and number of taxpayers is available in tables 1.2 and 1.4 of the online edition of Inland Revenue Statistics—http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats. Further breakdowns of stamp duty yield are given in table 15.1, with earlier years in the equivalent table of the paper publication, Inland Revenue Statistics 1997.

Higher Rate Taxpayers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many higher rate taxpayers there were in 2000–01; and what their average income was. [26263]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the "Inland Revenue Statistics" table 2.1, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/it_t01_1.htm.

The average income of higher rate taxpayers in 2000–01 is around £69,000.

Share Gains

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the capital gains tax and corporation tax yields from gains in quoted shares and gains in unquoted shares *(a)* in 2000–01 and *(b)* expected in 2001–02. [26224]

Dawn Primarolo: Information on the asset distribution of gains of capital gains tax payers and of non-life companies for 1998–99, the latest year for which figures are available, is in tables 14.4 and 14.7 respectively on the online edition of "Inland Revenue Statistics" which can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats.

It is not possible to measure directly the tax yield due to separate asset classes as some reliefs (including annual exempt amount) are given against aggregate gains.

Age Allowance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* in receipt of age allowances (i) are on high marginal tax rates, (ii) are on basic rate tax and (iii) pay no income tax. [26280]

Dawn Primarolo: People should get their age allowance if they tell the Inland Revenue of their date of birth. The number getting age related allowances, in 2001–02, for each of the categories requested is given in the table:

Million

	Number
Top rate (40 per cent.) taxpayers	0
Basic rate (22 per cent.) taxpayers	2.2
Non taxpayers	2.3

These estimates are based on the survey of personal incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Revenue Losses (Farm Incomes)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue lost to the Inland Revenue as a result of the reduction in farm incomes in the last four years. [27928]

Dawn Primarolo: PAYE tax by sector and income from self-employment by sector are available in tables 2.10 and 3.9 of Inland Revenue Statistics. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website: http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/it_t10_1.htm and http://www:inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_distribution/pi_t09_1. htm.

Child Poverty (London)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will put in place measures to enhance the impact of the working families tax credit on reducing child poverty in London; and if he will make a statement. [28262]

Dawn Primarolo: The working families tax credit, combined with other tax and benefit reforms since 1997, means that there are now 1.2 million fewer children in relative poverty than there would otherwise have been.

In August 2001, 95,000 families with children were receiving the working families tax credit in London, compared with 58,900 London families who received its predecessor family credit in August 1999. This represents a 61 per cent. increase in London which is greater than the increase across the United Kingdom as a whole over the same period.

The Government keep under constant review the effectiveness of the working families tax credit across all areas of the United Kingdom. They continue to put in place measures to encourage those who are eligible to take up the tax credits to which they are entitled.

Regulations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the regulations which entail a cost to public funds and estimate the cost in each case. [28030]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The cost to 'public funds' (exchequer costs) is considered at the policy development stage of any new regulatory proposal, and a Regulatory Impact Assessment is completed unless there are no or negligible costs.

Where Ministers choose a regulatory option, they must be satisfied that the benefits justify the costs.

Married Couples Allowance

David Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many pensioner couples in 2000–01 in north-west Leicestershire did not receive the married couples allowance available until 5 April 2000 because neither was 65 before 6 April 2000; [28704]

(2) how many pensioner couples in 2000–01 did not receive the married couples allowance available until 5 April 2000 because neither was 65 before 6 April 2000. [28703]

Dawn Primarolo: There were some 100,000 couples where at least one partner was aged 65 in 2000–01 not receiving the married couples allowance because neither was 65 before 5 April 2000. This estimate is based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and is consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

I regret that because of small sample sizes, it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate for the numbers in North-West Leicestershire.

Child Tax Credit

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of families in receipt of *(a)* the child tax credit and *(b)* the child care tax credit in the Loughborough constituency. [28517]

Dawn Primarolo: Information about the children's tax credit is not available by constituency. However, the number of families who are eligible for CTC in the east midlands is estimated to be 400,000.

Analyses of the numbers of recipients of child care support within working families tax credits and disabled person's tax credits by parliamentary constituency were published in "Working Families' and Disabled Person's Tax Credit Statistics: Geographical Analyses August 2001" on 8 January 2002 by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what end of year reconciliation information about incomes will have to be supplied by recipients of the proposed child tax credit; which group of recipients will have to supply such information; by what mechanism this information will be collected; and if he will make a statement. [28841]

Dawn Primarolo: Clause 17 of the Tax Credits Bill requires that a person who has received a tax credit award to be given the opportunity, after the end of the year, to provide details of their income and circumstances so that the Inland Revenue is able to finalise their award on the correct basis.

The Inland Revenue will issue a notice to those people. The notice will set out the circumstances and income on which the award is based. It will then be for claimants to respond, making clear any respects in which the information held needs to be updated.

Railtrack

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what implications Railtrack's successor's *(a)* spending and *(b)* borrowing requirements will have for the PSBR. [28825]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Railtrack's successor is expected to be in the private sector. Its spending and borrowing will have no impact on public sector net borrowing.

Government subsidies and investment grants paid to the rail industry add to public sector net borrowing. This will be the same when Railtrack's successor is established.

Scottish Transport Group Pension Fund

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the distribution of moneys to the members of the Scottish Transport Group pension fund; when he expects these payments to be made; and what rate of tax will be applied to such payments. [28973]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Scottish Executive are taking forward matters regarding the distribution of moneys to members of the Scottish Transport Group pension fund, following its announcement in November 2001 on the pension fund surplus. The tax payable on payments to pensioners will depend on the nature of the payment and the personal tax circumstances of the individual.

International Aid

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Government proposes to fulfil the commitment at the 2000 G8 Summit in Okinawa that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievements of this goal by lack of resources; what information he has collated on the actions of the other G8 countries to meet this commitment; and if he will make a statement. [27862]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

The international response to the resource commitment made at the World Education Forum in Dakar (and endorsed by the G8 at Okinawa) has been slow and has lacked effective co-ordination. At the Education for All High-Level Group meeting in Paris in October, I called for international action to be stepped up in a coherent, well-organised and supportive way.

Achieving universal primary education (UPE) can happen only through reform and action at the country level. More attention needs to be given to determining whether a country is "seriously committed" to education for all. Key indicators of commitment are the development of sound national education policies, closely linked to the country's poverty reduction strategies; the rapid abolition of user fees and other direct cost barriers to education; the resources allocated to education, and specifically to primary education; and concrete evidence of efforts to promote gender equality. Being serious about UPE means clear commitments in all of these areas.

Where countries are making these commitments, the international community must deliver the additional resources they require. We believe that delivering this Dakar resource commitment is best analysed and acted upon at the country level. It should be incorporated into all country level negotiations on poverty reduction strategies. It will also require a step-change in the level of international financing to support and sustain UPE, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Development agencies and the multilateral development banks, including the World bank, must increase the resources committed to helping reforming Governments deliver UPE. We also need much greater co-ordination between development agencies, working together in support of a country's own development strategy.

DFID's "Children out of school" paper sets out these proposals and urges much greater international energy and co-operation in taking them forward. It also calls for the response of the developed world to the Dakar resource commitment to be monitored and reported at the World bank annual meeting, and in the report on progress towards the millennium development goals provided by the multilateral developments banks for the G8.

The Government give high priority to the UPE goal and DFID has committed over £600 million to support the development of good quality, sustainable primary education systems in developing countries since 1997. We will do more. Canada shares our strong commitment to UPE and now chairs the G8 Education Task Force, where DFID represents the UK. Information submitted to the task force indicates clearly that the priority given to primary education within other G8 members' development programmes varies significantly. We would like the task force's report to this year's summit in Canada to indicate how the G8 can deliver effectively on its Okinawa commitment, and complement other international action to accelerate progress toward the UPE goal.

Seaside Amusement Arcades

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the economic impact on seaside amusement arcades of recommendation 43 of the Budd report. [28849]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have made no such assessment.

Hourly Wages

Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average hourly wage in each travel to work area is at the latest date for which figures are available. [28505]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Llew Smith, dated 21 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the average hourly earnings by travel to work area. I am replying in his absence. (28505)

The New Earnings Survey (NES) provides earnings data for full-time employees on adult rates of pay. The most recent estimates for average hourly earnings for all travel to work areas in Great Britain are for April 2000. I have deposited a table showing these in the House of Commons Library.

Breast Cancer Survival Rates

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the survival rates were for victims of breast cancer in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* South Tyneside in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [28065]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Stephen Hepburn, dated 21 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the survival rates for breast cancer in (a) the UK and (b) South Tyneside. I am replying in his absence. (28065).

Figures are not available for the United Kingdom as a whole or for local authority areas. The latest available five-year relative survival rate from breast cancer for women in Gateshead and South Tyneside Health Authority is 75%, the same as in England as a whole. These figures relate to women diagnosed in 1992–94 and followed up to 31 December 1999.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27971]

Ruth Kelly: The information provided was compiled from information supplied to the Treasury for inclusion in the Government fraud reports for the years 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. These figures do not include some external thefts and fraud but we cannot guarantee that this is the complete picture as there is no requirement for Departments to report details of all external thefts and frauds to us. Departmental returns include details of cases relating to their agencies but our records are not detailed enough to allow us to provide separate figures for departments and agencies. Data relating to NDPB are not collected for inclusion in the fraud report.

Cost of theft and fraud—HM Treasury

	£
1997–98	15,385
1998–99	20,867
1999–2000	21,630
2000–01	0

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [27999]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

£

	Item(s)	*Cost (approximately)*
1998	1 Laptop PC	2,500
1999	1 Desktop PC	2,000
	1 Laptop PC	2,000
	1 Laptop PC	3,000
2000	1 LCD Projector	2,000
	2 Disk Drives	300
	1 Laptop PC	2,000
2001	1 Laptop PC	2,000
	1 Personal Data Assistant (PDA)	250
	1 Laptop PC	2,000

Bank and Building Society Interest

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax is paid annually by basic rate taxpayers on bank and building society interest. [26254]

Ruth Kelly: The amounts are included in "Inland Revenue Statistics" table 2.6, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stat/income_tax/it_t06_1.htm.

Advertising Campaigns

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list advertising campaigns undertaken by his Department and associated non-departmental public bodies since May 1997; what the cost of each campaign was; and if he will make a statement. [27603]

Ruth Kelly: With regards to advertising campaigns by HM Treasury, I refer the hon. Member to my reply given to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 432W, and the reply given to the former hon. Member for Guildford, Mr. St. Aubyn, on 18 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 258W, by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary.

National Lottery

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total receipts from Lottery duty are since the inception of the Lottery. [27931]

Mr. Boateng: Receipts from Lottery duty since its introduction in December 1994 are shown in the table.

Lottery duty

	£000
December 1994 to March 1995	103,905
1995–96	611,912
1996–97	557,777
1997–98	674,517
1998–99	627,606
1999–2000	609,173
2000–01	596,386
2001–02 (to November 2001)	387,309

Aggregates Levy (Scotland)

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the aggregates levy in Scotland. [27890]

Mr. Boateng: A Regulatory Impact Assessment for the aggregates levy was published at the time of Budget 2000. It is available from the Customs and Excise website.

Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each of the central Government bodies which have reported fraud cases in each of the last four years, indicating for each body *(a)* the number of cases, *(b)* the number of staff involved in each case and *(c)* the total value of frauds. [27929]

Ruth Kelly: The information in the table was compiled from data supplied to HM Treasury by Departments for the annual fraud report in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 and is an analysis of internal frauds only (ie frauds committed by departmental employees).

The list of Departments is not complete. The absence of a Department from the list indicates that a 'nil' return was received from that Department in each of the four years. The data relate to frauds and thefts committed by employees of Departments only.

The values of frauds supplied by Departments are often only estimated values as a number of cases reported each year are at an early stage of investigation when values might not be known.

Department	*Number of cases*	*Number of staff involved*	*Total value (£)*
1997–98			
MAFF	6	6	10,729
Cabinet Office	8	8	8,094
COI			
Crown Office			
CPS	3	3	630
Customs and Excise	35	36	36,369
MOD	213	216	585,750
FCO	2	2	155,949
Health	11	12	49,411
Home Office	24	24	15,447
Inland Revenue	5	5	9,996
Land Registry			
LCD	12	12	6,092
National Savings			
Northern Ireland Office	1	1	0
OFT			
DSS/DWP	233	250	926,707
Scotland Office/Assembly	2	2	1,722
DTI	23	23	24,714
Treasury Solicitor			
ONS	2	2	3,100
DETR/DTLR	11	11	3,661
DfEE/DfES	18	27	98,436
PRO	1	1	680
Scot Court Service	1	1	33,428
Forestry Commission	1	1	705
NI Court Service			
DFID	3	3	2,732
Ordnance Survey			
HMT	11	11	11,385
Ofsted			
Charity Commissioners			
GCHQ	1	1	80
House of Commons and Lords			
National Assembly for Wales	2	2	200
1998–99			
MAFF	12	12	10,817
Cabinet Office	8	8	12,522
COI	1	1	15,263
Crown Office	1	1	2,472
CPS	4	4	3,058
Customs and Excise	39	40	79,380
MOD	129	129	829,404
FCO	10	13	102,227
Health	6	6	66,882
Home Office	48	48	83,416
Inland Revenue	7	7	139,462
Land Registry	16	16	13,564
LCD	3	3	64,274
National Savings	5	5	487
Northern Ireland Office	3	3	6,515
OFT	1	1	253
DSS/DWP	199	238	455,585
Scotland Office/Assembly	3	3	11,022
DTI	37	37	102,084
Treasury Solicitor	1	1	1,037,912
ONS	11	11	10,305
DETR/DTLR	10	12	1,889
DfEE/DfES	21	28	19,114
PRO	4	4	1,696
Scot Court Service	1	1	548
Forestry Commission			
NI Court Service			
DFID			
Ordnance Survey			
HMT			
Ofsted			
Charity Commissioners			
GCHQ			
House of Commons and Lords			
National Assembly for Wales			
1999–2000			
MAFF	16	16	10,117
Cabinet Office	24	24	28,126
COI			
Crown Office			
CPS			
Customs and Excise	53	53	140,049
MOD	77	77	268,416
FCO	4	4	11,183
Health	22	22	28,917
Home Office	16	16	136,517
Inland Revenue	7	7	826,939
Land Registry	18	18	10,956
LCD	3	3	2,710
National Savings	1	1	5,249
Northern Ireland Office	9	9	23,711
OFT			
DSS/DWP	220	261	417,152
Scotland Office/Assembly	1	1	1,596
DTI	23	23	18,646
Treasury Solicitor	1	1	250
ONS	8	8	7,062
DETR/DTLR	21	23	30,451
DfEE/DfES	22	33	46,122
PRO			
Scot Court Service			
Forestry Commission	1	1	535
NI Court Service	1	1	7,822
DFID	4	4	11,220
Ordnance Survey	4	4	58
HMT	6	6	19,130
Ofsted	1	1	2,503
Charity Commissioners	3	3	700
GCHQ			
House of Commons and Lords			
National Assembly for Wales			
2000–01			
MAFF	2	2	4,242
Cabinet Office	3	3	4,227
COI			
Crown Office			
CPS			
Customs and Excise	33	34	53,962
MOD	151	151	493,029
FCO	9	9	16,326
Health	27	27	34,626
Home Office	71	71	108,724
Inland Revenue	11	13	187,518
Land Registry	25	25	4,496
LCD	2	2	387
National Savings			
Northern Ireland Office	4	4	5,225
OFT			
DSS/DWP	137	143	71,112
Scotland Office/Assembly	1	1	0
DTI	12	12	6,043
Treasury Solicitor	1	1	170,000
ONS	4	4	2,500
DETR/DTLR	23	23	40,027
DfEE/DfES	7	7	402,063
PRO			
Scot Court Service			
Forestry Commission			
NI Court Service	3	3	440

Department	Number of cases	Number of staff involved	Total value (£)
DFID	5	6	7,709
Ordnance Survey	1	1	550
HMT			
Ofsted			
Charity Commissioners	1	1	750
GCHQ	2	2	1,610
House of Commons and Lords	1	1	100
National Assembly for Wales	3	3	12,379

Euro

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to allow United Kingdom businesses to make dual currency VAT returns to Customs and Excise where they trade in sterling and euros. [28395]

Ruth Kelly: No. The euro is treated for VAT return purposes as any other foreign currency.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total cost to United Kingdom businesses of additional administrative costs following the introduction of euro notes and coins. [28396]

Ruth Kelly: It is not possible to estimate the administrative costs to United Kingdom businesses of the introduction of the euro in the euro area. This would depend on the approach taken by individual organisations.

"Promoting Sport in the Community"

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many copies of his consultation document, "Promoting Sport in the Community", were printed; and how many responses he has received to the consultation. [28603]

Mr. Boateng: 5,000 copies of the "Promoting Sport in the Community" consultation document were printed and it is also available on the Treasury public internet site. A number of responses to the consultation have been received and consultation continues.

Public Sector Money

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons *(a)* the £162 million payment due on 1 October 2001 to Renewco was classified as public sector money and *(b)* the £1.2 billion loan to Railtrack administration was not classified as public sector money. [28826]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) determined that Renewco's activities would be classified to the public sector. The decision was based on the application of internationally agreed definitions for national accounts. This means borrowing by Renewco would be public sector borrowing and add to public sector net debt. The borrowed funds are therefore "public sector money". Payments by Government to Renewco would be transfers of public sector money within the public sector and so would have no impact on the consolidation public sector statistics.

Loans to Railtrack's administrator count as lending by the public sector to the private sector. That lending has to be funded from public sector sources such as taxes or government borrowing, and so is "public sector money". The lending is expected to be repaid before the end of March 2002 and so would have no impact on the fiscal balances and expenditure measures for the financial year as a whole.

Gift Aid

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the reasons underlying his statement in the pre-Budget report that the generosity of Gift Aid has been increased; and if he will make a statement. [28921]

Ruth Kelly: In his pre-Budget report statement the Chancellor stated that Gift Aid was being more widely used. This is a result of reforms he introduced from April 2000 to improve incentives for giving to charity. A larger number of donors can now use Gift Aid following the abolition of the £250 million minimum limit on Gift Aid donations. This has brought into the scheme the large number of smaller donations, which were previously excluded.

Child Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 891W, on child benefit, what the yield would be for 2002–03 of taxing child benefit payments to *(a)* recipients paying tax at the higher rate and *(b)* higher rate tax payers in a couple where one partner receives child benefit, with child benefit rates at £26.25 per week for the first child and £17.60 per week for subsequent children. [27317]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* If child benefit were increased to £26.25 per week for the first child and £17.60 per week for subsequent children and made taxable for higher rate taxpayers, it is estimated that it would yield about £0.1 billion of income tax. If it were taxable at the higher rate for any family with a higher rate taxpayer (regardless of who received the benefit) it would yield around £1.0 billion of income tax.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the results of the impact of the introduction of the climate change levy on the priority given to energy efficiency by United Kingdom energy managers; and if he will make a statement. [28013]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The climate change levy is designed to promote greater energy efficiency. Part of the levy revenue is being recycled to provide enhanced advice on energy efficiency to business and to provide support for energy efficiency investments. As the levy package has only been operational since April 2001, it is too early for an assessment to be made of its impact.

Census

Mr. Curry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what he estimates to be the minimum threshold in respect of persons and households compatible with the requirements of confidentiality about individuals which will permit effective data to be made available through the 2001 Census; [28863]

(2) how many parishes in *(a)* North Yorkshire and *(b)* England will fall below the minimum threshold of 100 persons/40 households for the purposes of the 2001 Census carried out by the Office for National Statistics. [28862]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. David Curry, dated 21 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions asking:

(i) what he estimates to be the minimum threshold in respect of persons and households compatible with the requirements of confidentiality about individuals which will permit effective data to be made available through the 2001 Census (28863); and

(ii) how many parishes in (a) North Yorkshire and (b) England will fall below the minimum threshold of 100 persons/40 households for the purposes of the 2001 Census (28862).

I am replying in his absence.

As part of the disclosure control measures being adopted to protect the confidentiality of personal information provided in the 2001 Census, we have recently announced that standard statistical output, other than simple headcounts, will not be released for small areas below a population threshold of 100 resident persons *and* 40 resident households.

The design of output areas recognises the need to identify parishes separately in the 2001 Census, but the number of parishes that fall below this threshold will not be known until the processing of data is completed later this year. Using information from the 1991 Census, we would estimate that some 215 parishes in North Yorkshire and 1230 in England would fall below the 2001 Census threshold.

Scottish Bus Group Pension Fund

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has had discussions with Scottish Ministers concerning the Scottish Bus Group pension fund holders. [28797]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers have held discussions on the matter with Scottish Ministers.

The Scottish Executive are taking forward matters regarding the Scottish Bus Group pension fund, following its announcement in November 2001 on the pension fund surplus.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has discussed with the Scotland Office the Scottish Bus Group pension fund holders. [28796]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers have held discussions on the matter with Scotland Office Ministers.

The Scottish Executive are taking forward matters regarding the Scottish Bus Group pension fund, following its announcement in November 2001 on the pension fund surplus.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received representations from members of the Scottish Parliament about the Scottish Bus Group pension fund holders. [28795]

Mr. Andrew Smith: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this matter.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received representations from the Scottish Bus Group pension fund holders. [28794]

Mr. Andrew Smith: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this matter.

HEALTH

Social Services Departments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 351W, on social services departments, if he will set out the amount of unallocated funds within the departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year, *(b)* now and *(c)* the forecast outturn. [14959]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The information requested is given in the table.

2001–02 departmental unallocated provision

£000

	Plan	*Forecast outturn*[1]
NHS[2]	350,000	0
Personal social services	82,750	2,750
Total	432,750	2,750

[1] This is the forecast outturn that will be reported to Parliament shortly in the spring supplementary estimates.

[2] This is the total departmental unallocated provision for the national health service of which £90 million is for revenue expenditure and £260 million for capital expenditure. The planned departmental unallocated provision for PSS was for revenue expenditure only.

BCG Vaccine

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the availability of the BCG vaccine against tuberculosis in schools in Arundel and South Downs. [18322]

Ms Blears: Our policy is that all school children should be BCG immunised between ages 10 to 14 if they have not previously been immunised. Initially, in West Sussex, this vaccine was offered to those students who were due to leave school in summer 2001. Where there has been sufficient vaccine and resources year 10 pupils were also offered testing and immunisation. Any current year 10 and 11 pupils who have not yet been offered vaccine will be offered testing and immunisation during this academic year.

Standards Reports

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the reasons for the delay in publishing the standards reports relating to *(a)* cleanliness and *(b)* decontamination announced on 14 November 2000. [19957]

Ms Blears: There has been no delay in publishing the standards reports relating to hospital cleanliness. So far as decontamination is concerned, we took the view that improving the standard of decontamination in the national health service was more important than reporting on it. We therefore asked the assessors to help with drawing up action plans and check on their implementation. We have published the results of the preliminary and comprehensive surveys of decontamination today. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Community Equipment Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems are in place to ensure that social services and NHS trusts have agreed budgets for community equipment services by April 2002. [R] [21794]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Statutory guidance issued to health and local authorities in March 2001 explained the requirement to make adequate financial provision for modernising local community equipment services. Several systems of financial and performance monitoring encourage commissioners and providers to identify and agree budgets for community equipment services for the coming financial year. These include spring and autumn monitoring exercises with senior managers of social services. Budgetary commitments agreed in local business plans by social services and national health service trusts feed into local modernisation reviews and planning for the integration of local services.

Home Helps, Buckingham

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many home helps are working in the constituency of Buckingham. [23719]

Ms Blears: Data on the number of home helps are not available by parliamentary constituency. As at 30 September 2000 there were 52 full-time and 661 part-time home helps employed by Buckinghamshire county council. This is equivalent to approximately 410 whole-time staff.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the adult population in *(a)* Devon and *(b)* Torbay was registered with NHS dentists in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–01. [22802]

Ms Blears: The percentage of adults registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist per head of population is shown in the table for South and West Devon health authority and North and East Devon health authority for 30 September in each of the years 1997–98 to 2000–01.

The registration rates for September 1997 are not comparable with the later figures. The September 1997 rates reflect a 24-month registration period; the later figures reflect a 15 month registration period.

Devon is covered by the South and West Devon HA and North and East Devon HA. Information is not available by constituency area for the percentage of adult registrations per population.

General dental services: percentage of the adult registrations[1] per population[2], 1997–98 to 2000–01

September each year	*South and West Devon HA*	*North and East Devon HA*
1997–98[3]	[3]51	[3]50
1998–99	43	43
1999–2000	41	45
2000–01	42	48

[1] Based on the number of adult registrations at September for each financial year.

[2] ONS mid-year adult population estimates used to calculate percentage of adult patients registered.

[3] Registration rates reflect a 24-month registration period rather than 15 months which is the basis of the later figures.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the correlation between inadequate coverage of NHS dentistry in a given area and a higher than average incidence of oral cancer. [25389]

Ms Blears: With an incidence of oral cancer of some 2,500 new cases per year it is not possible to make significant comparisons with provision of national health service dentistry by area especially as confounding factors like use of tobacco and alcohol would need to be eliminated. Nevertheless, we recognise that dentists have a unique opportunity both to warn patients of the risks from smoking and to identify pre-cancerous signs of oral cancer. We are committed to improving access to NHS dentistry.

Mixed Sex Wards

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mixed sex hospital wards are in use in the United Kingdom. [14732]

Ms Blears: Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the service in 1997 and since then the national health service has been working towards a clear target to eliminate mixed sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of national health service trusts by December 2002.

It is not possible to provide information at the level of the individual ward. The majority of hospital wards are usually subdivided into bays which are designated as male or female. Depending on the case mix and local need, the exact proportion of male to female bays will vary.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's progress on their plan to abolish mixed sex wards by 2002. [26717]

Ms Blears: We have set a target of December 2002 for the provision of single sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of trusts.

On-going monitoring of the progress of the project continues and indicates that progress towards the targets is being maintained and work is continuing to ensure that this remains so.

Water Fluoridation

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's policy on the fluoridation of water. [23968]

Ms Blears: Our current policy is to encourage health authorities with high levels of dental decay among their populations to consider the option of fluoridation as part of their overall oral health promotion strategy. Before asking their water suppliers to introduce fluoridation of the water supply, health authorities are required to undertake wide-ranging consultation with their local population to establish support for fluoridation.

The Medical Research Council has been commissioned to provide scientific advice regarding the health effects of water fluoridation and to suggest priorities for any further research which may be required. We will be reviewing our policy in the light of their report which is expected next year.

Health Expenditure, Isle of Wight

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expenditure was on non-national health service nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in the Isle of Wight health authority in the financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [23660]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Multiple Sclerosis Drugs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of NICE's provision appraisal determination estimate for implementing a positive guidance on beta interferon and glatiramer acetate; [8710]

(2) what assessment he has made of NICE's Provisional Appraisal Determination estimate for implementing positive guidance on beta interferon and glatiramer acetate. [9416]

Ms Blears: We are currently holding discussions with the manufacturers to consider a range of options under which drugs for multiple sclerosis might be made available under the national health service. One option is a 'risk-sharing' scheme which will evaluate their clinical and cost effectiveness, and until these discussions are concluded we cannot provide the information requested.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the Buckinghamshire health authority area referred urgently with suspected breast cancer waited for more than two weeks for an out-patient appointment for each reporting period since March 1999. [24849]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Year	*Quarter*	*Part*	*00–14 target*	*Beyond 14 day target*
1999–2000	1	Referrals within 24 hours	186	6
1999–2000	1	Referrals not within 24 hours	13	6
1999–2000	2	Referrals within 24 hours	158	5
1999–2000	2	Referrals not within 24 hours	13	8
1999–2000	3	Referrals within 24 hours	212	5
1999–2000	3	Referrals not within 24 hours	12	15
1999–2000	4	Referrals within 24 hours	246	9
1999–2000	4	Referrals not within 24 hours	14	10
2000–01	1	Referrals within 24 hours	248	9
2000–01	1	Referrals not within 24 hours	26	13
2000–01	2	Referrals within 24 hours	224	11
2000–01	2	Referrals not within 24 hours	15	4
2000–01	3	Referrals within 24 hours	274	11
2000–01	3	Referrals not within 24 hours	22	5
2000–01	4	Referrals within 24 hours	262	5
2000–01	4	Referrals not within 24 hours	16	1
2001–02	1	Referrals within 24 hours	285	16
2001–02	1	Referrals not within 24 hours	22	1
2001–02	2	Referrals within 24 hours	213	41
2001–02	2	Referrals not within 24 hours	16	6

Source:

Quarterly Central Return QCW, Code QA8

NHS Census

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many responses to the NHS census he received from people living in the Buckingham constituency. [24860]

Ms Blears: There has been no national health service census. The acute trust patient survey is currently scheduled to take place between January and March 2002. The survey will be part of a programme that the Government are putting in place throughout England. Hospital trusts will carry out a specially designed patient survey programme to seek views on the patient experience.

Improving the experience of the individual patient is central to the NHS Plan. By finding out more, in this systematic manner, we will increase our knowledge of what patients need and expect from the NHS and how well the service responds to their needs and expectations.

Pharmacies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community pharmacies in the Buckingham constituency *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened in each year since 1997. [24855]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of community pharmacies in the Buckinghamshire health authority area that opened and/or closed 1997–98 to 2000–01

Year	*Opened*	*Closed*
1997–98	0	0
1998–99	1	0
1999–2000	1	0
2000–01	2	2

Source:

PHS1 return

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest percentage reduction of fees for community pharmacists for dispensing NHS prescriptions. [24708]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]*: The fees paid to community pharmacy contractors vary according to the item prescribed. The large majority of prescriptions attract a basic dispensing fee. From July 1999 to October 2001 that fee was 97.5p per prescription dispensed. In November 2001 it was changed to 87.4p. This represents a reduction of approximately 10.4 per cent.

The basic dispensing fee is one of a number of fees and allowances by which the global sum for community pharmacies is distributed between pharmacy contractors. The global sum is the amount to be paid to contractors overall in the year in question. The global sum for 2001–02 for England and Wales is £806.6 million, an increase of 3.7 per cent. over 2000–01.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of pharmacy within the national health service. [25534]

Ms Blears: Our programme for the future of pharmacy in the national health service in England was set out in "Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan" published in September 2000, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was allocated to pharmacists for the dispensing of prescriptions; how many prescriptions were dispensed; and what was the unit cost allowed for each prescription in each year from 1992 to 2001. [25536]

Ms Blears: Each year, a figure (known as the global sum) is set for the remuneration to be paid to pharmacies overall in England and Wales for the national health service pharmaceutical services they provide.

The total remuneration to be paid in any given year is distributed through a system of fees and allowances, some of which relate directly to the number (and type) of prescriptions dispensed, some of which do not.

For the years 1991–92 to 2000–01 (the latest year for which complete information is available), the table shows the global sum, the number of prescription items dispensed and the global sum expressed as an amount per prescription item.

Year	*Global sum (£ million)*	*Prescription items dispensed (million)*	*Global sum expressed as an amount per prescription item dispensed (£)*
1991–92	601.4	412.8	1.46
1992–93	631.1	429.4	1.47
1993–94	640.6	447.3	1.43
1994–95	655.3	462.2	1.42
1995–96	671.7	474.7	1.41
1996–97	692.7	487.9	1.42
1997–98	709.3	505.8	1.40
1998–99	730.6	518.3	1.41
1999–2000	755.1	535.7	1.41
2000–01	777.8	531.8	1.38

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to replace the global sum approach to the payment of pharmacists for dispensing NHS prescriptions. [25537]

Ms Blears: We have no current plans to replace the present global sum system.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the Buckinghamshire health authority area waited more than *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months, *(d)* 12 months, *(e)* 15 months, *(f)* 18 months and *(g)* 24 months for (i) heart operations, (ii) cancer treatment and (iii) hip replacements in each year since 1997. [24850]

Ms Blears: The information requested is in the table.

Number of Buckinghamshire HA residents admitted from a waiting list where the primary operation was a heart operation or hip replacement, or where treatment was for a primary diagnosis of cancer, by time waited

		Time from referral for treatment to admission			
Data year	*Operation/condition*	*Up to 3 months*	*More than 3 months*	*More than 6 months*	*More than 9 months*
1997–98	Diagnosis of Cancer (ICD10 C00 to D48)	5,962	668	310	198
1998–99	Diagnosis of Cancer (ICD10 C00 to D48)	5,994	835	452	268
1999–2000	Diagnosis of Cancer (ICD10 C00 to D48)	6,377	793	337	181
2000–01	Diagnosis of Cancer (ICD10 C00 to D48)	5,595	708	281	151
1997–98	Heart operations (OPCS4 K01 to K71)	651	192	94	47
1998–99	Heart operations (OPCS4 K01 to K71)	867	354	141	57
1999–2000	Heart operations (OPCS4 K01 to K71)	888	328	103	36
2000–01	Heart operations (OPCS4 K01 to K71)	831	536	174	93
1997–98	Hip replacement (OPCS4 W37 to W39)	137	276	194	108
1998–99	Hip replacement (OPCS4 W37 to W39)	130	331	221	137
1999–2000	Hip replacement (OPCS4 W37 to W39)	163	314	210	139
2000–01	Hip replacement (OPCS4 W37 to W39)	100	361	257	161

		Time from referral for treatment to admission			
Data year	*Operation/condition*	*More than 12 months*	*More than 15 months*[1]	*More than 18 months*[1]	*More than 24 months*[1]
1997–98	Diagnosis of Cancer (ICD10 C00 to D48)	110	32	10	5
1998–99	Diagnosis of Cancer (ICD10 C00 to D48)	142	58	24	8
1999–2000	Diagnosis of Cancer (ICD10 C00 to D48)	81	37	13	6
2000–01	Diagnosis of Cancer (ICD10 C00 to D48)	77	31	19	12
1997–98	Heart operations (OPCS4 K01 to K71)	23	10	1	0
1998–99	Heart operations (OPCS4 K01 to K71)	28	7	2	1
1999–2000	Heart operations (OPCS4 K01 to K71)	14	7	2	1
2000–01	Heart operations (OPCS4 K01 to K71)	36	19	6	1
1997–98	Hip replacement (OPCS4 W37 to W39)	57	28	9	1
1998–99	Hip replacement (OPCS4 W37 to W39)	89	41	13	2
1999–2000	Hip replacement (OPCS4 W37 to W39)	77	43	17	3
2000–01	Hip replacement (OPCS4 W37 to W39)	87	58	23	10

[1] The time spent waiting for admission is calculated for HES purposes as being the period elapsed from the initial decision to admit until the date that the patient is actually admitted. This takes no account of any periods when the patient may have been unavailable for admission, or may have been suspended from the waiting list for medical reasons. It is for this reason that this analysis apparently shows patients waiting over 15 months. The waiting time figures published by the Department of Health take these situations into account.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list NHS trusts by length of average waiting time *(a)* to see an orthopaedic specialist and *(b)* for a non-emergency orthopaedic operation. [25449]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

The in-patient average waiting time is calculated as the median time waited so far for patients who were on the trauma and orthopaedics in-patient waiting list at end September 2001, that is it looks at patients who are still waiting for treatment.

For out-patients, the total number of patients still waiting for a first out-patient appointment is not collected. As a result, the average is calculated using data for patients who have already been seen for their first out-patient appointment. Hence the average is calculated as the median waiting time of patients seen during Quarter 2 2001–02 for a first out-patient appointment in trauma and orthopaedics specialty following general practitioner referral.

The in-patient and out-patient averages are approximations only, particularly for trusts who see very few patients. It is difficult to accurately calculate the average.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list average accident and emergency waiting times by NHS trust for *(a)* triage and *(b)* definitive treatment in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [25450]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts in England where more than 10 per cent. of patients are suspended from the waiting list for an in-patient operation. [25491]

Mr. Hutton: Trusts with a suspension rate of more than 10 per cent. are shown in the table.

In-patient waiting list data, England, position at quarter end September 2001

NHS Trusts with a suspension rate of over 10 per cent.	*Suspension rate (percentage)*
East Cheshire NHS Trust	10.0
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	10.0
Eastbourne and County Healthcare NHS Trust	10.0
Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	10.0
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	10.1
Wirral Hospital NHS Trust	10.2
Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust	10.3
Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust	10.3
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust	10.4
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust	10.5
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	10.5
Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust	10.6
North Dorset PCT	10.7
Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	10.8
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust	11.1
Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust	11.2
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust	11.3
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust	11.4
South West Dorset PCT	11.4
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust	11.6
Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust	11.9
Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust	13.0
North West Anglia Healthcare NHS Trust	13.1
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust	13.4
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	13.4
Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	13.9
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust	15.1
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care NHS Trust	16.0
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	16.1
West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust	16.2
Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust	16.3
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde Community Health Services NHS Trust	17.6
Mental Health Services of Salford NHS Trust	21.8
South Staffordshire Healthcare NHS Trust	26.0
Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust	31.6

Source:

Department of Health forms KH07 and KH07A

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which national minimum standards care homes will have to be fully compliant with from 1 April 2002. [24183]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* National minimum standards that will not apply to care homes from 1 April 2002 are those relating to training and environmental requirements. Specifically, existing care homes will have until 2005 to comply with the standards requiring a minimum of 50 per cent. of care staff to be qualified at NVQ level 2 or equivalent. Existing care homes will have until 2007 to comply with the standards relating to room size, shared facilities and places in single rooms.

However, non-compliance with national minimum standards will not lead to the National Care Standards Commission automatically pursuing enforcement action or deregistration. Instead it will seek to agree actions to be taken by homes to ensure compliance with standards within a reasonable time frame—unless vulnerable service users are at serious risk as a result of non-compliance. The national minimum standards are intended to be a means of assisting care homes to improve the quality of their services as well as a vehicle to protect vulnerable people.

Not all of the standards relate to all care homes as some are aimed at specialist provision only.

Western General Hospital, Swindon

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new beds are to be purchased for the new Western General Hospital in Swindon; how many new beds have been purchased; where they are presently stored; how they will be transported to the new hospital; what their total cost was; how their dimensions compare with the dimensions of the doors and lifts through which they must pass; and if he will make a statement. [24264]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Citizens Council

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisation will be used to prepare and organise meetings of the Citizens Council. [24615]

Mr. Hutton: I understand that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has not yet appointed an organisation to prepare and organise meetings of the Citizens Council.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there will be a time limit imposed between ceasing to work in specified capacities and joining the Citizens Council. [24607]

Mr. Hutton: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is considering this matter.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which categories of desired members of the Citizens Council will be targeted by outreach selection from the electoral register. [24610]

Mr. Hutton: It is important that the Citizens Council reflects the range of different views of society within England and Wales. Outreach selection will be used to complement the results of open advertisement. The categories of members which need to be enhanced through outreach selection will become apparent once the first stage—open advertisement—is complete.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if an independent body will be responsible for evaluating the meetings of the Citizens Council. [24614]

Mr. Hutton: I understand that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence intends to recruit an independent body to evaluate the meetings of the Citizens Council.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many subjects Citizens Councils are expected to cover each year. [24611]

Mr. Hutton: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has not yet made a decision on this point.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if members of the Citizens Council will be paid travel and accommodation expenses to attend its meetings. [24613]

Mr. Hutton: Yes.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what briefing will be given to members of the Citizens Council which will advise NICE. [24579]

Mr. Hutton: The nature of the briefing will be a matter for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long people will remain in the pool of potential members of the Citizens Council; and if the requirements for membership of this pool differ from that for full members of the council. [24609]

Mr. Hutton: I understand that the pool of potential members will exist solely in order for members to be selected. Once the selection has taken place, the pool will cease to exist.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated annual cost to public funds will be of the new Citizens Council to advise NICE. [24612]

Mr. Hutton: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently considering the detailed arrangements for the Citizens Council and these will be published in the institute's business plan.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the ratio of membership between England and Wales of the members of the Citizens Council which will advise NICE; and what recruitment mechanism will be used to select members. [24580]

Mr. Hutton: The appointment of members to the Citizens Council is a matter for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. We are confident that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will ensure that the constitution of the council will contain representatives from all walks of life from England and Wales. We therefore do not consider it necessary to be prescriptive about the number of members from each country.

A and E (IT)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations have taken place with *(a)* the Royal College of Nursing and *(b)* other representatives of nurses over the new IT provision in A and E. [24585]

Ms Blears: The Royal College of Nursing, the chair of the Royal College of Nursing Accident and Emergency Nurses Group and a representative of the Royal College of Nursing Faculty of Emergency Nursing are part of the consultation process for the new clinical assessment system—the information technology system that is currently being introduced to accident and emergency departments.

Efficiency Task Force

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the annual financial savings generated by the work of the NHS Efficiency Task Force since its inception. [24443]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service Efficiency Task Force was an advisory group that made a very helpful contribution in taking forward the Government's programme to improve efficiency. It is not possible to ascribe specific financial savings to the work of the task force.

Public Relations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the projects on which his Department collaborates with Headline Communications, indicating how much money has been paid to Headline Communications in the past year. [24577]

Ms Blears: Headline Communications have provided the Department with design services for a variety of projects including:

Health and Social Care Awards
Association of Healthcare Communicators Conference
NHS Direct
NHS Magazine
NHS Syndication Service
NHS Photo Library
NHS Plan News.

Moneys paid to Headline Communications from 1 December 2000 to 30 November 2001 amounted to £24,161.48 inclusive of VAT.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the projects on which his Department collaborates with Atlas PR, indicating how much money has been paid by his Department to Atlas PR in the past year. [24616]

Ms Blears: Atlas PR have provided the Department with a variety of communications services on the following projects:

NHS Magazine
NHS.uk
Walk in Centres
Patient and Public Information website
Association of Healthcare Communicators Conference
NHS Quality Programme
NHS Plan
NHS syndication service
DH and NHS Corporate Exhibitions and Events
NHS Plan News
NHS Direct
Health and Social Care Awards.

Moneys paid to Atlas Public Relations from 1 December 2000 to 30 November 2001 amounted to £807,148.60 inclusive of VAT.

Mental Health

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met his independent reference group on mental health. [24449]

Jacqui Smith: The last meeting of this group took place on 11 February 1998. My right. hon Friend the Secretary of State for Health has never met with this reference group, however my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), when Under-Secretary of State for Health, met with the group at their last meeting on the 11 February 1998. The independent reference group discontinued its work in 1998

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Secretary of State for Education in order to discuss the training for state schools in the skills and knowledge to ensure children have access to early assessment and support in relation to mental health. [24687]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* My right hon. Friend has not met with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to discuss this topic. We recognise the importance of promoting children's mental health and emotional well-being and the importance of working together to promote this.

We have an on-going commitment to the improvement of child mental health and it will be an important part of the Children's National Service Framework. We shall be working closely with the Department for Education and Skills when developing the mental health module of the framework. This is a major development and will safeguard the quality of child mental health services.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government expects to publish its strategy for women's mental health. [28288]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The Department will publish the women's mental health consultation document in the spring and, after a period of consultation, will publish the strategy implementation document in the autumn.

Nursing and Residential Care Homes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential care homes in each health authority have closed in each year since 1997. [24619]

Jacqui Smith: The total number of residential and nursing care establishment closures in 1999 and 2000, together with number of new registrations, are shown in the table. Regular statistical collections on nursing and residential care home closures were first introduced for the year ending 31 March 1999. Reliable information is not available for each health authority.

Care home establishment closures and new home registrations in England

	Year ending 31 March	
	1999	*2000*
Establishment closures		
Residential	885	1,510
Nursing	245	360
New registrations		
Residential	1,540	1,920
Nursing	245	345

Source:
Registration and Inspection Survey

Clinical Indicators

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the clinical indicators announced on 9 July 1997 were adopted as performance measures. [24571]

Mr. Hutton: The Department published a consultation paper to the national health service in July 1997 which proposed a set of 15 clinical indicators. Following consultation six indicators were published in "Quality and performance in the NHS: Clinical Indicators" in June 1999 and in "Quality and performance in the NHS: NHS Performance Indicators" in July 2000.

The six indicators published were:

Deaths in hospital following surgery
Deaths in hospital following a fractured hip
Deaths in hospital following a heart attack
Readmission to hospital following discharge
Returning home following treatment for a stroke
Returning home following treatment for a fractured hip.

NICE-Approved Therapies

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new funding will be made available to health authorities to ensure the funding of all NICE-approved therapies. [24588]

Ms Blears: We have recently announced an average 7.2 per cent. real terms increase in funding of the national health service.

We expect health authorities and primary care trusts to fund treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence from their general allocations.

Diabetes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support will be made available to GPs who seek to implement the delivery strategy prelude to the National Service Framework for Diabetes. [24589]

Jacqui Smith: The Diabetes National Service Framework Standards, published on 14 December 2001, include an analysis of the implications for planning and organising services. Those who are planning and investing in local diabetes services on an on-going basis will be able to take account of this in their plans for next year and beyond. Health improvement programmes and primary care implementation plans produced by health authorities, primary care groups and primary care trusts must include strategies for implementing National Service Frameworks.

The delivery strategy for the Diabetes National Service Framework will follow this summer, for implementation from April 2003. We shall set milestones in the delivery strategy based upon the resources that will be available to support implementation.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to introduce the National Standards Framework for diabetes. [26020]

Jacqui Smith: We published the Diabetes National Service Framework Standards on 14 December 2001. The delivery strategy will follow this summer, for implementation from April 2003.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps are being taken to provide extra funding for new treatments approved by NICE mid-way though the financial year and to ensure that the funding of other treatments and services awaiting approval is not adversely affected; [25874]

(2) what steps are being taken by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to ensure that patients whose treatment has not been *(a)* examined and *(b)* approved by NICE will not assume a lower priority than patients on approved treatments; [25876]

(3) what steps are being taken by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to ensure that the provision of unapproved services is not affected by funding the cost of approved treatments. [25875]

Mr. Hutton: Standing guidance in Health Service Circular 1999/176 advise national health service bodies to use their existing arrangements to determine local policies for treatments not referred to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence or pending guidance from NICE, using publicly available evidence to inform their decisions.

The statutory obligation on health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by NICE was introduced as part of our strategy to ensure consistency of access to treatments for patients.

Funding is provided in baseline allocations to meet these commitments. NHS bodies are expected to take into account in-year pressures in developing their expenditure plans.

Health Care Provision (Value Comparisons)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to establish a body to compare the value of *(a)* extra district nurses and *(b)* counsellors with the cost-effectiveness of drugs and treatments. [25873]

Mr. Hutton: We have no plans to establish such a body.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of tuberculosis have been reported in the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [24946]

Ms Blears: Information on statutory notifications of tuberculosis (excluding chemoprophylaxis) are available from the Public Health Laboratory Service. Further local information can be obtained from the Chairman of Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority.

The Department collects information on tuberculosis as part of the Hospital Episodes Statistic (HES) system, which contains details of patients admitted to and treated in NHS hospitals in England.

Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority: admission for tuberculosis (ICD10 code A15-A19)

	Number
1996–97	10
1997–98	11
1998–99	16
1999–2000	28
2000–01	27

Admissions are defined as the first period of patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. Admissions do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

Stroke Clinics

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions have taken place with concerned parties regarding funding of stroke clinics in the UK. [24894]

Jacqui Smith: The funding of stroke clinics is a matter for local discussion as set out in the recently published priorities and planning framework 2002–03. One of the priorities is to continue to implement on agreed time scales the National Service Framework for Older People.

The NSF for Older People sets a milestone of April 2002 for every general hospital which cares for people with stroke to have plans to introduce a specialised stroke service as described in the stroke service model from 2004. The development for these plans will incorporate local service configuration, integration and any relevant aspects of local funding requirements/priorities.

Orthopaedic Consultants

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many orthopaedic consultants were working in NHS hospitals in Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [25848]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is provided in the table.

Hospital medical trauma and orthopaedic surgery consultants within Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority area

	Number
1997	10
1998	10
1999	20
2000[1]	20

[1] As at 30 September 2000

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to the nearest 10.
2. In 1997 and 1998 there were seven organisations within this HA:

Merton and Sutton Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA
Pathfinder NHS Trust
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton NHS Trust
St. George's Group NHS Trust
St. Helier NHS Trust
Wandsworth Community Health NHS Trust

3. In 1999 and 2000 there were five organisations within this HA:

Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA
Pathfinder NHS Trust
South West London Community NHS Trust
St. George's Group NHS Trust

Source:

Department of Health 2000 medical and dental work force census

CT/MRI Scanners

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* CT and *(b)* MRI scanners are in working use per head of population in each health authority area in England and Wales. [24664]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* There are currently approximately 5.7 CT scanners and 3.7 MRI scanners per million head of population in England. By the time that central programmes are complete in 2004 these figures will have risen to approximately 7.1 and 5.2 per million respectively.

To provide these figures for every health authority in England would require disproportionate effort. However a breakdown by region has been provided in the tables.

Information regarding CT and MRI provision in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

MRI scanners[1]

Region	*MRI scanners per region (December 2001)*	*Population*	*MRI scanners per million population (2001)*	*MRI scanners per region—post NOF programmes 2003*	*MRI scanners per million—post programmes 2003*	*MRI scanners per million—post programmes 2004*
Eastern	18	5,377,003	3.35	20	3.72	—
London	44	7,187,272	6.12	46	6.40	—
North and Yorks	23	6,339,044	3.63	26	4.10	—
North West	26	6,603,991	3.94	28	4.24	—
South and West	18	4,901,316	3.67	20	4.08	—
South East	29	8,619,633	3.36	32	3.71	—
Trent	14	5,133,802	2.73	19	3.70	—
West Midlands	15	5,332,521	2.81	19	3.56	—
Total	187	49,494,582	[2]3.70	210	[2]4.19	[3]5.20

[1] This table shows a regional breakdown of MRI installed in the NHS to date and on completion of central equipment programmes

[2] Average

[3] Projected average

CT scanners[1]

Region	*CT scanners per region (December 2001)*	*Population*	*CT scanners per million population (2001)*	*Post programme CT scanners per region—2003*	*CT scanners per million—post programmes 2003*	*CT scanners per million—post programmes 2004*
Eastern	24	5,377,000	4.46	28	5.21	—
London	58	7,187,300	8.07	58	8.07	—
North West	45	6,604,000	6.81	45	6.81	—
Northern and Yorkshire	41	6,339,000	6.47	43	6.78	—
South East	41	8,619,600	4.76	47	5.45	—
South West	21	4,901,300	4.28	27	5.51	—
Trent	27	5,133,800	5.26	29	5.65	—
West Midlands	29	5,332,500	5.44	30	5.63	—
Total	286	49,494,500	[2]5.69	307	[2]6.14	[3]7.14

[1] This table shows a regional breakdown of CT installed in the NHS to date and on completion of central equipment programmes

[2] Average

[3] Projected average

Note:

For both CT and MRI London appears to have significantly larger numbers of machines per head of population than other regions. However, these figures are based on resident population and do not take account of the patients referred into London from elsewhere.

Surgical Instruments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the extent of re-use of single-use surgical instruments in hospital trusts; what action has been taken against hospital trusts found to be re-using surgical instruments designated for single use only; and which items of surgical equipment in general hospital surgical theatres are normally designated for single use only. [24667]

Jacqui Smith: Designation of medical devices as single use is a matter for the device manufacturer. The Department has advised national health service trusts on a number of occasions that they should not re-use single use devices. Any trust found doing so during the recent comprehensive survey was advised to cease and such cessation was made part of the action plan.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of hospital trusts in England and Wales have an infection control policy in place regarding surgical instrument sterilisation. [24675]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 8 January 2002]: The Department does not routinely collect information about the details of national health service trusts' infection control policies. There is, however, a controls assurance standard dealing with infection control. This requires NHS trusts to ensure that written policies, procedures and guidance for the prevention and control of infection are implemented and reflect relevant legislation and published professional guidance, including that on decontamination and the reprocessing of re-usable medical devices.

Air Ambulances

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many air ambulances there are; and what plans he has to increase this number; [24683]

(2) what his Department is doing to encourage increased corporate sponsorship of air ambulances. [24684]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* In England, there are 12 air ambulance services provided by 12 independent air ambulance charities. These charities are responsible for the number of aircraft provided.

Fund raising for air ambulances is organised by independent local charities. On all primary missions, air ambulances are called out directly to emergencies by the local ambulance service. Partnerships between the national health service and a whole range of charitable organisations can bring additional benefits to patients in particular circumstances.

GP Retirements

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners are due to retire in *(a)* Pendle and *(b)* the East Lancashire health authority in each year up to 2005; and what steps he is taking to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of younger general practitioners so that no practice closes. [24979]

Mr. Hutton: Figures are not available centrally in the requested format. However, during 2002–03, 14 general practitioners in the East Lancashire health authority area are expected to retire. A further eight GPs are due to retire during 2003–04.

18 GPs currently within the Pendle Primary Care Group are aged over 55.

East Lancashire health authority are pursuing a number of initiatives both in the long and short term to help address the problems in recruiting and retaining GPs.

Note:

These figures have been extracted from a study by Lancashire university in 1998 relating to work force planning for general medical and other primary care staff.

Asthma

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will prepare a national service framework for asthma. [24981]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently no plans to establish a national service framework for asthma.

Belarus

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to complete an inter-country adoption agreement with Belarus. [25153]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* An inter-country adoption agreement is currently being drawn up between the United Kingdom and Belarus. The wording of the agreement is being finalised. Once this has been done, it will be signed by both countries in due course.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions he has had with the Royal College of General Practitioners about recognising ME as a clinical condition by GPs; [25393]

(2) what research his Department has commissioned into the diagnosis and treatment of ME; [25394]

(3) if he will issue guidance to health authorities to ensure that ME is recognised as a clinical condition by GPs and that patients are referred to appropriate specialists. [25395]

Jacqui Smith: We have not had specific discussions with the Royal College of General Practitioners about this issue. However the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME independent Working Group's report which was published on 11 January has been placed on the Chief Medical Officer's website so that it can be accessed by all interested parties including general practitioners. The report and the summary for clinicians should result in improved awareness and understanding of this condition.

ME is mainly managed in primary care. The range of symptoms and other conditions associated with it should be investigated and treated by the most appropriate primary, community or secondary care service. Some patients are seen by neurologists, rheumatologists and psychiatrists.

The Department has commissioned research into the diagnosis and treatment of ME/CFS and details are available on the National Research Register which can be accessed via the Department's research and development website—www.doh.gov.uk/research. The Department has asked the Medical Research Council to develop a broad strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research on chronic fatigue syndrome.

Operating Theatres

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to monitor health and safety standards in operating theatres. [25358]

Ms Blears: The statutory responsibility for managing health and safety, including operating theatres, lies with the chief executive of a national health service trust.

The Department has introduced controls assurance standards as part of performance management arrangements. There are 21 controls assurance standards including a health and safety standard, medical devices standard, infection control standard and a decontamination of medical devices standard.

The controls assurance health and safety management standard requires that individual departments have health and safety policies, which address their own specific health and safety concerns.

NHS trusts are required to undertake risk assessment and the implementation of action plans against criteria defined in the controls assurance standards. NHS trusts must include a controls assurance statement in their annual report.

NHS Staff Budget

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total staffing budget of the NHS was in financial year 2000–01 *(a)* as an actual figure and *(b)* as a percentage of the total NHS Budget; and what the equivalent estimates are for *(a)* and *(b)* in the NHS Budget for 2001–02. [26595]

Mr. Hutton: Finalised figures for 2000–01 are not yet available. Provisional figures show that the hospital and community health service paybill in 2000–01 is £20.4 billion. This is 46 per cent. of the estimated net national health service expenditure in 2000–01 (£44.6 billion).

Our estimate of the HCHS paybill in 2001–02 is £22.7 billion. This is 46 per cent. of the planned expenditure for the NHS in 2001–02 (£48.8 billion).

Revenue Support Grant

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the category and amount of each item of funding outside the revenue support grant which his Department made available to *(a)* Westminster and *(b)* Kensington and Chelsea in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [26246]

Mr. Hutton: The table lists the category and amount of funding outside the revenue support grant which the Department made available to Westminster in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

£000

	2000–01	*2001–02*
AIDS Support Grant	798	547
Mental Health Grant	930	1,088
Training Support Programme	319	355
Partnership Grant[1]	1,500	—
Prevention Grant[1]	222	—
Promoting Independence Grant[1]	—	1,979
Carers' Grant	384	554
Children's Grant	1,234	3,216
Improving Information Management Grant[2]	—	16,666
Deferred Payments Grant[2]	—	32
Young People's Substance Misuse Planning Grant[2]	—	51
Building Care Capacity Grant[2]	—	422
Supplementary credit approvals:		
Mental Health	50	0
AIDS/HIV	414	300

[1] The Partnership and Prevention Grants were amalgamated into the Promoting Independence Grant from 2001–02

[2] The grants commenced in 2001–02

The table lists the category and amount of funding outside the revenue support grant which the Department made available to Kensington and Chelsea in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

£000

	2000–01	2001–02
Aids Support Grant	816	592
Mental Health Grant	780	891
Training Support Grant	204	195
Partnership Grant[1]	1,002	—
Prevention Grant[1]	157	—
Promoting Independence Grant[1]	—	1,324
Carers' Grant	270	393
Children's Grant	916	2,390
Improving Information Management Grant[2]	—	16,666
Deferred Payments Grant[2]	—	26
Young People's Substance Misuse Planning Grant[2]	—	37
Building Care Capacity Grant[2]	—	265
Supplementary credit approvals:		
Mental Health	0	350
AIDS/HIV	0	0

[1] The Partnership and Prevention Grants were amalgamated into the Promoting Independence Grant from 2001–02

[2] The grants commenced in 2001–02

Strategic Health Authorities

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the anticipated costs are of early retirement associated with the establishment of strategic health authorities. [26612]

Mr. Hutton: The current re-organisation of the national health service involves a significant movement of staff. However, all staff are guaranteed employment until 2003. With this in mind, it is too early to indicate levels (and therefore costs) of early retirement resulting from the forthcoming structural changes.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the anticipated annual saving to the NHS budget is of replacing existing health authorities with the proposed strategic health authorities. [26598]

Mr. Hutton: Strategic health authorities will not be replacing the existing 95 health authorities. Existing health authorities will be disestablished at the end of March and the vast majority of their functions transferred to primary care trusts. Strategic health authorities will have a new role: one of strategic development and performance management. However, the reductions in bureaucracy made as a result of the whole reform programme will lead over time to annual savings of £100 million.

NHS Directors (Early Retirement)

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many executive directors of NHS trusts and health authorities were allowed to retire early in financial year 2000–01; and what cost this represented to the NHS Budget. [26596]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service does not hold details of the number of executive directors who were allowed to retire early in 2000–01, or the cost to the NHS Budget. However, the total compensation for loss of office paid in respect of all NHS directors in trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities, both executive and non-executive, was £3,652,000 for 2000–01.

Surgical Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what new recruitment initiatives he plans to rectify the shortfall in surgeons in England; what assessment he has made of the feasibility of widening access to training programmes; what expenditure has been allocated to rectify the shortfall; by what date he expects the shortfall to be redressed; and if he will make a statement; [26098]

(2) if he will make a statement on the shortfall in surgical staff in England. [26097]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan work force numbers targets, updated in the Government's manifesto, provide the staff needed to deliver the NHS Plan up until 2005. International recruitment of medical staff including surgical staff is being taken forward to help deliver these targets.

Increases in national health service staffing are funded from the general allocation to the NHS and for staff in training from the multi professional education and training budget. Spending plans beyond 2002–03 are currently being finalised as part of SR2002.

Our current supply projections expect an increase of around 1,320 trained specialists to be available to take up surgical consultant posts by 2009–10. This reflects increases in the numbers of doctors in higher specialist training in surgery as a result of the NHS Plan. Projections to 2009–10 suggest an increasing gap between supply and demand may emerge without further action. We continually review future work force needs as part of our national work force planning processes and take action accordingly to address any shortfalls. This action includes increasing numbers in training but also modernising roles and developing new ways of working for doctors alongside other staff.

Paramedics/Hospital Staff (Assaults)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assaults there have been on paramedics and hospital staff in each year since 1997 in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the north-east and *(c)* South Tyneside. [26040]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the levels of violent incidents by individual staff group is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by national health service employers. Data on violent incidents involving all staff in the NHS were not collected centrally for 1997–98.

The Department conducted a survey of NHS trusts in England in 1998–99. The survey found that, on average, seven violent incidents were recorded each month per 1,000 staff. This is equivalent to approximately 65,000 violent incidents against NHS trust staff each year. Details of the survey can be found in Health Service Circular 1999/229: "Managing Violence, Accidents and Sickness Absence in the NHS", a copy of which is in the Library. Figures for recorded violent incidents in 2000–01 are currently being analysed by the Department.

The number of reported violent incidents for South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust and for the North-East Ambulance Service NHS Trust is shown in the table.

South Tyneside health care NHS trust

Calendar Year	*Violent incidents*
1997	27
1998	114
1999	326
2000	558
2001	401

North-east ambulance service NHS trust

Financial Year	*Violent incidents*
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	39
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	66
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	142
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	201
1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001[1]	188

[1] To date

The increase in reported violent incidents by staff is as a result of both on-going local and national campaigns to tackle violence against staff working in the NHS. The reduction in reported violence in 2001 is however a more meaningful comparison, indicating an actual reduction in violent incidents over that 12 month period.

Bed Blocking

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharges there were in North Yorkshire in the last month for which figures are available. [26455]

Jacqui Smith: During the four week period ending 30 December 2001 North Yorkshire health authority reported an average of 78 delayed discharges a week.

Sunderland Health Authority

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the real terms increase in budget allocated to Sunderland health authority has been for each year from 1997 inclusive; and what the projected increase is in each of the next three years. [26122]

Jacqui Smith: The real terms increase in budget allocated to Sunderland health authority for each year from 1997 inclusive is shown in the table. From 1 April 2002 the Sunderland health authority will be absorbed into the Northumberland and Tyne and Wear health authority.

Sunderland HA real terms revenue increase

	£000	*Percentage*
1997–98	2,950	2.10
1998–99	3,251	2.31
1999–2000	8,225	4.37
2000–01	9,198	4.58
2001–02	13,957	6.39

Correspondence

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the hon. Member of Colchester's letters to him of 2 October and 30 November 2001 on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Brookes and their son Peter. [25962]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 9 January.

Medical Intervention Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments his Department has carried out in the last two years into the relative costs of medical interventions in the UK public and private health systems; if he will publish the results; if he will summarise the key conclusions; and if he will make a statement. [26911]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has recently conducted a survey of health authorities, primary care trusts and acute trusts on the levels of activity being commissioned in the private sector and the accompanying costs. The survey returns from the national health service are being validated and analysed. We expect to be able to share key findings shortly.

The Department does not collect information about the cost of medical interventions in private hospitals for non-NHS patients.

Care Home Beds (Wiltshire)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the change in the number of care home beds in *(a)* west Wiltshire district and *(b)* Salisbury district since 1997. [26734]

Jacqui Smith: Information for West Wiltshire and Salisbury districts is not collected separately. The table shows the number of places in residential care homes and registered beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics in the Wiltshire area in 1997 and 2001.

Residential places[1] and registered nursing beds in the Wiltshire[2] area in 1997 and 2001, as at 31 March

	1997	*2001*
Places in residential care homes	4,513	3,991
Registered nursing beds in nursing homes[3,4]	2,234	2,057
Total care beds	6,757	6,048

[1] Excludes places in children's homes.

[2] Information is presented for the area represented by the county of Wiltshire prior to local government re-organisation on 1 April 1997. Figures for 2001 relate to the unitary authority of Swindon and the reduced shire county area of Wiltshire. For both years, information on nursing beds relates to Wiltshire health authority (which equates to the former county of Wiltshire prior to local government re-organisation).

[3] Registered beds in general and mental nursing homes, hospitals and clinics.

[4] Information for registered nursing beds 1997 relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

Hospital Beds (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the patients awaiting discharge in inappropriately occupied beds in Wycombe and Amersham hospitals will have their future care practice funded by *(a)* the health authority, *(b)* the county social services department and *(c)* a combination of both; and what the equivalent figures were in January (i) 2001, (ii) 1999, (iii) 1998 and (iv) 1997. [27120]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Quarterly information for Buckinghamshire health authority, for patients aged 75 and over is available in the Library.

Hospital Car Parking Fees

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance his Department has given NHS trusts with regard to car parking fees at hospitals. [26858]

Mr. Hutton: Guidance on car parking charges was issued to national health service hospitals in March 1996. It is a matter for individual hospitals to decide whether or not to charge for car parking and the cost of such charges in the light of local circumstances. Where charges are introduced, patients who are eligible to claim reimbursement of travelling expenses under the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme may have the charges reimbursed.

Autism

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence of children with autism was in each district health authority in England in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [26884]

Jacqui Smith: The figures requested are not available. The Medical Research Council's recently completed review of the Epidemiology and Causes of Autism notes that differences in definitions used in the past make comparisons problematic. The review states that there is fairly good agreement in recent studies that autism spectrum disorders affect about 60 per 10,000 children under eight and more narrowly defined autism between 10 and 30 per 10,000.

We are investigating ways of improving our data on autism. The Children in Need census issued in September/October 2001 is collecting data on the numbers of autistic children known to social services departments in England, who will be an important group within the overall total.

In June 2001 the Department for Education and Skills carried out a pilot exercise on data collection on a broad range of types of Special Educational Needs involving 200 schools and is now considering introducing a requirement for schools and local education authorities to provide this information from 2003 or 2004. This is likely to include data on pupils with autism.

Funding Resources/Initiatives

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all *(a)* funding resources and *(b)* initiatives sponsored by his Department for (i) the private sector, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) local authorities. [26849]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will discuss with MENCAP access to services by persons with learning difficulties. [27847]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Our strategy for improving services for people with learning disabilities, their families and carers is set out in the white paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" published in March last year. MENCAP contributed to the development of the White Paper and is involved with the implementation of some of its proposals. The chief executive of MENCAP is a member of the Learning Disability Task Force, set up to oversee the implementation of "Valuing People".

Ministers and departmental officials have met representatives of MENCAP on several occasions since "Valuing People" was published; I hope to meet them on 5 March.

Children's Rights Director

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consult on establishing a children's rights director; and if he will make a statement. [27432]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Draft Children's Rights Director Regulations were issued on 17 January for public consultation. It is envisaged that these regulations will establish the parameters of the children's rights director's initial role and functions. The consultation period will last for 12 weeks, to give enough time for interested parties to read and comment on the proposed draft regulations. Responses should be returned to the Department by 11 April 2002.

The children's rights director will be a senior officer of the National Care Standards Commission, an independent, non-governmental public body established under the Care Standards Act 2000 to regulate social and health care services previously regulated by local councils and health authorities. The post-holder, Roger Morgan, will have a national overview of the rights of children receiving services regulated by the NCSC.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the numbers of people awaiting delayed discharge *(a)* by region, *(b)* by health authority and *(c)* by trust in (i) numbers and (ii) percentage terms for (A) Q2 2001–02 and (B) the most recent figures available; what the reasons for delayed discharge were; and how many people were waiting (1) 0 to eight (2) eight to 14, (3) 14 to 21, (4) 21 to 28, (5) 28 to 35, (6) 35 to 42, (7) 42 to 49 and (8) 49 to 56 days. [28815]

Jacqui Smith: Information from Quarter 2 of 2001–02 on the numbers and percentage of delayed discharges at regional and health authority level, together with the reasons for delay and the numbers of people waiting one to eight days, eight to 14 days, 14 to 28 days and over 28 days has been placed in the Library. The other information requested is not available centrally. The data for the third quarter of 2001–02 will be available in mid-February.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to monitor the mortality rate for those re-admitted over 75 years of age *(a)* in re-admission and *(b)* within 30 days of re-admission; and if he will make a statement. [28814]

Jacqui Smith: Information is collected on mortality in hospital and within 30 days of discharge, but not separately following re-admission to hospital.

Psychogeriatricians

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychogeriatricians *(a)* there were in England by region in the last five years and *(b)* he estimates there will be in post in the next five years. [28880]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is in the table.

Latest projections suggest that by 2006 there will be an additional 143 trained specialists available to work within the specialty.

Hospital medical staff within the old age psychiatry speciality by region

As at 30 September *Number*

	1996		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*	
	All staff	*Consultant*	*All staff*	*Consultant*	*All staff*	*Consultant*	*All staff*	*Consultant*	*All staff*	*Consultant*
England	640	230	710	240	760	270	820	310	860	330
Eastern	60	20	70	20	70	30	70	30	80	30
London	100	40	110	40	120	40	110	40	130	50
North West	60	20	60	20	70	30	90	40	80	40
Northern and Yorkshire	90	40	100	50	120	60	150	70	130	60
South East	130	40	140	40	150	40	160	50	170	60
South Eastern	60	20	60	20	60	20	70	20	70	20
Trent	90	30	100	30	110	30	100	30	120	30
West Midlands	70	30	80	30	70	30	80	40	80	40

Note:

Where regions are shown, staff holding appointments in more than one region are included separately in each region. The sum of regional totals therefore differs slightly from the England total and a direct comparison between England totals is not advised.

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental work force census

Hospital Practitioners

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long investigations into allegations of professional misconduct for hospital practitioners and the final judgment have taken for the last five years; and what the status is of the person under investigation while the complaint is being processed. [28319]

Mr. Hutton: The General Medical Council does not collect data showing the time taken to conclude case[illegible] Each case varies in complexity and length.

Unless an order has been made by the Interim Orders Committee, a doctor under investigation is free to practise pending conclusion of the case. However, after the screening decision to proceed with an investigation, the GMC notifies the doctor's employer who may take steps in relation to the doctor's continued employment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers the General Medical Council has to discipline hospital practitioners who are found to have been guilty of *(a)* serious professional misconduct and *(b)* other less serious misconduct charges. [28317]

Mr. Hutton: When the General Medical Council's Professional Conduct Committee has found a doctor guilty of serious professional misconduct, it can issue a reprimand to the doctor, impose conditions on a doctor's practice for up to three years, suspend the doctor's registration for up to 12 months, which may be renewed, or erase the doctor's name from the register. At present the Professional Conduct Committee has no other powers. The GMC has made proposals for dealing with less serious charges and the Government will be considering how these might be implemented.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints about the conduct of hospital practitioners have been received in each year from 1997. [28318]

Mr. Hutton: National data collection on complaints includes data on the number of complaints made by profession, and separately on the subject of complaint.

The table shows the total number of complaints, complaints against medical staff, and what percentage of the total the latter represents. The complaints against medical staff cover a range of issues and not only questions of conduct.

Hospital and community health services

	2000–01	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*
Total number of complaints	95,994	86,536	86,013	88,757
Complaints against medical staff	43,930	38,261	37,382	36,883
Percentage of total	45.7	44.2	43.4	41.5

The number of complaints received by the GMC about doctor's conduct are as follows:

Year	*Number*
2000	4,343
1999	3,001
1998	3,066
1997	2,687

The figures for 2001 are not yet published but the indications are that the 2001 figure is similar to the 2000 figure.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been introduced since 1997 *(a)* to speed up the complaints process against hospital practitioners and *(b)* to increase the powers of the General Medical Council. [28320]

Mr. Hutton: In August 2000 the Medical Practitioners Act 1978 was amended to widen the General Medical Council's powers to act swiftly and effectively when a doctor's fitness to practise is first called into question. It introduced a minimum five-year period before a doctor who has been struck off the register may apply for restoration. It also enabled the GMC to co-opt non-members of the Council to any of its committees chiefly to help tackle the backlog of cases.

The GMC have committed themselves to new service standards including that by May 2002, except in exceptional circumstances, cases are to be heard by the Professional Conduct Committee within a year of referral by the Preliminary Proceedings Committee.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations are in use to discipline hospital medical practitioners. [28316]

Mr. Hutton: The Department issued (Disciplinary Procedures for Hospital and Community Medical and Dental Staff) Health Circular(90)9 in 1990, a copy of which is in the Library. This sets out the procedures for handling disciplinary issues for medical and dental staff on nationally negotiated terms and conditions of service. These arrangements are now under review to make sure they meet the needs of the modern national health service.

Registrars

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of registrars in the NHS went into full-time general practice in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [28870]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not available in the form requested.

Analysis of recent information on new entrants suggests that around two thirds of general practice registrars take up a permanent appointment in general practice within five years of qualifying.

Private Sector Nursing Homes

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is in relation to the level of fees paid by the public sector to private sector nursing homes for care of the elderly; and if he will make a statement. [28869]

Jacqui Smith: In our recently published agreement with the statutory and the independent social care, health care and housing sectors—"Building Capacity and Partnership in Care"—we make clear that contract fees should not be set mechanistically but should take into account the legitimate current and future costs faced by providers as well as the planned outcomes for people using services.

Trust Merger

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to announce his decision on the proposed merger of the Princess Royal Hospital Trust and the Royal Sussex County Hospital Trust. [28859]

Ms Blears: The announcement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's decision on the proposed merger of the Princess Royal Hospital (Mid-Sussex National Health Service Trust) and the Royal Sussex County Hospital (Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust) was made at 11.00 on 18 January.

Social Services (Older People)

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the criteria by which the money made available in 2002–04 to improve services for older people and speed discharge from hospital was allocated. [27136]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* All councils received additional funding through the Building Care Capacity Grant. The 55 councils of the highest rates, and the most severe problems, of delayed discharge received extra funding. The extra funding to these councils reflected the rate of delayed discharge in that council's area in summer 2001. These councils will, therefore, be subject to tighter conditions and closer monitoring.

The same criteria were used to distribute the £190 million available for councils through this grant in 2002–03.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 22 January 2002

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Royal Portrait

Harry Cohen: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the portrait of Her Majesty the Queen by Lucian Freud will be procured for the House for display in Portcullis House; and if he will make a statement. [28674]

Mr. Kirkwood: I understand that this striking portrait was presented by the artist to Her Majesty the Queen as a gift. It has been accepted into the Royal Collection and will be on public display when the new Queen's Gallery at Buckingham Palace is opened on 22 May.

The House owns a portrait of Her Majesty the Queen by Henry Mee which is hanging in 1 Parliament street. Arrangements are already in hand to display it in Portcullis House.

Portcullis House

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what has been the cost to date since the opening of Portcullis House of *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* remedial action to rectify faults and *(c)* action to introduce improvements requested by hon. Members; if he will produce a detailed list in respect of (b) and (c) above, with itemised costs; and if he will make a statement. [25377]

Mr. Bell *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

I regret that the information is not available in the form requested, but the following is readily available.

The first Members moved into the building in September 2000 and it was fully occupied at the beginning of January before the official opening in February 2001.

Maintenance costs in the current financial year, including VAT, total £650,000 to the end of December, which is in budget.

It has been necessary to enhance the capacity of the fan in the extract system from the cooking ranges, to replace three broken panels in the courtyard roof and to alter the interface with the window blinds. There is continuing work on the borehole to prevent silt entering the cooling system; to the lifts that run between the kitchens; and to the water feature. In each instance questions of liability for the costs are the subject of discussions with the contractor and/or the designer.

The majority of the changes requested by hon. Members and their staff have been for furniture additional to or different from the standard range available for the building. In the main these have been met from the furniture bought as part of the project but a further £3,800 has been spent. In some cases there have also been consequent minor changes to the power sockets. The only other change has been the conversion of cupboards to book/display cases in a limited number of rooms where none was provided and the removal of intrusive lightshelves from the fifth floor corner offices. The cost is some £20,000.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Council what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26831]

Mr. Robin Cook: None.

Members' Travel

John Mann: To ask the President of the Council what percentage of hon. Members' domestic official travel expenditure in the last 12 months was by *(a)* car, *(b)* train and *(c)* air. [29386]

Mr. Robin Cook: For the year ended 31 March 2001 the following percentages apply to Members' domestic official travel funded from the Members' Vote[1]:

	Percentage
Car	56.6
Rail	22.9
Air	18.5
Miscellaneous	2

[1] House of Commons Department of Finance and Administration.

Members' Tax Status

John Mann: To ask the President of the Council what discussions have taken place with the Tax Office over the last five years over the tax status of hon. Members. [29301]

Mr. Robin Cook: Over the last five years the Department of Finance and Administration have met the Inland Revenue on a number of occasions to discuss a wide range of issues relating to the tax status of hon. Members, and will continue to do so.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sudan

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she raised the bombing of civilians in southern Sudan with Government representatives on her recent visit; and if she will make a statement. [28710]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State raised the issue of the bombing of civilians during her meeting with the Government of Sudan's Minister of Defence. The Secretary of State made it clear that the UK expects parties to the conflict to live up to their obligations not to attack civilians, whether from the ground or from the air.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the prospects for funding health and education in Sudan following her recent visit. [28711]

Hilary Benn: We are willing to consider funding any well designed programmes which are likely to deliver tangible benefits to ordinary Sudanese people. We shall continue to give priority to those programmes that address the most urgent needs.

We are convinced that real sustained improvements in these sectors will only be possible when there is a settlement to the civil war. We are committed to doing what we can to bring this about.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the prospects for progress in promoting peace and good governance in Sudan; if she will make a statement on international efforts to resolve the conflict in that country; and what proposals she has for work to stimulate peace and reconciliation and the strengthening of civil society in Sudan. [28712]

Hilary Benn: There is an opportunity to achieve a political settlement to the war in Sudan. During my recent visit all sides emphasised that they recognised the urgent need for peace, that it was their responsibility to engage in serious negotiation, and that there was a window of opportunity.

The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is the mechanism by which the international community is assisting in the peace process. We, and others, are actively seeking new ways to invigorate this process.

Somalia

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she has responded to the World Food Programme appeal for assistance to Somalia; and if she will make a statement about the level of funding of that appeal. [28713]

Hilary Benn: We have not responded to the World Food Programme (WFP) element of the United Nations 2002 Consolidated Appeal for Somalia; we have, however, funded emergency health and nutrition programmes in the worst affected areas, and this complements the WFP's efforts.

The WFP part of the UN Appeal is the continuation of a three year project "Food aid for relief and recovery in Somalia", which began in July 1999. To date the UN report that just under 60 per cent. of the project's estimated requirements have been met.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of 11 September on poverty in Somalia following the disruption of overseas remittance income. [28714]

Hilary Benn: There has been some adverse impact on poverty as a consequence of the curtailment of the activities of Al Barakat—a Somali remittance company linked to terrorist groups. Other companies, offering similar services across Somalia, have not been affected. Indeed, there is evidence that they have expanded their client base, offsetting some of the effect of the Al Barakat closure.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by her Department since August 2001; and if she will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in "Good Policy Making". [28409]

Clare Short: DFID does not itself undertake 'regulatory impact assessments': these are the responsibility of our partner Governments and authorities. DFID does provide technical assistance to help Governments strengthen their capacity to undertake reviews of the regulatory environment and to regulate better. Many of the precepts underlying "Good Policy Making: A Guide to Regulatory Impact Assessment" are relevant to developing countries and we endorse them.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on Britain's planned financial contribution to the reconstruction of Afghanistan *(a)* in this financial year and *(b)* over the next five financial years. [28601]

Hilary Benn: We have set aside £20 million in this financial year to support the Interim Administration and the United Nations-led transitional recovery and rehabilitation process, while continuing to respond to humanitarian needs. This includes a contribution of £2 million already provided to the UN Afghan Interim Authority Fund to provide salaries of key public servants, equipment and supplies. As well as financial assistance, we are providing technical personnel and logistical, material and other practical support.

At the international conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan held in Tokyo from 21–22 January 2002, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a significant contribution to be used for the long-term rehabilitation of Afghanistan. The UK has committed £200 million over the next five financial years for both reconstruction and humanitarian activities. The majority of this pledge will be channelled through UN agencies and non-governmental organisations.

This pledge is in addition to the significant sums that the UK has contributed to the World bank, European Union and Asian Development bank, which will also direct further funds into Afghanistan in the coming years. The UK share of the European Union pledge alone will be 20 per cent.

Afghan Refugees

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on Government plans to aid Afghan refugees in Quetta in south-west Pakistan. [28509]

Hilary Benn: Pakistan has been shouldering the burden of some two million refugees from Afghanistan for many years; this is in addition to over 100,000 refugees who have moved into Pakistan from Afghanistan since September 2001. We will continue to do all we can to ensure that all refugees are properly cared for and to give neighbouring countries support to cope with the burden of refugees, for whom they have generously provided for so long.

DFID has provided £3 million to UNHCR's operations, in response to the current crisis, to support its operations for refugees in the region, including in Quetta city and Balochistan province. This has included technical personnel, material and financial support. At the request of UNHCR, we have provided three relief flights to Iran and Pakistan transporting tents, shelter material and communications equipment. We have also provided a specialist site planner to UNHCR in Pakistan to assist with the setting up of new refugee camp sites. In addition we have provided £6 million to NGOs, much of which has been directed towards Afghans in neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, and £11 million to support communities in Pakistan most affected by the influx of refugees.

As the situation stabilises inside Afghanistan, we hope that Afghan refuges will be able to return home voluntarily and, indeed, many have returned already.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to help street children living in Ethiopia. [28602]

Hilary Benn: We are currently supporting a project through the non-governmental organisation GOAL. The project aims to rehabilitate 700 street children back into the community and to raise awareness of the needs of street children through education and advocacy. The project started in April 2001 and is due to last for three years, with a contribution of £187,553 from DFID.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much was spent by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27390]

Hilary Benn: DFID provided £120,000 in 1998 for work by a public relations consultancy to raise awareness of malaria as part of the Roll Back Malaria initiative led by the World Health Organisation. The Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) spent £80,000 on external communications consultancy in 1998 and 1999, preparing for its transformation to a public limited company. Both DFID and CDC have separately used communications consultants for specific development activities in particular countries but the figures are not held centrally and it would require disproportionate cost to obtain them.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what equipment has been stolen from her Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26824]

Clare Short: Since 1 April 1997 the following equipment has been stolen from DFID in the UK and overseas:

14 laptop computers with a total value of £15,732. The value of each piece of equipment ranges from £730 to £1,642:

Computer chips: £1,100;

One video camera: value unknown;

One calculator: £108;

One notebook computer: £1,880; and

Two mobile telephones: £250.

SCOTLAND

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what equipment has been stolen from her Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26825]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since this date one laptop computer has been stolen, with an approximate value of £2,200 at the time of purchase.

Ministerial Staff (Overseas Visits)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff paid out of public funds will be accompanying her on her forthcoming visit to Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Malaysia; and from which departmental budget they are paid. [29513]

Mr. Foulkes: Two members of the Scotland Office staff are accompanying the Secretary of State on this visit.

Scotland Office Staff

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the staff in Dover house on loan to the Scotland Office from the Scottish Executive are of civil service grade. [29515]

Mr. Foulkes: All of the staff on loan from the Scottish Executive are civil servants.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many civil servants there are in her Department apart from *(a)* staff on loan to the Scotland Office from the Scottish Executive, *(b)* the member of staff on secondment from the House of Lords and *(c)* three temporary staff. [29514]

Mr. Foulkes: Apart from the categories of staff mentioned, the Department has two special advisers.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the job descriptions of each of the staff members in Dover house *(a)* on loan to the Scotland Office from the Scottish Executive and *(b)* that are other staff, indicating which staff members are paid from the Scotland Office budget and which from the Scottish Executive budget. [29523]

Mr. Foulkes: All of the Scotland Office staff in Dover house work in support of Ministers in carrying out the functions of the Department, and their costs are met from the Scotland Office budget.

TREASURY

National Asset Register

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list central Government acquisitions to the National Asset Register in each of the last four years, specifying the value of each acquisition. [28715]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The National Asset Register provides details of all significant acquisitions of central Government assets by Department for each of the financial years 1997–98 to 1999–2000.

Infrastructure Projects (Mid-Sussex)

Mr. Soames: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will undertake an audit into the level of public spending on infrastructure projects in Mid-Sussex. [28857]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* No. Public spending on infrastructure projects is divided between local, regional and national bodies. It is not possible to identify without disproportionate cost what proportion of central Government infrastructure funding is spent in [illegible] particular local authority area or parliamentary constituency. However, the Treasury seeks to ensure value for money in all public spending and works with other Government Departments to ensure that a rigorous evaluation framework is in place to assess the costs and benefits of particular projects. While the Treasury delegates authority to Departments to spend regular budgets, it nevertheless scrutinises particularly large, novel or contentious proposals individually to ensure they offer good value.

Incomes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have no income declared for tax purposes, other than unearned income; and in 2001–02 how many people are paying tax at *(a)* 40 per cent. and *(b)* the basic rate who derive (i) 100 per cent., (ii) 90 to 100 per cent., (iii) 75 to 100 per cent., and (iv) 50 to 100 per cent., of their income from unearned income. [26206]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is in the table.

Thousand

	2001–02		
Investment income as a percentage of total income	*Number of higher rate[1] taxpayers*	*Number of basic rate[2] taxpayers*	*Number of 'savers' rate[3] taxpayers*
100 per cent.	10	30	60
90 to less than 100 per cent.	20	10	20
75 to less than 90 per cent.	50	30	50
50 to less than 75 per cent.	80	210	80

[1] Taxpayers with a taxable income above the higher rate threshold.

[2] Taxpayers with a marginal rate at the basic rate from an extra £1 of earnings.

[3] Taxpayers with a marginal rate at the 20 per cent. lower rate for savings income or the 10 per cent. ordinary dividend rate from an extra £1 of earnings. Before 1999–2000 these people would have been classified as lower rate taxpayers.

Note:

There are around 130,000 taxpayers with no taxable income other than investment income.

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total income before and after tax was at constant prices in each of the last four years for the top *(a)* one per cent., *(b)* five per cent., and *(c)* 10 per cent. and *(d)* each 10 per cent., thereafter down to the bottom 10 per cent., including both working and non-working households, in figures and as a percentage of income before and after tax accruing to each group. [26312]

Dawn Primarolo: It would be possible to provide an answer only at disproportionate cost.

Income Tax

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer have many *(a)* working and *(b)* non-working people do not pay income tax in the United Kingdom. [26145]

Dawn Primarolo: Inland Revenue estimate that out of the 27.8 million taxpayers in 2000–01 in the United Kingdom (UK), 23.4 million had employment or self-employment income. These estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

The ONS population estimate for the UK in 2000 is 59.8 million.

The ONS estimate for the number of people in employment in the UK based on the September–November 2000 Labour Force Survey is 28.0 million.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the people of *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland paid income tax at (i) the basic rate and (ii) the higher rate in each of the last four years. [27437]

Dawn Primarolo: The proportions requested are in the table.

	Basic rate taxpayers[1] as a percentage of the country population	*Higher rate taxpayers as a percentage of the country population*
2000–01[2]		
Wales	33	3
Scotland	36	3
Northern Ireland	31	2
England	36	5

	Basic rate taxpayers[1] as a percentage of the country population	Higher rate taxpayers as a percentage of the country population
1999–2000		
Wales	33	2
Scotland	36	3
Northern Ireland	31	2
England	36	4
1998–99		
Wales	24	2
Scotland	29	3
Northern Ireland	24	2
England	28	4
1997–98		
Wales	25	2
Scotland	30	3
Northern Ireland	21	2
England	28	4

[1] Taxpayers with a marginal rate at 20 per cent. lower rate for savings or 10 per cent. ordinary dividend rate from £1 of extra earnings are excluded from this column as they are in the "savers" category.

[2] Provisional

Estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and the 2000–01 is consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Income Tax Bands

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax units in the latest year available are married couples falling within each £1,000 income band up to an income of £30,000 and thereafter in £10,000 income bands up to £100,000; and how many wives and husbands fall within each band, giving the average incomes of wives and husbands within each band separately and the same figures in aggregate for those tax units on incomes in excess of £10,000. [26204]

Dawn Primarolo: It would be possible to provide an answer only at disproportionate cost.

Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average amount of money recovered annually by *(a)* a Department for Work and Pensions senior fraud inspector and *(b)* a senior investigation officer in the Inland Revenue. [26238]

Dawn Primarolo: There is no position of 'senior fraud inspector' in the Department for Work and Pensions. Nor is it possible to separate the total amount of overpaid benefit recovered into overpayments due to fraud and those due to other reasons. It is therefore not possible to say what is the average amount of money recovered annually by a Department for Work and Pensions senior fraud inspector.

The term 'senior investigation officer' does not refer to any specific group of Inland Revenue staff. However, the Inland Revenue annual report, available in the House of Commons Library, details the additional liability identified as a result of work to tackle non-compliance undertaken by specialist offices such as the Large Business Office and the Special Compliance Office.

Working Mothers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 2001–02 of introducing an allowance against income rate of *(a)* £2000 and *(b)* £4000 for (i) all working mothers and (ii) all working mothers with at least one child under five years, giving both full and first year costs for each. [26144]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost to the Exchequer of introducing the personal allowances for these groups is shown in the table:

Cost of increased personal allowances for working mothers

Increase in personal allowance	Working mother type	Full year costs (£ million)	First year costs (£ million)
(a) £2,000 pa	(i) All	1,200	1,050
(a) £2,000 pa	(ii) With child under five	400	350
(b) £4,000 pa	(i) All	2,200	1,900
(b) £4,000 pa	(ii) With child under five	700	600

Note:

The estimates are calculated in 2001–02 prices, using data from the 1999–2000 Family Resources Survey held in the standard IGoTM tax benefit model. The first year costs have been estimated on a national accounts basis.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those public investment projects within his Department's responsibility which have attracted private capital in each of the last four years. [26109]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is given in the table:

Department and project	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
HMCE					
PFI Infrastructure Project	—	—	—	Yes	Yes
HMT					
GOGGS	—	—	—	Yes	—
IR					
Manchester	Yes	Yes	—	—	—
Bootle	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	—
Glasgow	Yes	Yes	—	—	—
Edinburgh	Yes	Yes	—	—	—
Stockport	—	Yes	Yes	—	—
NIRS2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NED	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
STEPS	—	—	—	—	Yes

Inland Revenue Rewards

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been, in each of the three years to 31 March 2001, Inland Revenue's estimates for sums to be expended in rewarding individuals under section 32 of the Inland Revenue Regulation Act 1890; what the sum voted for this category of expenditure was; what Inland Revenue's actual expenditure was; and how much of this expenditure related to rewards to ordinary members of the public. [26844]

Dawn Primarolo: The total amounts paid in rewarding individuals under section 32 of Inland Revenue Regulation Act 1890 for each of the three years ended 31 March 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively were £15,000, £17,965 and £5,075. All of these amounts were paid to members of the public.

Because of the relatively small sums involved, the Inland Revenue does not vote a sum nor earmark particular funds for this category of expenditure.

Excess Votes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many excess votes there were in each of the last four years, indicating the amount and the department responsible in each case. [27919]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Details of excess votes are presented to Parliament in February of the financial year following the excess in a House of Commons paper entitled "Statement of Excesses" (SoE). For 2000–01 the SoE will be presented towards the end of February. For the previous three financial years the relevant HC papers are numbered as follows—1997–98 HC239, 1998–99 HC276 and 1999–2000 HC323.

Public Works Loans

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money is on loan to local authorities by the Public Works Loan Board; which local authorities are borrowing; and what the sum involved is in each case. [27933]

Ruth Kelly: As at 31 March 2001, outstanding PWLB debt amounted to £47,169,517,807 divided between 350 of the 443 principal authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. This information was published in the PWLB's annual report for 2000–01. The PWLB operates a banking relationship with its local authority clients and does not disclose individual levels of borrowing.

Fuel Levy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the fuel levy of 20 pence per litre for biodiesel will come into effect. [28927]

Mr. Boateng: We are planning to introduce a new reduced rate of excise duty for biodiesel used as a road fuel, to be set at 20 pence per litre below the rate for ultra-low sulphur diesel, in Budget 2002.

Toddler Tax Credit

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* research has been conducted into and *(b)* conclusions drawn about the implementation of the Childcare Commission's recommendation to fund a toddler tax credit. [28763]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government continue to keep under review the levels of support provided to families with children. Budget 2001 announced a number of measures to support families with young children, including improved maternity provision and a higher rate of children's tax credit of up to £20 a week in the first year of a child's life. Budget 2001 also announced increases of around one third in the child care cost limits in the child care tax credit component of the working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit.

As the next stage of tax and benefit reform a new child tax credit, which will draw together all income related strands of support for families with children, will be introduced in 2003. The rates and thresholds for the new child tax credit will be set in Budget 2002.

Euro

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of British high street transactions have taken place in euros since 1 January. [28926]

Ruth Kelly: We understand from the British Retail Consortium that thus far such transactions have been less than 1 per cent. in volume and value terms.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26837]

Ruth Kelly: The following items were recorded as stolen:

Year	*Item(s)*	*Value*[1] *(£)*
1997 (May)	2 Desktop PCs	4,300
	1 Laptop PC	2,500
	1 Desktop PC	1,900
	1 Laptop PC	3,000
1998	1 Laptop PC	2,500
1999	1 Desktop PC	2,000
	Computer memory	25
	1 Laptop PC	2,000
	1 Laptop PC	3,000
2000	1 LCD Projector	2,000
	2 Disk Drives	300
	1 Laptop PC	2,000
2001	1 Laptop PC	2,000
	1 Personal Data Assistant (PDA)	250
	1 Laptop PC	2,000
2002	None recorded to date	

[1] Approximate

Married Couple's Tax Allowance

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men aged (i) under 65 and (ii) 65 and over and *(b)* women aged (1) under 60 and (2) 60 and over have been in receipt of married couple's tax allowance since 31 March 1999. [27544]

Dawn Primarolo: The numbers of taxpayers who received the married couple's allowance in 1999–2000 are given in the table.

Million

	Number in receipt of the married couple's allowance
Men under 65	7.8
Men 65 and over	1.8
Women under 60	0.2
Women 60 and over	0.1

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

Civil Registration

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether there has been progress with the proposal to reform civil registration in England and Wales. [29887]

Ruth Kelly: A White Paper "Civil Registration: Vital Change", setting out the Government's proposals for modernising civil registration within England and Wales, is being published today. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by his Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29424]

Ruth Kelly: Records are not kept of the number of occasions on which Treasury Ministers have not been able to answer parliamentary questions wholly or in part on grounds of commercial confidentiality. This information could be extracted from the thousands of answers given in a typical year only at disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell dated 6 August 2001 and 1 November 2001, addressed to the Economic Secretary, regarding data protection. [28295]

Ruth Kelly: I hope to be in a position to write to the hon. Member very shortly.

Saving and Assets for All

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will make a statement in respect of the outcome of the consultation on Saving and Assets For All. [29366]

Ruth Kelly: Results of the consultation on proposals for the Child Trust Fund and Saving Gateway, launched in April 2001, were published with the pre-Budget report in November 2001, in "Delivering Saving and Assets". This document also contained more detailed proposals for further consultation.

This second round of consultation, which will close on 28 February 2002, will inform the development of the proposals by the Government over the coming months, including as part of Spending Review 2002.

Child Poverty

John Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the action his Department has taken to reduce child poverty. [29277]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government are committed to abolishing child poverty within a generation and halving it by 2010. As part of this commitment, a strategy document entitled "Tackling child poverty: giving every child the best possible start in life" was published in December 2001. This document will inform the Budget and Spending Review 2002.

As a result of personal tax and benefit changes announced in the last Parliament, there are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there would otherwise have been. In real terms:

Families with children are, on average, £1,000 a year better off.

Families with children in the poorest fifth of the population are on average £1,700 a year better off.

A family with two young children on half average earnings (£12,700) are £3,000 a year better off.

Specific measures announced over the last Parliament include:

Increases in child benefit and the introduction of the children's tax credit. This means around 5 million families get up to £25.50 for the first child compared to £12.35 in 1997.

The introduction of the working families tax credit which benefits nearly 1.3 million families who are receiving, on average, £35 a week more than its predecessor, family credit.

A higher rate of children's tax credit from April 2002 which will be worth an extra £10 a week in the year of a child's birth—a total of up to £1,040 in that year.

Increases in the children's allowances in income support and other income related benefits which mean that rates for children under 11 rose by 80 per cent. in real terms.

As part of the next stage of tax and benefit reform, a new tax credit for families with children—the child tax credit—will be introduced from 2003 building on the foundation of universal child benefit. It will bring together the strands of support for children in children's tax credit, working families tax credit, disabled person's tax credit and income support/jobseeker's allowance, and will be a seamless and transparent system of support for children paid to the main carer whether in or out of work. Decisions on rates and thresholds will be set out in Budget 2002.

WALES

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26827]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The following items have been reported as lost or stolen:

Description	*Value (£)*	*Year*
Camera	200.00	1997–98
Laptop	107.00	1997–98

Note:

Figures relate to Welsh Office, Cadw, and Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales/Estyn up to 30 June 1999, and to Wales Office thereafter.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Port Dues

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether all ports in the UK charge port dues for ships coming into the port for repairs; which European ports around the North sea waive port dues for ships without cargo commitments coming in to port for repairs; and what assessment he has made of whether port dues place the port of Tyne at a competitive disadvantage to European ports which waive port dues for ships coming in for repair. [26043]

Mr. Spellar: All ships have the right to enter ports in the UK subject only to the payment of ship, passenger and goods dues. Statutory harbour authorities, including the port of Tyne, have the right to set such dues at whatever level they consider appropriate and may waive any of them at their own discretion. Harbour undertakings are paid for by their users—if dues are waived in any case, the cost is borne by others. Users have a right of objection to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if they consider the dues to be unreasonable.

Airline Disinfection

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how a determination is made as to which flights arriving in the United Kingdom require pesticide disinfection. [25215]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 January 2002]:* The port health authorities decide the routes into the United Kingdom on which disinfection of aircraft is required. They make their decisions in the light of the advice from the World Health Organisation on the risks to public health arising in different countries, either long-term or as the result of an outbreak of disease.

Road Deaths

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road fatalities there were in each of the last five available years on *(a)* motorways, *(b)* dual carriageways and *(c)* single carriageways. [27378]

Mr. Spellar: The figures requested are as shown:

Road fatalities in Great Britain

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Motorways	165	191	174	202	189
Other roads:					
Dual carriageways	527	515	469	491	481
Single carriageways	2,824	2,800	2,680	2,629	2,641
Other[1]	74	87	88	94	90
Total	3,598	3,599	3,421	3,423	3,409

[1] Includes roundabouts and one way streets

London Underground (Overtime)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the total overtime payments in each of *(a)* the last seven years and *(b)* the last 12 months for each underground line. [27714]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd., who have provided the following information. The information is not available in the precise form requested.

London Underground Ltd. was reorganised in September 1999, in preparation for the introduction of modernisation plans. Under 'shadow running' arrangements, information is collected from each infrastructure company and the operations company, rather than on the 'line by line' basis that reflected London Underground's previous structure. The table therefore records operational staff and engineering staff overtime costs by line until 18 September 1999, and subsequently overtime costs for staff in each of London Underground's reorganised components. Overall totals cover the same groups of staff and so are comparable.

Overtime costs per financial year

£000

	2000–01	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1996–97*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*
Before reorganisation							
Bakerloo	—	562	1,075	671	622	642	505
Central	—	1,255	2,552	1,908	2,081	1,759	1,536
District	—	945	1,659	1,514	1,787	1,722	1,549
Jubilee and East London	—	764	500	342	370	268	242
Metropolitan and Circle	—	1,222	2,078	1,632	1,370	1,408	1,330
Northern	—	732	1,379	910	968	1,363	1,006
Piccadilly	—	1,017	1,809	1,354	1,276	1,114	975
Victoria	—	327	564	530	596	479	391
Network Services and Engineering	—	5,257	10,973	10,023	9,880	10,538	9,239

Overtime costs per financial year

£000

	2000–01	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1996–97*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*
After reorganisation							
Stations	7,947	3,813	—	—	—	—	—
Trains	3,026	1,154	—	—	—	—	—
Infraco BCV	6,100	3,111	—	—	—	—	—
Infraco JNP	4,056	2,361	—	—	—	—	—
Infraco SSL	4,443	2,303	—	—	—	—	—
Total	25,572	24,821	22,589	18,884	18,950	19,293	16,773

Note:

For the year 1999–2000, figures in the upper part of the table are for the year to 18 September; figures in the lower part for the remainder of the year. Detailed monthly information is a matter for London Underground.

British Merchant Marine

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received from the RMT on the competitiveness of the British merchant marine and related employment issues; and if he will make a statement. [27637]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The RMTs Acting General Secretary, Mr. Vernon Hince, wrote to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), recently to urge the extension of work permit requirements to one-port voyages. This is under consideration by the Home Office.

Mr. Hince also wrote to my hon. Friend last November about proposed dismissals of UK seafaring ratings by the P&O Group, a matter which was additionally raised at the 4 December meeting of our Shipping Task Force.

We are deeply disappointed by the actions of P&O. These job losses are particularly regrettable at a time when we are seeing a revival in UK merchant shipping after a long decline, a revival to which the shipping unions have made an immense contribution.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of total local authority expenditure was met in each of the last four years by *(a)* central Government funds, *(b)* business rate payers and *(c)* council tax payers. [27936]

Dr. Whitehead: English local authorities have reported the following funding of revenue expenditure.

	Revenue Expenditure[1]	*Government Grant*[2]		*Non-Domestic Rates*[3]		*Council tax*[4]	
	£ billion	*£ billion*	*Percentage*	*£ billion*	*Percentage*	*£ billion*	*Percentage*
1998–99	50.189	25.291	50	12.531	25	12.332	24
1999–2000	53.651	26.421	49	13.619	25	13.278	25
2000–01	57.308	27.764	48	15.406	27	14.200	25
2001–02[5]	61.270	30.341	50	15.144	25	15.245	25

[1] 'Revenue expenditure to compare with TSS' i.e. expenditure financed from Revenue Support Grant, specific and special grants within AEF, non-domestic rates, council taxes and balances. Also includes spending met by SSA Reduction Grant, Police Grant, Central Support Protection Grant (1999–2000 onwards) and General Greater London Authority Grant (2000–01 onwards). This column is not the total of the others. The difference is due to funding by balances and other adjustments.

[2] Includes Revenue Support Grant, specific and special grants within AEF, SSA Reduction Grant, Police Grant, Central Support Protection Grant (1999–2000 onwards) and General GLA Grant (2000–01 onwards).

[3] Distribute amount from non-domestic rate pool. This is not exactly equal to the payments from business in any year, but adjustments are made to the distributable amount in future years to ensure that, over time, all rates received are redistributed to receiving authorities. Includes City Offset.

[4] Gross of council tax benefit and council tax transitional reduction scheme.

[5] Budgets.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will investigate the settlement for local government with particular reference to the different sums that were allocated to smaller district authorities. [28261]

Dr. Whitehead: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already looked into the local government settlement for district councils. In his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 136–37, he explained that he would introduce an alternative baseline for 2001–02 which, in effect, adjusts only for the transfers of service for which shire districts are responsible and that, in order to guarantee a minimum 2.3 per cent. increase for shire districts, he would ensure that all shire districts received a minimum grant increase of whichever increase is greater—2.3 per cent. on the original baseline, or 2.3 per cent. on this alternative baseline.

Further details will be provided as part of the Government's final settlement proposals, which the House will have a chance to debate on 30 January.

Strategic Rail Authority

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the SRA plan makes no reference to automatic train protection in its list of priorities. [28543]

Mr. Spellar: Automatic train protection (ATP) is not mentioned in the SRA's Plan because it is being superseded by a combination of Train Protection Warning System (TPWS) and European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS). TPWS is designed to reduce the risks from Signals Passed at Danger by slower-running trains, and is being installed at about 11,000 signals with legislation requiring completion by the end of 2003. The Uff-Cullen inquiry recommended that such a system as ERTMS should be installed throughout the high-speed network by 2010. The omission of ATP from the plan does not involve any compromise of safety standards.

Rail Network

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the time scale required to establish special purpose vehicles for infrastructure investment in the railways. [28544]

Mr. Spellar: Section 4 of the SRA Strategic Plan discusses the issues involved in developing and implementing special purpose vehicles. As the plan notes, this will be progressed simultaneously with the process of bringing Railtrack out of administration.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress the Railtrack administrator has made on the development of an asset register. [28540]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the administrator

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what bonus scheme the Railtrack administrator has implemented to replace employee share schemes. [28530]

Mr. Spellar: This a contractual matter between Railtrack plc, its employees and the administrator.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), of 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W, on Railtrack, what information his officials have sent to the Railtrack administration about the future funding of the railway industry. [29181]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The administrators have been referred to the Government's 10-year plan for transport and to the regulatory settlement for control period 2, as supplemented by the agreement between Railtrack and the Department in April 2001.

Public Subsidies (Railways)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average public subsidy per rail passenger journey has been in each of the past 10 years. [28570]

Mr. Spellar: The information is not held in the form requested.

Lorry Movements

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many lorry movements occur in the United Kingdom each year. [28559]

Mr. Spellar: Lorries made an estimated 292 million movements in the United Kingdom during 2000, the latest year for which figures are available. The figures relate to the number of journey legs, between stops to pick up or unload goods, including unladen legs, but with each journey of a collection and delivery type round counted as a single movement.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* time taken on the renewal of the Chiltern and South West Trains franchise process and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority estimate for the establishment of a final agreement for the Wales and Border franchise. [28560]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority is continuing to negotiate final agreements for the Chiltern and South West Trains franchises. A further announcement will be made shortly. The authority hopes to announce a preferred bidder for the Wales and Borders franchise by autumn 2002, and to have a new franchise in place by spring 2003.

Passenger Capacity Limits

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the train operating companies which are required to carry out passenger counts on commuters to meet the passengers in excess of capacity limits set by the SRA. [28661]

Mr. Spellar: The Passengers In Excess of Capacity (PIXC) mechanism is used in relation to overcrowding on all commuter services into London and on some commuter routes into Edinburgh. The train operating companies it applies to are c2c, Chiltern, Connex South Eastern, First Great Eastern, Silverlink, South Central, South West trains, Thames Trains, Thameslink, West Anglia Great Northern and Scotrail.

Central Line

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to extend the Central line to Uxbridge. [28479]

Mr. Spellar: None. It is already served by the Piccadilly and Metropolitan Lines.

Council Tax

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many properties there were in each council tax band in each year since 1997, broken down by London borough. [28534]

Dr. Whitehead: Tables, showing how many properties there were on the valuation list for each London borough, in each year since October 1997, have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Speed Limits

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many 20 mph zones are in place in England; and how many he estimates will be in place by the end of the 2002–03 financial year. [28394]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally.

London Underground

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the age of the oldest and newest rolling stock on each London Underground line; and if he will make a statement. [28311]

Mr. Spellar: For information about Jubilee and Northern Line rolling stock, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 497–98W.

This is an operational matter for London Underground who have provided the information in the table, showing, for the remaining lines, the year in which the oldest and newest rolling stock came into service.

London Underground—years in which oldest and newest rolling stock entered service, by line

Line	*Oldest stock year entered service*	*Newest stock year entered service*
Barkerloo	1973	1975
Central and Waterloo and City	1993	1994
Circle and Hammersmith and City	1969	1977
District	1978	1982
Metropolitan and East London Line	1961	1965
Piccadilly	1975	1978
Victoria	1967	1970

Commuter Travel

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many extra commuters a day he estimates will travel to London from each county in the south-east of England as a result of the meeting of his house building targets; [28731]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of extra *(a)* rail passenger journeys per day into each London terminus and *(b)* road journeys on each motorway into London as a result of meeting his house building targets. [28730]

Ms Keeble: Statistics on travel patterns are available from a variety of both local and national sources, including the National Labour Force Survey and the National Travel Survey. However, the relationship between the house building targets set out in Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9) and the volume of commuter travel into London is a complex one. It would therefore not be sensible to estimate how many extra commuters will travel to London from counties in the south-east as a result of those targets being met.

Green Belt

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the amount of green belt in a local authority area will continue to affect the level of settlement it receives after the 2003 review. [28391]

Dr. Whitehead: Under the current formula the amount of green belt has no direct effect on the level of grant an authority receives through the Local Government Finance Settlement. In partnership with the Local Government Association and other local authority organisations we are reviewing the local government finance grant distribution formula. Until this review is concluded it is not possible to say which factors will have an impact on the level of future settlements.

Disability Vehicle Stickers

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action the Government are taking to reduce fraudulent use of the blue badge scheme. [29107]

Ms Keeble: There is a wide variety of powers available to local authorities, who are responsible for administering the blue badge scheme, for tackling fraudulent use. At present:

> it is an offence under Section 117 of The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 for the badge itself to be misused by a non-disabled person, the maximum fine on conviction being £1,000.
>
> local authorities have powers to withdraw a badge if the holder constantly misuses it or allows it to be misused by others.
>
> it is also an offence under Section 47 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to park a vehicle which is not displaying a badge in a designated disabled person's parking bay.

The issues of abuse and misuse of badges are a major part of a review of the scheme that we are currently undertaking.

In the meantime, it is open to anybody to bring instances of fraudulent use to the attention of the police, traffic wardens or the appropriate local authority and we will continue to work with these bodies and stakeholder groups to minimise the potential for abuse and misuse.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 595W, on disability vehicle stickers, which organisations have been consulted by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee as part of its review of the blue badge scheme. [29174]

Ms Keeble: The blue badge review discussion paper has been sent to major stakeholders, including disability organisations, local authorities and enforcement bodies in England and the devolved Administrations, whose authorities are collaborating with my Department. A list of those who received the paper has been placed in the

House. The paper is also available on request from the Department's Mobility and Inclusion Unit and on our website.

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) to consider responses to the consultation and to report back to him with their recommendations.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 595W, on disability vehicle stickers, when he expects the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee to complete its review of the blue badge scheme. [29177]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State has asked the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) to consider the responses to a discussion paper issued by my Department and to report back with their recommendations by the end of April 2002.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 595W, on disability vehicle stickers, whether the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee is considering a reduction in the minimum period of issue of blue badges as part of its review of the blue badge scheme. [29175]

Ms Keeble: The main purpose of the review is to seek views on the future shape of the scheme by considering a range of issues which were identified in discussions with those most closely affected by it, including the minimum period of issue for blue badges. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) have been asked to consider responses to the consultation and to report back to the Secretary of State with their recommendations having considered all the responses received.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 595W, on disability vehicle stickers, what representations the Government have received from *(a)* hon. and right hon. Members, *(b)* disability charities, *(c)* other charities and *(d)* others calling for an extension of the blue badge scheme to cover those individuals with temporary disabilities. [29176]

Ms Keeble: The discussion paper was issued on 14 December 2001 and the consultation period is due to end on 15 March 2002. The few responses which have been received so early in the consultation are currently being analysed. We will, however, keep the House informed as the review progresses.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 595W, on disability vehicle stickers, what criteria are set down for local authorities to determine the eligibility of people applying for a disability vehicle sticker through the blue badge scheme. [29482]

Ms Keeble: The criteria which local authorities use for assessing eligibility for a disabled person's badge are set down in The Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (England) Regulations 2000 [SI 2000/682].

These contain a prescribed description of disabled person to whom a local authority may issue a disabled persons' badge and are a person who is more than 2-years-old who falls within one or more of the following categories:

receives the higher rate of the mobility component of the disability living allowance in accordance with section 73 of the Social Security and Benefits Act 1982;

uses a motor vehicle supplied by the Department of Social Security or the Scottish Executive or is in receipt of a grant pursuant to section 5(2)(a) of the National Health Services Act 1977 or section 46 of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978;

is registered blind under section 29(4)(g) of the National Assistance Act 1948 or, in Scotland, is a blind person within the meaning of section 64(1) of that Act;

receives a mobility supplement under article 26A of the Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983 including such a supplement by virtue of any scheme or order under article 25A of the Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme 1983;

drives a motor vehicle regularly, has a severe disability in both upper limbs and is unable to turn by hand the steering wheel of a motor vehicle even if that wheel is fitted with a turning knob; or

has a permanent and substantial disability which causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking.

Patient Transport Services

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action the Government are taking to assist people suffering from balance difficulties, arising from cancer illness, to *(a)* travel to and from and *(b)* park at hospital clinics. [29106]

Ms Keeble: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive, but I understand from them that, essentially, the Scottish Ambulance Service Non-Emergency Service transports people to and from hospitals, clinics and day centres, and bases its provision on the medical need of the patient. In some of the more remote areas of Scotland, patient transport services are provided by community run schemes. The ambulance service's aim is to provide a seamless journey for patients with mobility problems and those who experience significant discomfort because of the nature of their medical condition, or the type of treatment they receive at hospital. To ensure that it continues to understand and meet the needs of its patients, it is currently reviewing and developing the way in which it provides and delivers non-emergency services to make them even more flexible and patient friendly.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what guidelines and recommendations he has made to local authorities with regard to determining the value and suitability of discretionary grant awards under the disabled facilities grant; and if he will place copies in the Library; [29115]

(2) how long on average it took each local authority to make disabled facilities grant payments following approved applications; [29112]

(3) under what circumstances local authorities may delay the payment of an approved disabled facilities grant; [29113]

(4) how long it has taken for each local authority to approve an application for the disabled facilities grant, following the receipt of a valid completed application form; and how many applications for disabled facilities grant, broken down by local authority, were not responded to within the recommended six month period following the receipt of a valid completed application form; [29114]

(5) how much money was awarded by each local authority for the disabled facilities grant; what was the average award made by each local authority for the disabled facilities grant; and what funding was provided to each local authority by the Government towards their spending in respect of the disabled facilities grant in each of the last five years. [29116]

Mr. Byers: Disabled facilities grants (DFG) are administered by local authorities who are under a statutory duty to approve or refuse an application within six months of the date of application. My Department does not collect data on the length of time taken by local authorities to consider applications.

Figures showing each English local authority's expenditure on DFGs, the average value of grant and the Government's DFG allocation over the last five years have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Section 23(1) of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 sets out the purposes for which mandatory DFG must be approved. Discretionary DFG is available to make a dwelling or building suitable for a disabled occupant in any other respect. Paragraphs 31 to 36 of Annex I to DoE Circular 17/96, (copies of which have already been placed in the Library) gives examples. Paragraph 10 of that Annex also states that discretionary DFG may be paid where the costs of the adaptations exceed the maximum limit for mandatory DFG. There is no maximum limit on the amount which may be paid in the form of a discretionary DFG.

Section 36 of the Act provides that local authorities may delay the payment of DFGs up to 12 months after the date of application. Paragraphs 58 to 61 of Annex 1 to circular 17/96 advises that such a delay should only be made in exceptional circumstances when a particularly heavy caseload of applications is causing severe resource problems for the authority. It should not be made where adaptations are urgently required and where a delay would cause hardship or suffering to the applicant.

Local Government Inspection

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much is spent annually on external inspection of local government; and if he will make a statement on the methods used to assess the effectiveness of such inspections. [28818]

Dr. Whitehead: The following costs identified represent those of the major *[Interruption.]* Inspectorates working in the local government field together with the costs of district audit. Apart from district audit and inspection by the Audit Commission Inspection Service, which include a fee element, these costs are centrally funded by sponsoring Departments.

Other inspection bodies, such as the Health and Safety Executive, will have some involvement with local government, but figures for this are not readily identifiable or available.

The figures do not include any element of the indirect costs of inspection to authorities; e.g. staff time, as no agreed or reliable figures are available.

Audit Commission Inspection Service

Audit Commission, district audit and best value inspection costs for the audit year 2001–02 are likely to be in the region of £194 million. Best value inspection costs represent a £44 million component of this figure which includes £23.5 million in direct grant paid by DTLR and the National Assembly for Wales. The remainder of the costs are charged in fees supported through the Revenue Support Grant in England and Wales.

Social Services Inspectorate (SSI)

In 2001–02 SSI inspections cost £5.2 million. £4.5 million of this related to inspection of social services functions that are the responsibility of local councils.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI)

The total running costs for the BFI in the last three years is circa £6 million per year.

HM Fire Service Inspectorate

Spend in 2001–02 is £1,660,000.

Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)

The total direct cost (i.e. excluding overheads) of LEA inspections in 2000–01 amounted to about £2.3 million.

Assessment of the effectiveness of the various statutory and non-statutory components of the inspection regimes applied by each inspectorate, is the responsibility of the relevant sponsoring department. However, the Local Government White Paper seeks to deliver inspection regimes which more fully reflect authority performance, with a substantial reduction in inspection activity for the high performing. Our intention is that inspection will be co-ordinated across all local authority functions and will reflect risk analysis of each local authority based on a comprehensive performance assessment.

Refrigerator Disposal Costs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements he has made with regard to the allocation of the adjustment to the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block, announced in the provisional local government finance settlement, to cover the cost of implementing refrigerator disposal regulations. [29117]

Mr. Byers: £6 million has been added to the upper tier sub-block of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services Standard Spending Assessment for 2002–03 for the costs of implementing refrigerator disposal regulations for the period 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2003. This will be distributed to local authorities using the standard formula for this sub-block.

NIMSA

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the achievement of performance targets set for the use of NIMSA funding of the Ordnance Survey. [28979]

Ms Keeble: Performance criteria and deliverables are defined for NIMSA activities. Progress is reviewed quarterly by the NIMSA Review Group. Through NIMSA funding, Ordnance Survey delivers a range of valuable services in the public interest. These outputs are published in an annual report.

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the minutes of the NIMSA Review Group's meetings in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [28983]

Ms Keeble: No. Publication of Ordnance Survey outputs funded under NIMSA is by an annual report.

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the use of NIMSA funding by the Ordnance Survey in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [28982]

Ms Keeble: The National Interest Mapping Services Agreement (NIMSA) was implemented on 1 April 1999. It is an agreement between DTLR, on behalf of Government, and Ordnance Survey for the provision of Ordnance Survey services that are required in the national interest but are not commercially viable.

Since April 1999, NIMSA funds have been used by Ordnance Survey for activities that are defined and agreed by the NIMSA review group comprising officials from DTLR and Ordnance Survey. These activities are agreed each year in advance, but are subject to change by the review group.

Details about NIMSA activities are published annually in an annual report. The report for the year 2000–01 will be published in February 2002.

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he was consulted on the appointment of Lord Birt in respect of his role on transport. [29313]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 298W.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many answers to parliamentary questions have been refused by his Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29422]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was formed on 8 June 2001. In the period 8 June 2001 to 18 January 2002, my Department has answered over 3,400 written questions, of which information was withheld in respect of 23 questions because the information requested was wholly or partially commercially confidential.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will respond to the questions of the hon. Member for the Vale of York, refs. 23897–23900. [29281]

Mr. Spellar: I answered the hon. Member's questions on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 422–23W.

Fire Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information is available to him to determine the percentage of fire officers' time spent on average on *(a)* responding to emergencies, *(b)* other key duties, *(c)* administration and *(d)* sick leave, in the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [28432]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not held centrally. However, information about shifts lost due to sickness by firefighters in 2000–01 was published at tables 30–33 of Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate Best Value Performance Indicators, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library. This information is also available on www.safety.dtlr.gov.uk/fire/fepd/bvpi/bvpi.htm.

Electoral Modernisation Pilot Schemes

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the names of those local authorities which have applied to him to run electoral modernisation pilot schemes in the May 2002 elections. [29886]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department has received 41 applications from local authorities to run electoral modernisation pilot schemes during the May 2002 local elections, involving a range of activities. More than half of the bids contain an element of electronic voting and/or counting; the rest are postal voting and some miscellaneous proposals. The local authorities that have submitted bids are:

Basingstoke and Deane District Council
Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Borough of Broxbourne
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
London Borough of Camden
Chester City Council
Chorley Borough Council
Coventry City Council
Crawley Borough Council
Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
London Borough of Enfield
Epping Forest District Council
Gateshead Council
London Borough of Greenwich

London Borough of Hackney
London Borough of Havering
Huntingdonshire District Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Ipswich Borough Council
Kingston-Upon-Hull City Council
City of Lincoln Council
Liverpool City Council
London Borough of Newham
North Tyneside Council
North West Leicestershire District Council
Preston Borough Council
Rugby Borough Council
St. Albans City and District Council
Sheffield City Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Swindon Borough Council
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
London Borough of Wandsworth
Watford Council
West Lancashire District Council
City of Westminster.

An announcement confirming which bidders have been successful will be made by the end of this month.

Mobile Homes

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to propose changes to legislation to provide better protection for the rights of owners of mobile homes; and if he will make a statement. [29365]

Ms Keeble: Changes to the legislation relating to park homes were included in the recommendations of the Park Homes Working Party. Following consultation, we issued our response to the Working Party's report on 29 November last year, and placed copies of it in the Library of the House. This gives a detailed response to each of the Working Party's recommendations and indicates how we intend to take them forward.

Special Purpose Vehicles

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those development plans set out in annexe 2 to the SRA's Strategic Plan which will be subject to the establishment of special purpose vehicles. [29123]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The details of the new enhancement framework are currently being developed. The precise number of projects for which SPVs will be created will depend on the outcome of the SRA's negotiations with the private sector, and on factors such as the project's type, complexity and size.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that third generation mobile telephone base station sites must be a statutory part of new planning guidelines. [28946]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* On 22 August 2001 we introduced changes that significantly improved the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast development. The changes, which included amendments to Part 24 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (GPDO):

> strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 m and below so that they are the same as for planning applications;
>
> increased the time for a local planning authority to deal with prior approval applications to 56 days;
>
> underlined that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college; and
>
> increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation.

Part 24 of the GPDO does not distinguish between different generations of telecommunications equipment and therefore applies to third generation base stations.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish guidelines for 3G mobile telephony companies to share the use of 3G mobile telephony base stations. [28948]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Government's policy is firmly to encourage mast and site sharing where that is the optimum solution in the individual circumstances. Indeed, conditions attached to individual operating licences granted by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry include a requirement to investigate mast sharing before seeking to put up any new mast.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8, "Telecommunications" (PPG8), makes clear our expectation that developers should provide evidence to local planning authorities that they have carefully considered the use of existing masts, buildings and other structures before seeking to erect any new mast, regardless of size. The authority may be justified in refusing prior approval or planning permissions if it considers the evidence regarding the consideration of such alternative sites is not satisfactory. PPG8 is publicly available and applies to all telecommunications development, including 3G base stations.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of new 3G mobile telephony base station sites that will be needed in the United Kingdom. [28947]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* This is a matter for the individual telecommunications operators. However, the operators are fully aware of the importance we attach to keeping the number of masts to the minimum practicable, for example through mast sharing, and to ensuring that those which are needed are designed and sited with sensitivity and care.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Prisoners (Guantanamo Bay)

Llew Smith: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) what communications her Department has had with the United States Attorney-General in respect of the legality of the conditions of detention of British citizens held at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba; [28647]

(2) what discussions the Attorney-General has had with the United States Administration on the establishment of ground rules for the military tribunals it is setting up to try suspected terrorists from the al-Qaeda network. [28648]

The Solicitor-General: The Law Officers and our Department have had no such communications or discussions with the United States Government. Such contacts are a matter for the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what is the *(a)* budget and *(b)* work programme of the (i) Forward Strategy Unit and (ii) Delivery Unit; and who belongs to each; [29065]

(2) for what period Lord Birt has been appointed to the Forward Strategy Unit; [29189]

(3) how many times he has met Lord Birt since 1 January; [29185]

(4) if Lord Birt has access to Cabinet papers relating to transport; [29315]

(5) how many hours per week Lord Birt works; [29184]

(6) how much Lord Birt has claimed from official funds by way of out-of-pocket expenses; and how much of this relates to taxi travel; [29191]

(7) what assessment he has made of how far the degree of information hitherto made public about the role of Lord Birt is consistent with the Government's guidelines on parliamentary accountability; [29182]

(8) when Lord Birt last travelled by train on official Government business; [29190]

(9) if he will list the transport organisations Lord Birt has met since his appointment; [29186]

(10) what secretarial support is available to Lord Birt; and what the expected annual cost of this is; [29183]

(11) if he will place in the Library a copy of Lord Birt's work on crime; [29193]

(12) what further information concerning the present activities of Lord Birt will be released when the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is fully in operation; [29194]

(13) what office space has been made available to Lord Birt; and in which buildings it is; [29188]

(14) if he will list the Ministers to whom Lord Birt reports. [29187]

The Prime Minister: The role of the Forward Strategy Unit is to provide long-term strategic analysis to me and to other Cabinet Ministers on a range of issues. The information on the work of the unit in the public domain is consistent with the long-standing principle that internal policy advice to Ministers remains confidential.

For the current work programme and budget of the Forward Strategy Unit, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 104W.

For the current work programme and budget of the Delivery Unit, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 83W.

Ministers, their special advisers and other civil servants meet many people in the course of their work. It is not our policy to make information on meetings or their content public.

Lord Birt as the PM's unpaid strategy adviser, based at No. 10, works with the Forward Strategy Unit on a range of projects.

Details of an individual's conditions of appointment are not made public in order to protect the privacy of the individual concerned.

Lord Birt last travelled by train on official Government business on 28 November 2001 and regularly travels by train on official business. He is entitled to claim reasonable expenses incurred during his work. His travel arrangements and expense claims are in accordance with the rules set out in the Cabinet Office Management Code.

External advisers when working with the Forward Strategy Unit may have access to its administrative facilities which are accounted for within the unit's budget.

In line with the practice of successive Governments, access to Cabinet papers is decided on a case-by-case basis.

As the Government have already made clear, Lord Birt's advice and conclusions on crime were one of the inputs reflected in the Government's strategy document "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead" (Cm 5074). That document was published and placed before Parliament on 26 February 2001.

Enron

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings have taken place and on which dates between *(a)* himself, *(b)* Ministers within the Cabinet Office, *(c)* officials within No. 10, *(d)* officials within the Cabinet Office, *(e)* special advisers within No. 10 and *(f)* special advisers within the Cabinet Office and representatives of Enron since 1 May 1997. [28623]

The Prime Minister: It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Environmental Reports

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister how many of the FTSE 350 companies with which he has held meetings in the last 12 months have produced environmental reports; in how many of the meetings he has held with such companies he raised the importance of such reports; and what further action he will take to encourage such reporting. [29326]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Missile Defence

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to know the nature of the request from the US Administration concerning British involvement in the Nuclear Missile Defence programme. [26559]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 103W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Listed Buildings

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to reform the listing process for buildings of historic value, with particular reference to where they have a landmark value because of their location and appearance [26780]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Buildings will continue to be considered for listing against strict criteria of special architectural or historic interest. The Government's guidance to local authorities in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15—Planning and the Historic Environment stresses a general presumption in favour of retaining unlisted buildings in conservation areas which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area. The Government's recent policy statement, "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future" (December 2001) stresses the importance of planning authorities taking account of the value a community places on a particular aspect of its immediate environment.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will take steps to ensure that listed buildings cannot be de-listed following an appeal from the owner without public notification and an opportunity for objections to be made. [27898]

Dr. Howells: Decisions on listing and de-listing are based on expert advice received about a building's architectural and historic interest. There is no formal process for appeals against decisions on listing and de-listing, but we will consider fresh evidence at any time. Given this, we see no benefit in the introduction of a formal appeals procedure.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by her Department since August 2001; and if she will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28398]

Dr. Howells: Full regulatory impact assessments are placed in the House Libraries. Since August 2001 the Department has produced regulatory impact assessments in respect of the draft Regulatory Reform (Golden Jubilee Licensing) Order 2002 and the National Heritage Bill, the former coming under *(a)* and the latter under neither *(a)* nor *(b)*. I also refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Cabinet Office on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483.

Tramways (Preservation)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of locations and length of pre-1945 tramways which survive under tarmac or are otherwise intact; and what her policy is on their preservation. [28577]

Dr. Howells: A search of the schedule of ancient monuments has revealed that there are 11 entries on tramways. The majority of these form parts of industrial sites.

Under the Monuments Protection Programme, this Department and English Heritage are undertaking a systematic review of England's archaeological resource, with a view to providing statutory protection, principally through scheduling and listing, to those sites identified as being of national interest. Transport systems, including tramways, are being assessed in this context.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average time is that the Head of her Department has recommended since May 1997 between a special adviser leaving her Department and taking up outside employment; and if she will make a statement. [28912]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 594W.

Free Television Licences

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact on elderly residents of warden-accommodation of the rule that free television licences are available only if all the residents of such accommodation qualify for the concession. [28878]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Under the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary scheme, television licences are available at a fee of £5 for each unit of qualifying accommodation. The requirement that sheltered housing must be provided for disabled people, mentally disordered people or retired people aged 60 or over is one of a number of qualifying criteria for entitlement to the concession. The ARC scheme as a whole was examined by the independent review panel on the future funding of the BBC in 1999, but the panel recommended that the existing scheme should be retained, since it was unable to identify a superior alternative funded from the licence fee.

As announced last year, the Government propose to introduce measures to preserve the rights of ARC beneficiaries who remain in accommodation provided or managed by a local authority, a housing association or a development corporation, when the social mix or the level of warden cover change. Consultations between officials and the BBC about the necessary amendments to the television licence fee regulations are currently under way. We intend to bring forward these amendments as soon as we can but it is important that in doing so we do not create any new anomalies or unnecessary administrative burdens.

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to extend the free television licence scheme to all pensioners. [29652]

Dr. Howells: The Government have no plans to extend free television licences to pensioners below the age of 75.

Seaside Resorts

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact of recommendations 60 to 64 of the Budd report on Her Majesty's Government's policy of regenerating seaside resorts. [28850]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 317W.

Broadcasting Bill

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Broadcasting Bill will be published. [29490]

Dr. Howells: We have no plans to bring forward a new Broadcasting Bill. However, we are planning to publish in the spring of this year a draft Communications Bill, which will implement the policies set out in the White Paper on Communications that was published in December 2000. The Communications Bill will set up a new converged regulatory structure for telecommunications, spectrum management and broadcasting.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what equipment has been stolen from her Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26834]

Dr. Howells: Equipment stolen from the Department since May 1997 has been confined to information technology equipment, namely one laptop computer (value £2,000), three personal computer base units (value £1,500) and one personal computer monitor (value £300). All losses are reported by the Department as both a security breach, immediately after the event is detected, and annually to the Treasury as a loss by fraud.

Recreational Boating

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to encourage the construction of berths along inland waterways and the coastline for recreational and leisure boating. [27125]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

We are looking at what action we may need to take for water-based sport and recreation more generally in the light of the research report—"Water-Based Sport and Recreation: the facts" prepared for DEFRA by the School of Environment, University of Brighton and published on 21 December—on facts about water-based sport and recreation on inland rivers, canals and enclosed waters that we published last month. In general it is for local providers to assess demand and supply in order to determine whether there is a need for a change in provision of berths and other facilities for recreational and leisure boating.

DEFENCE

Stewardship Report

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to publish the first Stewardship report promised in the Ministry of Defence's policy document, "In Trust and On Trust: The Strategy for the Defence Estate". [29723]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence will publish its first Stewardship report on the Defence Estate on Tuesday 22 January. This fulfils the commitment made when "In Trust and On Trust: The Strategy for the Defence Estate" was launched in June 2000.

"In Trust and On Trust" set out clearly the MOD's policies and priorities as well as performance targets against which the effectiveness of our stewardship of the estate could be judged. It also contained a pledge to report annually against the strategy's goals.

The Stewardship report which we are now publishing contains comprehensive information on the estate, covering both rural and built environments, and sustainability. This is the first time that the MOD has published such a comprehensive report on its estate. A copy has been placed in the Libraries of the House and also on the MOD website at www.mod.uk.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many publications were issued by his Department in each of the last four years. [11838]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence produces a huge range of publications in both hard copy and electronic format. No central record is kept of these and it would not be possible to list each new publication as this could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

However our central corporate communications division, which is responsible for most corporate and policy publications, does have a record of the publications that it and its predecessors have produced. From the information available, the following main publications have been produced in each of the last four years:

Financial year 1998–99

Strategic Defence Review (Cmd 999)
Departmental Performance Report
Defence Booklets
Defence Annual Report
Sanctuary Conservation Booklet
Defence Factsheets
Focus internal newspaper

Financial year 1999–2000

Defence White Paper (Cmd 4446)
Defence Annual Report and Mission Booklets
Defence Booklets
Defence Factsheets (series of 28)
Factsheets (in Welsh)
Large text/Braille/audio material
Sanctuary magazine
Focus internal magazine
Departmental Performance Report

Financial year 2000–01

MOD factsheets (series of 33)
Factsheets (in Welsh)
Corporate Booklets (including two policy papers on: Defence Diplomacy and Multinational Defence Cooperation)
Kosovo Lessons from the Crisis (Cmd 4724)
Departmental Performance Report
Focus internal newspaper
Sanctuary magazine

Financial year 2001–02

Departmental Performance Report
Corporate Booklets (including two policy papers on: European Defence and Defence Acquisition)
Focus internal newspaper
Sanctuary magazine.

Military Police

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the proposed manning level is for each of the next three years for the *(a)* Ministry of Defence Police, *(b)* Royal Military Police, *(c)* Military Provost Guard Service and *(d)* RAF Police; and if he will make a statement; [26639]

(2) what is the approved number for the *(a)* Ministry of Defence Police, *(b)* Royal Military Police, *(c)* Military Provost Guard Service, *(d)* RAF Police; and if he will make a statement. [26637]

Mr. Ingram: The current figures are as follows:

	Requirement	*Strength*
MOD Police[1]	3,395	3,328
Royal Military Police[2]	2,109	2,073
Military Provost Guard Service[3]	528	453
RAF Police[4]	2,384	2,265

[1] Figures as at 1 January 2002. Civilian support staff not included.

[2] Strength as at December 2001. Requirement is the Manpower Planning Target for 2001–02 Financial Year. Figures shown are the Adjutant Generals Corp (Provost Branch) which includes: AG(PRO)-General Police Duties (GPD), AG(PRO)-Special Investigations Branch (SIB) and AG(PRO)-Military Provost Staff (MPS).

[3] Strength as at 1 December 2001. Requirement is the current establishment figure for 2001–02 Financial Year.

[4] Figures as at 1 December 2001.

Based on the known Ministry of Defence Police complement alterations, the overall staffing levels for the next three years are expected to be between 3,000 and 3,300.

The RAF Police are in the process of a major structural reorganisation with a view to reducing the requirement. The trained strength will be reduced over the next six to eight years to align with the reduced requirement. It is likely that the Military Provost Guard Service will increase to offset part of the reduction in the RAF Police but will be aligned to the strength reductions.

Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme of providing widowed spouses of post-retirement marriages with a pension based on all the pensionable service of the service men and women. [27199]

Mr. Ingram: Post-retirement widow and widower pensions (PRWP) were introduced as a requirement of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975. Provision was made in the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) for the payment of pensions to widow(er)s of service pensioners who married (or remarried) after retirement, but this change benefited only the widows of those giving service on or after 6 April 1978, and the widowers of those giving service on or after 6 April 1989. Only service on or after those dates was taken into account when calculating the level of pension. Against this background, it would cost in the order of £50 million to extend PRWP's to all current and deferred AFPS pensioners. This would be a one-off cost based on a broad actuarial estimate.

There is no distinction between service men and public sector employees with regard to the fact that the PRWP only applies to those with service on or after 6 April 1978, or 6 April 1989. It has been the long-standing policy of successive Governments that discretionary changes to improve the benefits from public service pensions schemes should be implemented from a current date for future service only. To extend the post-retirement marriage concession to survivors of members of all public service occupational schemes would cost between £300 million and £500 million.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what formula is used for the annual uprating of armed forces pensions. [28868]

Mr. Ingram: *[holding answer 21 January 2002:]* Pensions which are already in payment are increased annually in line with the retail prices index under the terms of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (Pensions Increase) Order.

The increase in rate of pension payable to those who retire each year is broadly in line with annual pay increases. Armed forces pensions are not based on individual earnings but on a representative rate of pension for each rank. This 'band of brothers' approach ensures that all those who leave in the same year in the same rank and with the same number of years' service, receive the same pension. The representative rates of pension are linked to 'spot' rates of pay for each of the ranks. Annual increases in the spot rates of pay automatically increase the representative rates of pension based on them.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27986]

Dr. Moonie: The reported estimated cost to the Ministry of Defence, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies of fraud and theft in each of last complete financial years is as follows:

£

	MOD	*Agencies*	*NDPBs*
1997–98	168,393	421,263	0
1998–99	183,107	527,897	0
1999–2000	1,976,669	60,737	0
2000–01	581,238	300,112	0

No abatement is made for subsequent recoveries. The figures relate to a combination of suspected and proven frauds and thefts with estimated values refined from time to time as investigations, sometime lasting a year or more, reach a conclusion. A significant element of estimated cost or value can relate to 'at risk' estimates applied to suspected procurement fraud cases, the majority of which are usually resolved as 'no crime' or have a proven value lower than original estimates.

Troop Deployments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries in which UK troops are stationed, giving the numbers of troops in each case. [28742]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 821–22W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) which shows the number of UK regular forces serving overseas as at 1 November 2001 broken down by service.

Departmental Employees

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* agencies sponsored by his Department work in (i) London, (ii) areas benefiting from EU Objective 1 status, (iii) areas with Objective 2 status and (iv) other areas. [16104]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 November 2001]*: Statistics on Ministry of Defence employees are not held in the format requested. Officials are currently compiling this information and I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Early Retirement

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* RAF and Royal Marine officers, *(b)* Navy officers and *(c)* Army officers have sought early retirement in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [25832]

Mr. Ingram: The figures for Premature Voluntary Release (PVR) of service officers, broken down by the number of applications and number of actual exits, for each of the three services are as follows:

Financial Year	*Applications*	*Exists*
1998–99		
Navy including Royal Marines	239	164
Army	515	509
RAF	268	243
1999–2000		
Navy including Royal Marines	221	[1]238
Army	547	442
RAF	243	213
2000–01		
Navy including Royal Marines	245	[1]167
Army	530	531
RAF	278	241

[1] Exits may exceed applications in any year due to the time taken to process applications

RAF Bases

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel have been carried on tactical exercises from *(a)* Brize Norton and *(b)* Lyneham in each of the last five years. [26343]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cyber-Warfare

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to set up a cyber-warfare unit in his Ministry. [26635]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to set up a cyber-warfare unit in the Ministry of Defence although structures already exist to co-ordinate the conduct of information operations which encompass existing military capabilities, such as those traditionally used for command and control warfare, as well as computer operations and emerging technologies.

Military Garments

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial checks are carried out on companies tendering for contracts on military garments. [27436]

Dr. Moonie: Prior to a company being invited to tender for a contract the Ministry of Defence will have satisfied itself of the company's financial strength. The checks involve obtaining a financial report containing a complete copy of the company's accounts and then carrying out reviews of items such as the balance sheet and operating cost statement.

Challenger 2

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve the global deployment capability of the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank fleet. [27271]

Mr. Ingram: The lessons for the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank (CR2) from Exercise Saif Sareea 2 will be fully evaluated, in the light of ongoing operational experience in a range of environments, before any decisions on changes to the global deployment capability of the CR2 are made.

Cadets

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cadet units have not been allocated cadet centres. [27195]

Dr. Moonie: None.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many visits of UK personnel to the US under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement have occurred in each year since 1997. [28255]

Dr. Moonie: The number of visits by UK personnel, involving one or more individuals, to the US under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement in each year since 1997 is as follows:

Year	*Number of visits*
1997	200
1998	253
1999	225
2000	207
2001	205

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK personnel work in the United States under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement; and in which US facility they are working. [28254]

Dr. Moonie: There are four UK officials serving in the US under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement (1958 MDA). All are located in the British Embassy, Washington DC. Their duties are to facilitate the conduct of bilateral business within the provisions of the MDA. In addition there are four staff on secondment from AWE Aldermaston in the US, to assist with the technical development of facilities of mutual interest. Two are stationed at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, one is located at Sandia National Laboratory and one at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many exchange of information and visit reports have been generated as a result of exchanges of information under the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement in each of the last five years. [28256]

Dr. Moonie: Six exchanges of information by visit and reports (EIVRs) have been created within the last five years. In 1997 one on the subject of test monitoring was generated, which first met in 1998. In 1998 one was created on matters concerned with the contract to manage the Atomic Weapons Establishment, which also met in that year. Four EIVRs covering the subjects of executive channel, miscellaneous visits, non-proliferation and arms control technology, and enhanced surveillance were created in 2001.

Nevada Test Site

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK personnel work at the Nevada test site; and how many UK personnel have visited the Nevada test site in each of the last three years. [28258]

Dr. Moonie: There are no UK personnel permanently based at the Nevada test site. Numbers of UK personnel who have visited the Nevada test site in the last three years are as follows:

Year	*Number of visits*
1999	9
2000	26
2001	40

Explosive Remnants of War

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcomes of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Review Conference in December 2001, with particular reference to the issue of explosive remnants of war. [28072]

Mr. Ingram: The Review Conference of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons agreed a detailed mandate for a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to discuss ways and means to address the issue of explosive remnants of war over the coming year. The GGE is also mandated to explore the issue of anti-vehicle mines. The Chairman-designate of the GGE will undertake consultations on possible options to improve compliance with the Convention. Interested states parties are invited to hold expert consultations on small calibre weapons and ammunition. The Review Conference agreed to convene a meeting of states parties to the Convention in December 2002 to follow up on these decisions.

Flight Lieutenant A. L. Adams

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent by the RAF in training Flight Lieutenant A. L. Adams. [28384]

Dr. Moonie: Individual training costs are not collected. Flight Lieutenant Adams' Initial Officer Training is estimated to have cost approximately £16,500 and his flying training of the order of £770,000 excluding his salary and allowances.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the costs incurred in the process of redress initiated by Flight Lieutenant A. L. Adams. [28385]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the personal files recently supplied to Flight Lieutenant A. L. Adams. [28387]

Dr. Moonie: In accordance with exemptions 8a and 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, personal data are not to be disclosed without the consent of the individual to whom the information applies. All personal data relating to Flight Lieutenant Adams' redress of complaint are in his possession and it is for him to determine whether and how they should be placed in the public domain.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the reasons for no conclusion having been reached through process of redress initiated by Flight Lieutenant A. L. Adams. [28386]

Dr. Moonie: Flight Lieutenant Adams voluntarily withdrew from fast-jet flying training in October 1999, and was subsequently restreamed to rotary wing training rather than his preference of multi-engine training. He initiated the process of redress in March 2000. His complaint was rejected by the Commander-in-Chief, Royal Air Force Personnel and Training Command in December 2000. Flight Lieutenant Adams subsequently asked for the matter to be considered by the Air Force Board. Under the procedures followed during the consideration of a redress of complaint, all appropriate documents are disclosed to the complainant, who is invited to comment, before they are submitted to the decision-maker. This inevitably prolongs the process, and Flight Lieutenant Adams has commented, as is his right, on four separate occasions since the relevant synopsis was first disclosed to him in March 2001. It was necessary to postpone a scheduled meeting of the Air Force Board in September in order to take account of his latest comments. The case is now under consideration by the Air Force Board, who have asked for further information on which Flight Lieutenant Adams has been invited to comment before his case can be considered further.

War Criminals (Bosnia)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of British peacekeeping forces in Bosnia in relation to the hunt for war-crime suspects, with particular reference to Mr. Karadzic. [28369]

Mr. Ingram: Assistance to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as an integral part of SFOR's mission and this includes the detention of individuals indicted as war criminals that SFOR encounter in the course of their duties. SFOR have to date performed 26 detention operations; 14 of which involved British forces.

The arrest and transfer to The Hague of Radovan Karadzic remains a high priority for us, as for the other members of SFOR, and the UK will continue to make every effort to ensure that he is apprehended and brought to justice. While the international community may detain war criminals by force if necessary, we continue to urge Mr. Karadzic to surrender himself to the International Tribunal voluntarily.

Royal Navy Vessels

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy vessels have had modifications and upgrades since 1997; and how long each of them were in port for that purpose. [28350]

Mr. Ingram: All operational Royal Navy vessels will have undergone some form of modification or upgrade since 1997. Rather than bring vessels into port for specific modifications or upgrades this work will generally have been undertaken within a period in which the vessel is either alongside, docked for maintenance or for repair.

United States National Guards

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the presence in the United Kingdom of United States National Guards; what notification he has received from United States authorities of their intention to station such personnel within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [28322]

Mr. Hoon: As with our components of the US visiting force, the presence of US National Guards in the UK is governed by the NATO Status of Forces Agreement of 1951. No request has been received from the United States authorities to station US National Guards permanently in the UK, although they do transit through the UK from time to time.

Russian Armed Forces

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investment the Government are making in retraining members of the Russian armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [27833]

Mr. Hoon: As at 31 December 2001, the Ministry of Defence's Russian Resettlement Project has spent £7.6 million on the retraining of 13,000 retiring and recently retired officers of the Russian armed forces. The Ministry of Defence funds resettlement courses at five cities around Russia. The range of training courses is aimed at the local job market and covers, for example, logistics, business administration, IT systems and English language.

The Russian Resettlement Project is a major success story of our defence relationship with Russia. Employment is found by 70 per cent. of graduates within four months of successfully completing the course.

European Defence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with other EU member states about the establishment of a council of European Defence Ministers; and if he will make a statement. [28497]

Mr. Hoon: The question of a formal council of Defence Ministers was discussed at the EU General Affairs Council on 19 November 2001 and an informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers on 12 October 2001.

There is already a programme of informal meetings of EU Defence Ministers, and the General Affairs Council provides a forum for formal discussions as and when required. There are no proposals to establish a separate council of European Defence Ministers.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with other EU member states about the creation of a European concept of Special Forces; and if he will make a statement. [28495]

Mr. Hoon: None.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Shipbuilding Industry

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy towards the establishment of a temporary EU defensive mechanism for the shipbuilding industry. [19585]

Mr. Wilson: We share the UK industry's very real concerns about Korean unfair competition, which we take very seriously. We believe the best means of tackling Korean unfair competition is to launch action in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), on which all member states are agreed, and to help yards improve their competitiveness. However, we are strongly opposed to the Commission proposal to reintroduce, in parallel, temporary operating subsidies.

We do not believe that subsidy is an appropriate response to this complex and longstanding problem. Operating subsidies have not been effective in countering Korean unfair competition or in improving the competitiveness of EU yards in the past and we believe the Commission's new proposal will be even less effective at countering Korea. The Commission proposal is likely to be difficult to operate in practice and is open to abuse. Furthermore, it will distort competition within the EU as only some member states stand to gain. The proposal will not benefit UK yards as they do not build the relevant types of ships, namely containerships and product/chemical tankers, and could well be damaged by the subsidies that competing yards stand to receive.

At the December 2001 meeting of the Industry Council, the Commission tried for the third time to secure agreement on its dual approach of subsidies and WTO action but again failed to secure sufficient support from member states. Member states remained firmly split on the subsidies proposal. The UK vigorously pressed the Commission to launch the WTO action but to no avail. The deadlock on the Commission approach therefore continues, with no action against Korea. The Commission will now review the market situation and present its findings in March as a basis for further discussion.

Telephone Sales

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to make it illegal for telephone sales and marketing organisations to withhold their telephone number when contacting members of the public; and if she will make a statement. [24456]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Consumers are protected under the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations 1999 which ensures that direct marketers must on request provide their address or a free telephone number on which they can be contacted. The Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 also require that telephone sales and marketing organisations who cold call consumers at home are obliged to identify clearly the business they represent and the commercial purpose of their call at the beginning of the conversation. If a contract is concluded over the telephone, the regulations also give consumers the right to clear information before they decide to buy (which must then be confirmed in writing) and the right to a cooling off period of seven days in which the consumer can cancel and receive a full refund.

If consumers do not wish to receive unsolicited commercial telephone calls, they can register with the Telephone Preference Service. Telephone sales and marketing organisations are obliged under the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations 1999 to desist from calling individuals who are registered on the scheme.

Subscribers can register by calling 0845 070 0707 or through the following website: "http://www.tpsonline.org.uk".

Pharmacy Market

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Office of Fair Trading inquiry into controls over the pharmacy market will include within its scope dispensing by general practitioners. [24983]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The market study on pharmacies has been initiated by the Director General for Fair Trading and the scope of the study is for him. OFT have confirmed that they are investigating the restrictions on entry to dispense NHS prescriptions. As such the scope of the study could include all those who dispense NHS prescriptions including general practitioners.

Fireworks

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations she received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public concerning the use, misuse and sale of fireworks between (i) 1 October and 31 December 1999, (ii) 1 January and 30 September 2000, (iii) 1 October and 31 December 2000 and (iv) 1 January and 30 September 2001. [26699]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The representations received by the Department over these periods, concerning a wide range of issues relating to fireworks is set out in the following table:

Period	*MPs*	*Public*
1 October to 31 December 1999	119	260
1 January to 30 September 2000	65	109
1 October to 31 December 2000	111	129
1 January to 30 September 2001	125	501

ECGD

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether it is the financial objective of her Department that the ECGD should operate within a break even framework. [27218]

Ms Hewitt: Yes. ECGD aims to maintain a ratio of its reserves to its estimates of Expected Loss on amounts at risk under its guarantees of at least 1.5. Last year ECGD contributed, after expenses, £205 million to the Exchequer.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether it is the policy of her Department to eliminate subsidies from export credits. [27219]

Ms Hewitt: Yes. ECGD charges premium to cover its costs and expected losses such that a Reserve Coverage Ratio (ratio of accumulated reserves to expected losses) is maintained of 1.5 or higher.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by her Department since August 2001; and if she will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28406]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has produced 10 regulatory impact assessments since August 2001. The RIAs relate to:

Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations

The Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971 (Electronic Communications) Order 2001

The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2001

Utilities Act 2000: Electricity Licence Exemptions

The Maternity and Parental Leave (Amendment) Regulations 2001

The Equipment and Protective Systems Intended for use in Explosive Atmospheres (Amendment) Regulations 2001

The Copyright, etc. and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Bill

The Registered Designs (Amendment) Rules 2001 and The Registered Designs (Fees) (Amendment) Rules 2001 (combined RIA)

The Trade Marks (Amendment) Rules 2001

The Electricity from Non-Fossil Fuel Sources (Locational Flexibility) Order 2001.

All full regulatory impact assessments are placed in the Libraries of the House.

The Good Policy Making Guide recommends that policy makers take early soundings from affected parties. The results of these informal consultations are not required to be produced in a RIA at this stage. However, Departments are advised to include a partial RIA in formal consultations. Consultations can be accessed via www.ukonline.gov.uk/citizenspace/consultations/.

The Good Policy Making Guide does recommend that as part of the RIA's assessment of costs and benefits, any additional costs and indirect costs should be identified and quantified stating who or what bears them.

There is no specific requirement in the Good Policy Making Guide to consult on appropriate methodology. Nor is there a specific requirement to set out the information at (b). The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ceramics

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ensure *(a)* respect for copyright, *(b)* compliance with regulations and *(c)* traceability for consumer protection on imports of ceramics from China to the United Kingdom under WTO agreements; and if she will make a statement. [28772]

Nigel Griffiths: China became a member of the WTO on 11 December 2001, and is bound by the agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights ("TRIPS"). This requires all WTO members to provide certain minimum standards for the protection and enforcement of copyright and other intellectual property rights. The agreement is the first broadly-subscribed multilateral intellectual property agreement that is enforceable between Governments.

An EU requirement to apply origin markings to ceramic imports from China would be incompatible with WTO rules. However, EC Regulation No. 3295/94 (as amended) allows a right holder to lodge an application with Customs to prohibit the entry into the Community of counterfeit and pirated goods. It also provides for Customs Officers to contact a right holder if they come across suspected infringing goods during the course of their checks. In this case the goods will be detained and the right holder will be invited to lodge an application within a specified period.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Chinese capability to meet its WTO requirements on counterfeiting and copying of ceramic products. [28773]

Nigel Griffiths: China gave a commitment to abide fully with the provisions of the agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights ("TRIPS") by the date of her accession to the WTO. The agreement requires all WTO members to provide certain minimum standards of protection for patents, copyrights, trade marks and other forms of intellectual property protection; and to provide effective provisions for enforcement of these rights. China's accession to the WTO on 11 December 2001 will provide a welcome boost to the ability of rights holders to enforce their rights within China. Foreign countries can look forward to improved safeguards for their rights; and have been promised reinforced co-operation from the Chinese authorities.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on manufacturing industry in North Staffordshire. [28770]

Alan Johnson: The North Staffordshire Task Force and Advantage West Midlands are working with local partners to assist manufacturing industry in the area. In addition, the Government recently announced a further £1.5 million support for the Ceramics Industry Forum, many of whose members are in North Staffordshire. I am also meeting my hon. Friend on 23 January to discuss recent announcements by businesses based in the area.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners' compensation claims have been registered in *(a)* St. Helens, South constituency, *(b)* St. Helens metropolitan authority area and *(c)* Merseyside in relation to (i) vibration white finger and (ii) respiratory diseases. [28700]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered claims in the regions as follows:

Number

	(i) Vibration white finger (VWF)	*(ii) Respiratory disease*
(a) St. Helens, South[1]	439	759
(b) St. Helens metropolitan authority[2]	901	1,605
(c) Merseyside[3]	1,435	2,672

[1] St. Helens, South as defined by the area with postcode prefixes: L 34, 35; WA 9, 10.

[2] St. Helens metropolitan authority as defined by the area with postcode prefixes: WA 8–12; L 34–35.

[3] Merseyside as defined by the area with postcode prefixes: CH 48–49, 60–63; L 3, 9–10, 12, 14, 16–26, 34–38; PR 8–9, WA 8–12, WN 4–5

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many respiratory specialists in *(a)* Merseyside, *(b)* the north-west and *(c)* England were working on the Medical Assessment Process for compensating former miners at (i) 1 January 2001 and (ii) 1 January 2002. [28699]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* As at 1 January 2001, there were 104 respiratory specialists working on the Medical Assessment Process (MAP) living and/or working in England as a whole, of which 10 were working in the north-west region, but none working in Merseyside.

As at 1 January 2002, there were 155 respiratory specialists working on the MAP living and/or working in England as a whole, of which 19 were working in the north-west region, but none are working in Merseyside.

North-west centres are defined as: Wigan, Wrexham and Manchester.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many compensation claims by former miners living in *(a)* St. Helens, South and *(b)* St. Helens metropolitan authority (i) have yet to be settled and (ii) have been paid their final sum. [28698]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* To date, the number of claimants who have not settled their claims or received an offer of compensation, and the number of settled claims is as follows:

	St. Helens, South[1]	*St. Helens metropolitan authority*[2]
Respiratory disease		
Number of unsettled claims which have not received offers	728	1,518
Number of settled claims	16	31
Number of offers outstanding with solicitors	15	56
Vibration White Finger		
Number of unsettled claims which have not received offers	256	521
Number of settled claims	134	255
Number of offers outstanding with solicitors	49	125

[1] St. Helens, South as defined by the area with postcode prefixes: L 34, 35; WA 9, 10

[2] St. Helens metropolitan authority as defined by the area with postcode prefixes: WA 8–12; L 34–35

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average *(a)* interim and *(b)* final payment amount is for (i) Vibration White Finger and (ii) respiratory diseases to former coal miners in (A) St. Helens, South, (B) Merseyside and (C) England. [28706]

Ms Hewitt: There are six different types of interim payments that may be made to claimants for compensation for respiratory disease, subject to conditions. Of these, three are of fixed amounts and are listed as follows:

Type of interim	*Eligibility*
PD D12	A £2,000 interim is made to claimants in receipt of the Industrial injuries benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema
Widows' interim 1	Widows who receive a bereavement award, and have not received any other payment, are entitled to a further interim payment of £2,000
Widows' interim 2	Widows who are not in receipt of a bereavement award, although one of the eight qualifying descriptors is cited on her late husband's death certificate but was not found to cause or materially contribute to the death, and have not received any other payment, are entitled to an interim payment of £1,000

The variable interims are:

1. Bereavement awards.
2. Expedited interims—where an expedited offer has been made, but rejected by the claimant, a proportion of the offer is forwarded while the claimant proceeds the full Medical Assessment Process, MAP.
3. Post MAP interims—where a claimant has attended a MAP appointment and for whom the work history has been agreed, but the Department is unable to settle the claim, an interim is made.

Claims for compensation for respiratory disease can be settled by either an expedited payment following spirometry testing or a full and final offer following MAP.

The average interim and full and final figure for the above regions are as follows:

£

Respiratory disease	*St. Helens, South*	*Merseyside*	*England*
Interim payments			
Average bereavement award	7,609	8,322	8,210
Average expedited interim	n/a	n/a	2,862
MAP interim	5,168	4,119	4,024
Full and final offers			
Average expedited settlement	n/a	6,467	5,323
Average full and final settlement following MAP	1,351	1,767	2,380

There are four different interims in respect of Vibration White Finger (VWF) claims as listed:

1. Standard £1,000
2. General damages
3. Anniversary
4. Services.

The average interim and full and final figure for the above regions are as follows:

Vibration White Finger	*St. Helens, South*	*Merseyside*	*England*
Average interim payment	4,562	4,523	5,776
Average full and final payment	7,178	7,348	8,048

Power Stations

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many power stations there are in the United Kingdom and how each one is fuelled. [28014]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* A list of power stations in the United Kingdom (operational at 31 May 2001 and of more than 1 MW capacity) is given in Table 5.13 of the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, 2001, a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House and on the DTI website. The list shows the fuel used by each station and its generating capacity. In total 165 separate stations appear on the list.

Energy Sources

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the extent to which *(a)* geothermal, *(b)* hydroelectric, *(c)* wind and *(d)* wave sources of energy are used in the United Kingdom. [28015]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* We are aware of only one operating geothermal aquifer scheme in the UK, in Southampton, where a geothermal aquifer contributes 2 MW of heat to a 12 MW district heating scheme. The UK is unlikely to see extensive developments based upon aquifers due to a limited resource and limited scope for its exploitation. In the 1980s, the UK conducted major research into geothermal hot dry rock technology, involving the extraction of heat through the artificial injection of water into otherwise dry rock formations, but no prospect was seen at the time of making this technology economically viable in the short or medium term.

The UK has extensive hydroelectric schemes, most of them long-established. Declared net capacity of UK hydro plants in 2000 was 1,479 MW. Scope for expansion is limited by the availability of suitable new sites and environmental considerations.

Wind energy is already well established in the UK, and unit production costs have been falling for some years. The British Wind Energy Association calculates that, at the end of 2001, total UK wind energy generating capacity stood at 473.6 MW installed capacity, and that nearly 200 MW more is confirmed for construction in 2002. We are taking vigorous steps to encourage the development of the wind energy industry, with its enormous potential, both onshore and offshore. The UK's first offshore wind energy installation, off Blyth in Northumberland, opened in 2000. The Government are encouraging more ambitious developments offshore by a substantial capital grants programme.

Wave energy is at an early stage of development in the UK. A 500 kilowatt wave energy device, supported through an SRO contract, is operating on Islay. The Government have recently announced support for further innovative wave energy projects. The UK's potential wave energy resource is enormous.

Household Products

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce legislation to control the use of chemicals in household products; and if she will make a statement. [29509]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The safety of chemical products, such as household products, is governed by the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 1994. These regulations require that manufacturers must assess a chemical product for its health effects (toxicity, irritancy etc.). If dangerous the product must then be labelled with a warning symbol and phrases indicating the dangers. The particular chemical(s) which cause the product to be classified must be named on the label.

The regulations also require that all potentially dangerous chemicals supplied to the public must be in packaging which is properly labelled and contains warnings about the potential hazards and giving brief advice on suitable precautions. Manufacturers or suppliers of household products are also required to give details of how to use the product safely.

International Communications

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many international communications are routed daily through the UK; and what percentage of those are transmitted via satellite. [28585]

Mr. Alexander: Many millions of traffic minutes per day are routed through the UK, which is an important transit hub for international telecoms traffic. However, neither the Department nor Oftel maintains statistics on the routing of international communications through the UK or on what percentage of these are transmitted via satellite.

Bananas

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the likely effect on UK banana importers of changes to the EU banana regime. [25957]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The EU banana regime has recently been amended to implement Phase II of the Understanding with the US and Ecuador in response to World Trade Organisation concerns and to end the long-running trade dispute. The main effects of this are to transfer 100,000 tonnes of bananas from the C Quota to the A/B Quota, and to make the C Quota exclusive to bananas originating from ACP countries.

Detailed European Commission regulations are necessary for the management of the quota regime, and until these have been proposed, it is not possible to determine the effect on individual UK banana importers.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the EU Banana Management Committee on 15 November 2001. [25958]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Two European Commission proposals received favourable opinions. The first was to establish the maximum quantity of bananas which may be imported into the Community during the first quarter of 2002 by each registered operator. The second was to amend Commission Regulation 896/2001 to correct certain errors in the text as well as to clarify the rules for determining the reference quantities applicable to traditional operators in the A/B Quota.

In response to a suggestion from the UK, the chairman proposed to issue a working document on strengthening the rules prohibiting linkage between traditional and non-traditional operators.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates she has made of the value of the reduction in banana imports under C licences as a result of changes to the EU banana regime in the next five years. [25956]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Under the previous arrangements (Phase I of the Understanding with the US and Ecuador), 850,000 tonnes of banana imports under C Quota licences were permitted per year. Under Phase II, the effect on banana traders registered as operators in the C Quota arise both from the transfer of 100,000 tonnes of bananas from the C Quota to the A/B Quota, and from making the C Quota exclusive to ACP countries.

Total imports from ACP countries in 1999 (the last year for which full data are available) amounted to 676,638 tonnes, with similar quantities in the previous two years. This implies that the changes made in Phase II, taken together, should enable the ACP to continue to achieve a market share comparable with that they have had in the recent past. The value of this to ACP suppliers and individual importers will depend on price developments and, in the case of importers, their licence allocations.

HEALTH

Care Beds

2. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to increase the number of care beds across the country. [26361]

Jacqui Smith: Our policy is to enable people to remain independent in their own homes wherever possible. That is where most people want to receive care. Between 1999 and 2000 there was a 5 per cent. increase in the number of households receiving intensive home care. In addition, in October last year, we announced an extra £300 million investment over two years which will buy a range of services including additional care home placements.

Delayed Discharges

17. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce unnecessary delays in discharges from hospital. [26376]

19. **John Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in reducing delayed discharges from hospital. [26378]

Jacqui Smith: On 8 January, we announced the allocation to councils of the £190 million Building Care Capacity Grant for 2002–03. £100 million was allocated nationally for the grant in 2001–02 and the first payment made in November 2001.

This additional funding has been used to deliver a significant national reduction in delayed discharges since September 2001.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were in hospital on 25 December 2001 as a result of delayed discharges. [27362]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally on a daily basis.

Social Services

18. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent measures he has introduced to improve the performance of local authority social services. [26377]

Jacqui Smith: The Government have announced the introduction of star rating for social services from this summer to enable councils and the public to see how they are performing. Standards for delivery have been published in National Service Frameworks for mental health and older people. "Quality Protects" is delivering improved life chances for children. We have also increased the resources available for social services by an average of 3.2 per cent. a year in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03.

GPs

20. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects a resolution of the renegotiation of the general practitioners' contract for England and Wales. [26379]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Confederation is leading the negotiations with British Medical Association's General Practitioners Committee, on behalf of United Kingdom Health Ministers. It is committed to putting proposals to UK Health Ministers as soon as practicable. I understand an encouraging start has been made but that further work remains.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners in England and Wales have received golden hellos. [24672]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* To date the Department has received 137 completed application forms since the launch of the scheme on 2 November

2001. There is no information available as to how many applications are currently being processed by health authorities.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practice vacancies there were in each of the last two years. [28020]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's general practitioner recruitment, retention and vacancy survey 2000 for England and Wales reported 1,214 general practitioner vacancies outstanding at some time in the 12 month period between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2000. These vacancies were reported by 96 per cent. out of the then 104 health authorities in England and Wales. Eight health authorities did not supply the necessary information.

For the 2001 survey 98 out of the then 100 health authorities provided information indicating that there were 2,464 general practitioner vacancies outstanding at some time in the 12 month period between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001.

Cleft Lip and Palate Services

21. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on establishing a centre of excellence for cleft lip and palate services in the north-west. [26380]

Jacqui Smith: Commissioners and national health service trusts in the north-west are working together on options for the location of the cleft lip and palate centre for the region. This work will be completed by March and will be followed by three months public consultation on the options.

Accident and Emergency

22. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investment has taken place in the last five years on accident and emergency facilities in England and Wales. [26381]

Ms Blears: A total of £150 million has been invested in accident and emergency departments through the accident and emergency modernisation programme. It is the biggest investment in A&E services since the beginning of the national health service The first wave of investment was for £30 million in 1998, the second was for £85 million in May 1999 and the final wave of funding was made available to the NHS in January 2001.

NHS Dentistry

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he proposes to take in 2002 to improve the provision of NHS dental treatment. [26383]

Ms Blears: An estimated £1.1 billion will be spent on the general dental service and in excess of £50 million revenue will be invested in personal dental service pilot schemes in the current financial year. These levels of expenditure are anticipated to continue in the next financial year.

Primary Care Trusts

24. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has made to his counterpart in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to ensure that local primary care trusts are included as statutory bodies with respect to the proposed changes to the local government planning regime. [26384]

Mr. Hutton: The planning Green Paper—Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change—has only recently been issued by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and the Department of Health will make representations by the due date of 18 March.

It is expected that strategic health authorities and primary care trusts will be included as statutory bodies at the appropriate level of the planning regime.

Royal Sussex County Hospital

25. **Mr. Lepper:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made at the Royal Sussex county hospital, Brighton, following the publication of hospital star ratings. [26385]

Ms Blears: The Department has commissioned reviews of those trusts with a zero star status. This review is currently being evaluated by officials before submission to the Secretary of State for his consideration.

In the initial review the Royal Sussex county hospital failed to meet three performance targets, namely those of out-patient waiting lists, over 12 hour trolley waits and percentage of patients seen within two weeks of referral with suspected breast cancer.

Significant improvements have been made in each of these areas which we expect will be confirmed when the findings from the above review are published within the next few weeks.

Waiting Lists

26. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to reduce waiting times and waiting lists in the NHS. [26386]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan sets out the progress this Government want to make over the coming years. The plan, which was announced in July 2000, addresses waiting times for outpatient and inpatient treatment.

By the end of 2005 the maximum in-patient waiting time will be cut from 18 months now to six months and the maximum out-patient waiting time will be cut from over six months now to three months. Urgent cases will continue to be treated much faster.

Our objective is to reduce the maximum wait for any stage of treatment to three months by the end of 2008. As a result of delivering these policies we expect the average time for an out-patient appointment to fall to five weeks and the average time that patients have been waiting for in-patient treatment to fall from three months to seven weeks.

This Government met their 1997 manifesto commitment to reduce the total number of patients on the in-patient waiting list by 100,000. We achieved this in March 2000 and have maintained it ever since. The NHS is expected to continue to reduce the waiting list in order to make achievement of the maximum waiting times more manageable.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trust managers have been dismissed on grounds of gross misconduct after manipulating waiting list figures. [27255]

Mr. Hutton: The National Audit Office report "Inappropriate adjustments to national health service waiting lists" listed nine trusts where inappropriate adjustments had taken place. In two of these trusts, Salford and Stoke Mandeville, the investigations have reached the disciplinary stage. There have been no trust managers dismissed on grounds of gross misconduct in the other seven cases.

The Department accepts that some of the earlier cases covered in the report were not always handled properly and it accepts in full the recommendations set out the NAO report. In future, any manager found to have deliberately distorted waiting figures will face dismissal on grounds of gross misconduct. This will be supported by a new code of conduct for national health service managers. Anyone who breaches that code of conduct will not be re-employed as a manager—anywhere in the national health service.

Health Inequalities

27. **Stephen Hesford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to tackle health inequalities; and if he will make a statement. [26387]

Yvette Cooper: We have completed our consultation on delivery of the two national health inequalities targets and we expect to publish an implementation plan this year. We are reviewing policy across Government impacting on health inequalities through our cross-cutting spending review and are taking action through a wide range of national health service activity.

29. **Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made in tackling health inequalities. [26389]

Yvette Cooper: We have completed our consultation on delivery of the national health inequalities targets and we expect to publish an implementation plan this year. We are reviewing policy across Government impacting on health inequalities through our cross-cutting spending review and are taking action through a wide range of national health service activity.

NICE

28. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current programme for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. [26388]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has to date issued 31 sets of technology appraisal guidance and four sets of clinical guidelines, with a further 44 appraisals and 31 clinical and service guidelines in its forward programme. The guidance published so far covers a wide range of disease areas including cancer, mental health, coronary heart disease, diabetes and long term conditions.

Mental Health

30. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on developments in the treatment of mental health patients in the Avon health authority area. [26390]

Ms Blears: Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust have plans in place to progress towards the achievement of the targets set out in the mental health national service framework. The trust is working closely with other local NHS bodies to finalise the outline business case for the £68 million scheme for the modernisation of mental health services in Avon.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the £56 million allocated for high security places for dangerous and severe personality disorder persons in the NHS and for hostel places has so far been spent; and how many NHS places and hostel places have been provided. [10528]

Jacqui Smith: New dangerous and severe personality disorder (DSPD) units at Rampton and Broadmoor will deliver 140 places for dangerous and severe personality disorder persons by 2004. These are complex schemes, involving major innovations both in design, and in the approach to service delivery.

Work has concentrated initially on the Rampton site. To date, there has been capital expenditure of £412,000 at Rampton with a projected spend of £500,000 by year end. This is being committed to meet the costs of early design work, design team fees, and to refurbish accommodation for the DSPD team in Rampton. Work will commence on site in March 2002, with completion due in June 2003, and the expenditure of capital has been profiled to achieve this output. The unit is planned to open in the autumn of 2003. Work on the unit at Broadmoor is at an earlier stage of development, and no capital has been committed. However, it is on target to open in 2004.

Revenue spend on the Rampton and Broadmoor developments is projected to be £0.35 million this year. This will meet staff costs. At Rampton these costs include the salaries for the project director, consultant psychiatrist, nurse manager, consultant psychologist, business manager, security adviser and secretarial staff. There are also running costs for the DSPD team accommodation, and the costs of a one off study tour of Holland and Germany. At Broadmoor these costs include salaries for the project director and consultant psychiatrist.

We have decided that money originally earmarked for community hostel places should be allocated to a range of pilot provision within medium secure units and community settings, in order to provide step down care from high security.

Two units will open in early 2003 with a total of 23 beds for offenders with severe personality disorder, and community teams will be established in three locations to deliver care and treatment to this client group in community settings from 2002–03. The capital allocation of £3.5 million for these schemes will be committed over 2002–03.

Work on both sites is proceeding more slowly than originally anticipated in order to ensure that robust local dialogue takes place in advance of any application for planning permission. It is now estimated that about

£50,000 will be committed this year. This will meet the cost of training events for the new clinical teams, together with travel expenses, plus commissioning a study to look at the development of staff competencies and staff training needs in working with people with DSPD in forensic settings.

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent progress he has made in improving the treatment of mental health patients. [26382]

Jacqui Smith: All of the targets set to be achieved by this date in the National Service Framework for Mental Health have been met. These include almost 500 additional secure beds; over 320 24-hour staffed beds; 170 assertive outreach teams; access to services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year for all those with complex mental health problems; investment to improve the physical environments in psychiatric wards; and guidance issued to ensure the safety, privacy and dignity of mental health patients.

Funding Formula

31. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to revise the funding formula for the allocation of resources to health authorities in England and Wales. [26391]

Mr. Hutton: A wide ranging review of the weighted capitation formula used to allocate resources to health authorities and primary care trusts in England is currently taking place. A key criterion of the new formula will be to contribute to the reduction of avoidable health inequalities. The intention is that, following the review, the new formula will be ready for 2003–04 allocations.

Issues relating to a review of the funding formula for resource allocation in Wales, are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Migraine

32. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the treatment of migrainous headaches and migraine. [26392]

Mr. Hutton: We would expect that patients suffering from migrainous headaches and migraine would normally be treated by their general practitioner in the first instance. If this failed to resolve the problem then patients could be referred to a consultant neurologist for further investigation and tests.

The National Research Register is a database of on-going and recently completed research projects funded by, or of interest to, the United Kingdom's national health service. The current issue, Issue 4, 2001, shows that there are 17 on-going projects looking at migraine with another 56 recently completed.

Overseas Treatment

33. **Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he is making on the provision of treatment for NHS patients overseas. [26393]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to contract, East Kent health authority plan to send 18 patients to France for treatment before the end of January and up to 80 in total by the end of March. West Sussex/East Surrey and Portsmouth HAs are largely concentrating on potential German providers; subject to agreements on contracts they will send a number of patients to Germany in February and March. In total it is hoped that around 200 or more patients will travel to France and Germany for treatment during the pilot period. Initial guidance to the national health service will be published shortly.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people from *(a)* East Kent, *(b)* Portsmouth, *(c)* West Sussex/East Surrey and *(d)* other areas of England were sent to other European countries for health treatment between (i) 1 January and 31 December 2001 and (ii) 1 January and 30 January 2002; if he will make a statement on the comparative costs of such treatments compared with the NHS in England, taking into account travel costs; and if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the three test-bed pilot schemes for overseas treatments. [26913]

Mr. Hutton: No patients from East Kent, Portsmouth or West Sussex/East Surrey were sent to other European countries for treatment in 2001. Subject to contract, East Kent plan to send 18 patients to France for treatment before the end of January. Portsmouth plan to send one patient to France during the same period. West Sussex/East Surrey will commence sending patients overseas in February. Portsmouth will send further patients overseas in February and March.

Direct comparisons of the costs of overseas treatment and national health service costs are not straightforward; for example, prices so far for hip and knee replacements include intensive rehabilitation which would not be included in standard NHS reference costs. In general the prices agreed so far for treatment overseas are in excess of NHS average reference costs but comparable to those in the United Kingdom private sector. However, we would expect better prices if and when we commit to larger volumes of patients travelling overseas to individual hospitals.

The test bed exercise continues until the end of the financial year. It is therefore too early to draw any firm conclusions.

Norfolk and Norwich Hospital

34. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve physical access to the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital; and if he will make a statement. [26394]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service has spent over £4 million on improving the road to the new hospital and has deposited an additional £1 million for improvements to be carried out.

The Highways Agency has confirmed it cannot approve proposals for an access road from the A47 to the new Norfolk and Norwich university hospital on the grounds of safety.

Norfolk county council is considering other options for a second access road to the hospital site. The hospital trust continues to support any proposals for additional access provided such access is safe.

Consultants' Contracts

35. **Paul Farrelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he is making in his negotiations with hospital consultants on their new NHS contracts, with particular reference to the proposed seven-year rule; and if he will make a statement. [26395]

Mr. Hutton: Our proposals for the new consultant contract, published in February 2001, incorporated improved remuneration and incentives for consultants within a more robust framework of contractual duties and responsibilities, and envisaged that for an initial period, perhaps of seven years, the terms of the contract would prevent newly appointed consultants engaging in similar work outside the national health service.

These proposals, alongside the British Medical Association's own proposals, form the basis of continuing negotiations.

Global Warming

36. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what potential new diseases he has identified in the United Kingdom as a result of global warming. [26396]

Yvette Cooper: The review "Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK" was published for comment in 2001. This review is currently being edited and the final report will be published during the next few months. It was prepared by an expert group and focused on a range of impacts. These included the possible increase in local outbreaks of malaria and in diseases associated with ticks. The full report is available on the Department's website http://www.doh.gov.uk/hef/airpol/airpolh.htm.

Care Homes

37. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the change in the number of care home places since 1996. [26397]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the number of residential places and nursing beds in care homes in England for each year since 1996. The number of places/beds peaked in 1998 at 553,500, an increase of 8 per cent. from 1996. Since then, the total number of places/beds has fallen to 528,000. However, this is still 3 per cent. higher than the 1996 level.

Further information on places and beds can be found in the Statistical Bulletin, "Community Care Statistics 2001: Residential Personal Social Services for Adults, England". A copy of the publication is in the Library.

Residential places and registered nursing beds, 1996 to 2001

England *Rounded numbers*

As at 31 March	*Residential places in residential care homes*[1]	*Registered nursing beds*[2] *in nursing homes*[3]	*Total care places*
1996[4]	323,000	190,600	513,600
1997[4]	338,100	196,300	534,400
1998	347,900	205,600	553,500
1999	344,000	202,200	546,200
2000	345,900	193,300	539,200
2001	341,200	186,800	528,000

[1] Includes residential places in dual registered homes

[2] Includes nursing places in dual registered homes

[3] Nursing homes are defined as general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

[4] Information in 1996 and 1997 refers to the period 1 October to 31 March for registered nursing beds.

Source:

Department of Health annual returns

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of support funding has been given to care home owners to enable them to meet the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2001; what level of funding will be available for the continuing adjustments; and if he will make a statement. [7991]

Jacqui Smith: The resources provided for personal social services are increasing by, on average 3.4 per cent. per annum in real terms over the next three years. We expect home owners will cover the costs of meeting the standards through the fees they charge. Local authorities are funded to meet these additional costs. The Government, through the agreement between the statutory and independent social care, health care and housing sectors "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care" (paragraph 6.2), issued in October 2001, made it clear that service commissioners should not set contract prices for care places mechanistically. We expect them to have regard to providers' costs and efficiencies and planned outcomes for service users.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available in the Hillingdon and Harrow health authority in the care home sector in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [27267]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the number of places in residential care homes and registered beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics in the areas covered by Hillingdon health authority and the Brent and Harrow health authority area between 1997 and 2001. Information is not separately available for Harrow.

Residential places[1] *and registered nursing beds in the Hillingdon and brent and Harrow area*[2] *between 1997 and 2001*

Number

At 31 March	*Places in residential care homes*	*Registered nursing beds in nursing homes*[3,4]	*Total places/beds*
(a) 1997	2,577	1,361	3,938
(b) 1998	2,586	1,600	4,186
(c) 1999	2,414	1,778	4,192
(d) 2000	2,539	1,718	4,257
(e) 2001	2,537	1,894	4,431

[1] Excludes places in children's homes.

[2] Information is presented for the area covered by the health authorities of Hillingdon and Brent and Harrow and correspondingly the London boroughs of Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent.

[3] Registered beds in general and mental nursing homes, hospitals and clinics.

[4] Information for registered nursing beds in 1997 relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

Foster Care

38. **Mr. Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he takes to monitor the safety of privately fostered children. [26398]

Jacqui Smith: Once a local authority has been notified of a private fostering arrangement it is required under the Children Act 1989 to be satisfied that the foster parents, household and accommodation are satisfactory and that the welfare of the child is being safeguarded and promoted.

The private fostering arrangement has to be monitored by the local authority, through supervising, regulating and advising the foster carers and parents. The local authority is required to visit at specified intervals and to report on these visits. They have the power to impose requirements, or if there are serious concerns, to prohibit the fostering arrangement.

A chief inspector's letter was issued in 2000 reminding local authorities of their duties for supervising children placed in private foster arrangements.

The chief inspector heads the social service inspectorate, (SSI) a professional division of the Department, and independent of the local authority, voluntary and private sector providers of social services. The SSI is responsible for inspecting local council personal social services provision and its organisation and management in order to promote quality standards, improve effectiveness and efficiency, and ensure the safety and well-being of service users.

Abortion

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authorities which do not offer abortions within 10 weeks. [19455]

Yvette Cooper: All health authorities in England and Wales funded some national health service abortions within 10 weeks gestation of pregnancy in 2000. However, the percentage funded by the NHS varied, and ranged from 26 per cent. in one health authority area to 96 per cent. or more in three health authority areas.

The sexual health and HIV strategy states that services should be developed to provide NHS funded abortions in line with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' clinical guideline "Induced Abortion" and has set a target that from 2005, commissioners should ensure that women who meet the legal requirements have access to abortion within three weeks of the first appointment with the general practitioner or other referring doctor.

Adoption

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his intention to extend the right of adoption to *(a)* unmarried opposite sex couples and *(b)* same sex couples; and if he will make a statement. [19224]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* We are looking thoroughly at the many and complex issues of partnership registration, rights and responsibilities. Adoption will, alongside all other relevant issues, be considered as part of that work.

Under the existing Adoption Act 1976 single people may adopt (regardless of sexual orientation), but only married couples may adopt jointly. It is open for one unmarried partner to adopt a child and for the other to obtain parental responsibility by applying for a residence order in respect of the child. The Adoption and Children Bill makes no change in this area. The Government's intentions will, of course, be subject to the parliamentary consideration of the Bill currently under way.

NHS Professionals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to review the NHS's use of framework agreements as part of the tendering process for NHS professionals. [24419]

Mr. Hutton: London, where the first framework agreement was completed, has been the subject of on-going review in line with the structured and widely recognised project management methodology, PRINCE. An initial evaluation was completed with findings presented to the London Agency Project Board. Further evaluation will take place in six months with good practice shared with others undergoing similar processes.

Revenue Resource Allocations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount in *(a)* real terms and *(b)* percentage terms of the health authority revenue resource allocations announced on 6 December are accounted for by estimated (i) salary increases for (A) pay review body staff and (B) non-pay review body staff, (ii) medical price inflation, (iii) new pension contribution rates, (iv) implementation of planned national service frameworks and (v) special arrangements for speeding up heart operations. [24328]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Health authority revenue allocations for 2002–03 include funding to meet increases in pay, prices and other pressures faced by all health authorities, and to implement national service frameworks, but these are not separately identified within allocations.

A small number of initiatives, including action to speed up heart operations and extend choice for those who wait longest for heart surgery, will be funded through central budgets. Details will be announced later.

Prosthetics

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research is being carried out into prosthetics practice in the UK; [26586]

(2) what research is being carried out into trans-femoral socket and limb prescription, design and delivery. [26584]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is not currently funding any research in these two areas.

However, the Department does provide support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the national health service. Details of on-going and recently completed research projects funded by, or of interest to, the NHS are available on the National Research Register at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to make state-of-the-art prosthetics available on the NHS to those who want them; [26611]

(2) what plans he has to make state-of-the-art prosthetics available on the NHS. [26590]

Jacqui Smith: The national health service already has available to it, via contracts negotiated by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, the widest possible range of prosthetic limb components available. The decision as to which type of prosthesis an individual patient receives is one that should be decided at a local level taking into account an individual's clinical circumstances.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the NHS prosthetics expenditure in the last financial year for which records are available per amputee; and what proportion of this expenditure was used on *(a)* administration, *(b)* prosthetics staff and *(c)* prosthetics. [26587]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect information on the financial expenditure on each individual amputee. Expenditure is decided at a local health authority and national health service trust level.

The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency estimate that some £23 million including value added tax was spent on prosthetic service contracts and a further £13 million including VAT was spent on prosthetic limb hardware and associated items during 1999–2000.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on the UK prosthetics industry of the emigration of qualified prosthetics professionals and technicians. [26589]

Jacqui Smith: There has been no report of a significant impact on the United Kingdom prosthetic industry due to the emigration of qualified prosthetic professionals and technicians.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training is given to orthopaedic surgeons on prosthetics and orthotics, with specific reference to the functional implications of the various levels of amputation and residual limb lengths. [26594]

Jacqui Smith: The Royal College of Surgeons is the body responsible for the training of medical students on surgery. The majority of amputations are carried out by vascular and general surgeons, and relatively few are undertaken by orthopaedic surgeons. Orthopaedic surgeons receive training on amputations and prosthetics at various stages of the medical curriculum, such as:

Medical students receive lectures and tutorials on general surgery, and are taken to a limb fitting centre.

Basic surgical trainees will receive training from mainly vascular surgeons on the practical skills of "common amputations".

Specialist Registrars receive higher surgical training on amputation and rehabilitation, and on prosthetics and orthotics.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department has given to disablement service centres for the prescription and delivery of prosthetics. [26591]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not issued any guidelines to disablement services centres for the prescription and delivery of prosthetics. Prescriptions and delivery criteria are decided at a local level to take account of an individual patient's clinical need.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of funding for prosthetics in each of the last five financial years for which records are available; and what level is anticipated for the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial years. [26588]

Jacqui Smith: The level of funding on prosthetic services is not separately identified in health authority financial baseline allocations. But on 9 January 2001 we announced that funding for providing silicone cosmesis to prosthetic limb users was to be made available totalling £4 million over the next three years. The funding started in April 2001 with £0.5 million for 2001–02, £1.5 million for 2002–03 and £2 million for 2003–04. This was an addition to the baseline allocation.

The local health authority will decide the level of funding an individual disablement service centre receives. We would not expect the level of funding a DSC receives next financial year to be any less than invested this financial year.

Amputees

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many amputees there are in England. [26593]

Jacqui Smith: The latest collection of data from the year 1998–99 reported that there were 51,498 patients with amputations in contact with their national health service limb centre in England.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines have been issued on the use of ischial containment sockets for amputees. [26585]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not issued any central guidelines for the issue of ischial containment sockets. Ischial containment sockets for amputees are issued on the basis of a clinical decision made by the multi-professional team at a national health service trust.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many amputations have been carried out in each of the last five years for which records exist, as a result of necrotising fasciitis. [26592]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27300]

Mr. Hutton: The figures requested are in the table.

£

Year	*Amount*
1997–98	61,415.25
1998–99	66,897.29
1999–2000	48,148.81
2000–01	56,831.99

The Department of Health now has a Directorate of Counter Fraud Services staffed by professionally trained and accredited counter fraud specialists.

Children at Risk

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent steps have been taken to ensure co-ordination between local authorities' social and educational services with regard to supporting children at risk; [27358]

(2) what measures the Government are taking to protect children identified as being at risk. [27240]

Jacqui Smith: The safeguarding of children at risk is a high priority for us. That is why over the last few years we have introduced new legislation, new guidance, new structures and new policy initiatives to make children safer and to ensure that there is a proper focus on children at the very heart of Government. These measures include:

> The Care Standards Act 2000 to improve the inspection and regulation of children's care services, and the Protection of Children Act 1999 which makes it much more difficult for unsuitable people to work with children;
>
> Revised core inter-agency child protection guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children (1999) and the new Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families (2000);
>
> New guidance focusing on Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution (2000) and a National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation (2001);
>
> A Minister for Young People—my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchin (Mr. Denham)—and a new Cabinet Committee focusing on Children and Young People's issues;
>
> The first ever national Children's Rights Director for England—Roger Morgan—to act as a powerful champion for some of the most vulnerable children in our country;
>
> The establishment of the Children and Young People's Unit, which is responsible for ensuring the coherence of Government polices that affect all children and young people under 19;
>
> Radical new initiatives such as the £885 million Quality Protects programme, Sure Start and Connexions.

The child protection guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children (1999) and the new Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families (2000) both give specific guidance on how education and social services departments should work together to support children in need.

Co-ordination of the planning and delivery of services by education and social services departments is a key element of the Government's five year £885 Quality Protects programme, which is improving the management and delivery of children's services. The Government have published Objectives for Children's Social Services. The Department's public service agreement contains targets including improving the educational outcomes of children in need and children looked after. Local authorities have to produce annual QP management action plans (MAPs) on how they are moving towards the achievement of these objectives. The national overview report of local authority's QP MAPs published in October 2001 reported in relation to services for children in need

> " . . . in general there is plenty of evidence of good collaboration between education and social services; and as these partnerships develop the focus of their work is beginning to broaden"

and

> "closer partnerships in a range of contexts are beginning to draw social work expertise and the needs of vulnerable children onto agendas which in the past might have been seen as 'purely educational'".

In October 2000, the Department of Health and Department of Education and Employment jointly issued "Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care". The national overview report shows that for looked after children

> "MAPS this year included considerable evidence of joint working between education and social work staff, designed to support the education of looked after children."

In "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" issued in March 2001, the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Employment, agreed to further work together to build on our special education needs (SEN) programme of action. The recently published revised special education needs code of practice, gives guidance on how social services and education departments should jointly plan and meet the needs of children with SEN. The SEN Toolkit issued with the code of practice, included a section on the role of social services. This was sent to directors of education and social services. Work has also begun on the commitment in "Valuing People" to find out more about the numbers, characteristics and outcomes of disabled children in residential schools and other residential placements, who are known to be particularly vulnerable to abuse.

Learning disability partnerships boards have been set up in local authority areas to oversee and advise on the implementation of the adult aspects of "Valuing People". Membership should include representation from a range of statutory sector interests, including social services and education. Guidance issued to local councils in August said that one member should be appointed to be a champion for child/adult transition issues. The guidance adds that boards will need to develop effective links with other agencies whose responsibilities are relevant to implementing valuing people; these will include Connexions partnerships, local learning partnerships, further education colleges, and education institutions.

Primary Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the levels of investment in primary care research and development have been in each year since 1997. [27359]

Jacqui Smith: The Department's estimated expenditure on primary care research and development for the years since 1997 are:

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	31.1
1997–98	30.0
1998–99	31.3
1999–2000	39.0
2000–01	38.4

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been cancelled in each of the last four quarters. [27360]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of operations cancelled, by region and health authority, for the time periods requested, are available in the Library.

Data are collected on the number of operations cancelled at the last minute. The latest published figures are for Quarter 1 2001–02.

Operations cancelled at the last minute are those cancelled by the hospital, for non-medical reasons, on or after the day the patient was due to be admitted.

Domiciliary Oxygen Therapy Service

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS was of *(a)* concentrators and *(b)* cylinder oxygen as part of the Domiciliary Oxygen Therapy Service in the last year for which figures are available. [27242]

Jacqui Smith: The figures requested are shown in the table.

Cost of Domiciliary Oxygen Therapy Service, England, 2000–01

	£ million
Payments to suppliers of oxygen concentrators	14.3
Net ingredient cost of oxygen supplied in cylinders, and oxygen masks[1]	9.6
Fees paid to pharmacies for the collection and delivery of cylinders and provision of associated equipment	14.4

[1] Net ingredient cost (NIC) refers to the headline reimbursement cost of the drug before the deduction of discount and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to improve the provision of oxygen through the Domiciliary Oxygen Therapy Service. [27241]

Jacqui Smith: We will be considering options shortly.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients received domiciliary oxygen supply services in each year since 1992. [27243]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Invalid Vehicles

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many invalid vehicles provided under the invalid vehicle scheme up to 1976 were on the road in each of the last five years. [27251]

Jacqui Smith: The number of vehicles provided under the invalid vehicle scheme at the end of each of the last five years was as follows:

Year	*Total fleet size*
1996–97	1,215
1997–98	1,054
1998–99	951
1999–2000	754
2000–01	629

Everyone leaving the invalid vehicle scheme will be eligible to receive indefinitely the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance, currently set at £38.65 a week rising to £39.30 from April 2002. They may choose to use this, for example, to obtain a motorised scooter or a four wheeled car specially adapted to each driver's needs through the motability scheme. Help with driving lessons is available. Technical officers from the service have visited each driver to discuss his or her future needs and to help decide what option to take.

National At-Risk Register

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to introduce a national at-risk register to co-ordinate those lists which exist at a local level. [27239]

Jacqui Smith: A central register is maintained for each area covered by a social services department. The register lists all the children resident in the area (including those who have been placed there by another local authority or agency) who are considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm, and for whom there is a child protection plan.

"Working Together to Safeguard Children" implemented better ways of making sure these registers link up together more effectively when a child moves from place to place. Since the publication of "Working Together" in December 1999, it has been the case that if a child and family have moved permanently to another local authority area, the receiving local authority should convene a child protection conference within 15 working days of being notified of the move. Only once this has taken place may de-registration take place in respect of the original local authority's child protection register.

We have no plans at present to introduce a national risk register.

Accident Rates

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the accident rate per 100 persons has been in each of the last available five years. [27363]

Yvette Cooper: The number of in-patient admissions for accidents and rates per 100,000 population is shown in the table.

Hospital episode statistics: Admissions and rates per 100,000 population where the primary diagnosis[1] is "accidents" (ICD10 codes S00-T98) with a relevant cause[2] code (CD10 codes V01-X59, Y40-Y84)

Year	*Admissions*	*Rates per 100,000 population*
2000–01	467,036	934
1999–2000	491,364	988
1998–99	471,297	952
1997–98	480,525	975
1996–97	474,469	967

[1] The primary diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the Hospital Episode Statistics data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

[2] The cause code is a supplementary code which indicates the nature of the condition.

Note:

Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data, except for 1998–99 to 2000–01 which are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics, Department of Health

Wheelchairs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many electrically powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs have been made available in each year since 1997; [27348]

(2) how much the NHS has spent on the provision of electrically-powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs in each year since 1997; [27351]

(3) how many people have utilised NHS vouchers as part-payment for powered wheelchairs in each year since 1997. [27350]

Jacqui Smith: Figures on expenditure on electrically powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs (EPIOCs) are not collected centrally, nor are figures for numbers of vouchers issued separated into manual wheelchairs and EPIOCs.

The table gives the only date available centrally. A number of these figures are incomplete (as annotated):

England	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Number of powered wheelchairs issued	4,464	4,033	3,388	[2]3,279
Number of vouchers issued for wheelchairs	[1]560	[2]5,010	6,305	[2]6,250

[1] Collection of data was not mandatory

[2] Incomplete figure (one return missing)

Mixed Sex Wards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the definition of a mixed sex ward includes those wards which use privacy screens. [27365]

Ms Blears: The term "mixed sex ward" can be used to describe a variety of arrangements. The use of partitioning as a means of dividing wards into bays, which are then used to accommodate either male or female patients, is an acceptable means of protecting patients' privacy and dignity.

However, the use of moveable privacy screens alone is not acceptable, as these provide poor physical separation of facilities. Their use as an adjunct to permanent solutions, such as partitioning, can be helpful in further enhancing a sense of privacy and dignity.

Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the national health service in 1997. This guidance clearly states that any screening in use must be adequate to ensure privacy is maintained, e.g., which will prevent patients being overhead or overseen by others, where this is not desirable.

Protecting patients' privacy and dignity is of paramount consideration, irrespective of whether the ward is single-sex or accommodates both male and female patients in appropriately designated bays.

Hillingdon and Harrow Health Authority

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for in-patient treatment in the Hillingdon and Harrow health authority on 1 January in each year from 1997 to 2002. [27268]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is provided in the table.

Number of patients waiting for in-patient treatment for Hillingdon and Brent and Harrow health authorities—December 1996 to November 2001

	Hillingdon HA	*Brent and Harrow HA*
December 1996	5,138	10,735
December 1997	5,789	11,817
December 1998	4,689	10,122
December 1999	4,311	9,108
December 2000	3,897	8,462
November 2001[1]	4,215	8,046

[1] November indicates monthly data

Note:

Data are quarterly

CFS/ME

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the report to the Chief Medical Officer on the most effective forms of treatment and management for CFS/ME will be published; [27207]

(2) what plans he has to provide better access to medical support for ME sufferers; [27210]

(3) what his estimate is of the total number of ME sufferers in the United Kingdom; [27211]

(4) how many ME clinics there are in the United Kingdom; and where they are located; [27208]

(5) what support his Department is giving to research into ME. [27209]

Jacqui Smith: The independent chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) working group's report was published on 11 January 2002 and can be downloaded from http://www.doh. gov.uk/cmo/cfsmereport/index.htm.

The report of the independent CFS/ME working group has identified CFS/ME as a specific illness. The report makes a number of recommendations around recognition and definition of the illness: treatment and care; health service planning; education and awareness; and research. We shall be bringing this report to the attention of CEs of health authorities, trusts, and primary care trusts so that they can consider its implications when commissioning services.

The Department has commissioned research into the diagnosis and treatment of CFS/ME and details are available on the National Research Register which can be accessed via the Department's research and development website—www.doh.gov.uk/research. The Department has asked the Medical Research Council to develop a broad strategy for advancing further biomedical and health services research on CFS/ME.

The information on the number of ME sufferers in the United Kingdom is not collected centrally. However, the CFS/ME working group report suggests that each strategic health authority should make provision for secondary and tertiary care for people with CFS/ME, based on an estimated annual prevalence rate of approximately 4,000 cases per million population, in the absence of more refined data.

ME is mainly managed in primary care. The range of symptoms and other conditions associated with it should be investigated and treated by the most appropriate primary, community or secondary care service. General practitioners should usually be able to manage most cases in the community setting, but should be able to refer patients for specialist opinion and advice where appropriate. It is the responsibility of local health authorities to commission services for their local populations including those suffering from CFS/ME. Information on the number of specialist ME clinics in the United Kingdom is not available centrally.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department has taken to increase public knowledge and awareness of ME; [28204]

(2) what arrangements exist between the NHS and health services abroad to exchange information about ME; [28290]

(3) what data are collated by the NHS on the *(a)* prevalence and *(b)* treatment of ME; [28203]

(4) if he will make a statement about Government-sponsored research into the *(a)* causes of and *(b)* potential cures for ME; [28200]

(5) if he will make it his policy to support research into a possible diagnostic test for ME; [28201]

(6) what assessment he has made of the numbers of *(a)* adults and *(b)* children suffering from ME in each of the last 10 years; [28199]

(7) what steps he is taking to ensure that GPs and consultants are advised of new developments in the *(a)* diagnosis and *(b)* treatment of patients with ME. [28202]

Jacqui Smith: The chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) independent working group's report has identified CFS/ME as a specific illness. The report was published on 11 January and has been placed on the Chief Medical Officer's website so that it can be accessed by all interested parties including general practitioners and consultants. It is hoped that the report and the summary for clinicians will result in improved awareness and understanding of this condition.

The report makes a number of recommendations around recognition and definition of the illness: treatment and care; health service planning; education and awareness; and research. We shall be bringing this report to the attention of chief executives of health authorities, national health service trusts and primary care trusts so that they can consider its implications when commissioning services.

The Department has commissioned research into the diagnosis and treatment of CFS/ME and details are available on the National Research Register which can be accessed via the Department's research and development website—www.doh.gov.uk/research. The Department has asked the Medical Research Council to develop a broad strategy for advancing further biomedical and health services research on CFS/ME.

The information on the number of ME sufferers in the United Kingdom is not collected centrally. However, the CFS/ME independent working group report suggests that each strategic health authority should make provision for secondary and tertiary care for people with CFS/ME, based on an estimated annual prevalence rate of approximately 4,000 cases per million population in the absence of more refined data. This equates to a population prevalence of at least 0.2 per cent.-0.4 per cent. If children only are considered the figure is lower at 0.07 per cent.

We are not aware of any formal arrangements for exchanges between the NHS and health services abroad on CFS/ME. The only exchanges would be through ad hoc meetings and professional networks of relevant experts.

Regarding research into a possible diagnostic test for CFS/ME, we have asked the Medical Research Council to develop a broad strategy for advancing further biomedical and health services research on CFS/ME.

Public-Private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which companies that have been involved, in public-private partnerships with his Departments have become insolvent since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [27601]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not collected centrally about the status of individual companies involved in public-private partnerships. Individual national health trusts are responsible for managing contracts with their private sector partner.

Private finance initiative contracts deal comprehensively with the possibility of early termination due to contractor default, including through insolvency, in order to protect the public interest.

Respiratory Disease

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the BMA and the British Thoracic Society concerning the number of respiratory specialists needed in the NHS. [27460]

Mr. Hutton: We have not had any recent discussions with the British Medical Association and the British Thoracic Society concerning the number of respiratory specialists needed in the national health service.

West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures were used to appoint the chief executive of the West Midlands South strategic health authority; and if he will make a statement. [28193]

Yvette Cooper: The appointment of the chief executive designate of the Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire health authority, in common with that for all the chief executives designate of the other health authorities, was through a process of open competition. The chief executive posts were advertised nationally. The appointment process included the national health service chief executive, regional commissioners from the NHS appointments commission, the directors of health and social care in the Department, patients representatives and the health authority chairs designate. Chief executives will be formally appointed to health authorities on the basis of their franchise plans following the establishment of the new health authorities in April.

Morning-after Pill

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many schools the morning-after pill is available; and whether the joint Department for Education and Employment/Department of Health guidance "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs: A Good Practice Guide" (HMSO, 1996) applies to its supply in schools. [28211]

Yvette Cooper: Information on the number of schools with on-site health service providing emergency contraception to pupils is not collected centrally. The circular (14/96) and accompanying good practice guide, "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs", jointly issued by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department, is written for school teaching staff, local education authorities and governing bodies. It is not applicable to health professionals who provide prescription only medicines to under 16s within an agreed legal framework and arrangements set out in patient group directions. There are no circumstances in which teachers supply emergency contraception.

Female GPs (Pensions)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on pension rights for female GPs. [25585]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The pension rights for female general practitioners are the same as those for male GPs, apart from the treatment of widows' and widowers' benefits. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the former Member for North Norfolk on 13 January 1999, *Official Report*, column 212W.

Redwood Hospital

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he agreed a price for the PPP deal at Redwood hospital between the Surrey and Sussex NHS Trust and BUPA; if a final agreement had been signed off prior to his announcement of the deal on 4 December 2001; what the price is per patient of treatment in the PPP deal at Redwood hospital; and what estimate he has made of the number of nurses who will need to be recruited to increase the capacity at the Redhill/Redwood hospital site following the BUPA deal. [27846]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* On 4 December 2001 we announced that we are in discussion over a proposal for the BUPA Redwood facility to become a diagnostic and treatment centre, treating national health service patients. Discussions of a range of detailed issues—including prices and staffing issues—are continuing. Our aim is to secure high quality services for patients and value for money. A final agreement will not be signed until discussions are satisfactorily concluded.

Stroke Services

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which NHS trusts employ *(a)* stroke nurse consultants and *(b)* stroke liaison nurses; [28051]

(2) how many NHS Trusts have in place a multi-disciplinary programme of secondary prevention and rehabilitation for those who have suffered strokes; [28052]

(3) which stroke rehabilitation units admit people under the age of 55 years. [28050]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. However, the National Service Framework for Older People includes a standard for stroke. The service model for integrated stroke services and the milestones for action apply equally to all stroke patients, irrespective of age.

It is the role of health authorities, in partnership with primary care groups and trusts, to decide what services to provide for their populations including the employment of stroke nurses. They are best placed to understand local health needs and commission services to meet them.

The NSF will need to cover or link to prevention, acute care, rehabilitation and long-term support for stroke patients and their carers. April 2002 is the milestone for every general hospital which cares for people with stroke to have plans to introduce a specialised stroke service from 2004.

Southend General Hospital

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the closure of the cancer unit at Southend General Hospital is under consideration; and which body or person has the responsibility for determining the minimum catchment area size of such units. [28011]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The closure of the cancer unit at Southend hospital national health service trust is not under consideration. The body which determines the minimum catchment area of cancer networks is the relevant regional office of the Department. Cancer networks in the eastern region were last reviewed in 1999. The south Essex cancer network was endorsed by NHS executive eastern despite the fact it falls below the Calman-Hine recommendation that cancer networks should serve a minimum population of 1 million. Current cancer services in the south Essex cancer network serves a population of approximately 680,000.

Barium Enemas

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what performance targets he has set for the waiting time for a barium enema. [28305]

Yvette Cooper: We have acknowledged the importance of diagnostic procedures, and are encouraging hospitals to streamline their services so that tests are carried out, and a diagnosis made, as quickly as possible.

There are no specific performance targets set for the waiting time for a barium enema. However, where this diagnostic procedure is to be used to confirm or exclude a diagnosis of bowel cancer, specific targets have been set. From July 2000, a two week out-patient waiting time standard has been introduced for urgent general practitioner referrals of patients with suspected bowel cancer.

The length of time that a patient might have to wait for any diagnostic procedure is dependent on their clinical condition with priority given to urgent cases.

Antipsychotic Medicines

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made as to the opinion of psychiatrists on the efficacy of atypical antipsychotic medicines. [13783]

Jacqui Smith: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) is the United Kingdom Government agency responsible for ensuring that all medicines on the UK market are safe, effective and of suitable quality. Any new drug substance which has not been marketed before in the UK will be assessed by the MCA's independent advisory committee—the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM). The CSM has psychiatrists among its membership and can also bring in psychiatric expertise if necessary on an ad hoc basis. The CSM assesses medicines purely on the basis of safety versus efficacy and does not consider cost effectiveness.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has been asked to provide guidance concerning the clinical and cost effectiveness of atypical antipsychotics in the treatment of schizophrenia. The process of drawing up this guidance involves a detailed appraisal of the available literature followed by drafting of the guidance. The latter activity will include a range of expertise, including psychiatric.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27981]

Mr. MacShane: The cost of theft from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK over the last four years can be broken down into:

1998: £470

1999: £4,400

2000: £5,200

2001: £9,630.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28402]

Mr. Straw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have produced no regulatory impact assessments since August 2001. For further information, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

Religious Persecution

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what training is available in his Department in the recognition of religious persecution. [28644]

Peter Hain: Promotion of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion, is at the heart of our foreign policy. We condemn instances where individuals are persecuted because of their faith or belief, wherever they happen and whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

Our approach is to treat religious freedom as an integral part of our foreign policy. Protecting and promoting freedom of religion is most effective when it is done in the context of the promotion and protection of other human rights. So we emphasise that human rights are everyone's business. That is why we have made human rights an essential element of training for all policy officers, including ambassadors.

We work closely with Amnesty International and other NGOs in designing and running our Human Rights courses. Courses are open to members of other Government Departments, including the Home Office, to attend.

In addition all decision-makers in the Joint Entry Clearance Unit and staff serving overseas as Entry Clearance Officers or Managers or Consular Officers receive training on the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1999 and the European Convention on Human Rights, which includes freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

The FCO also offers its staff a wide-ranging programme of training on inclusion and diversity issues. Our Managing Inclusion course is core training for all grades, both at home and overseas. Regional diversity training is also available for staff engaged locally overseas.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what resources are available in his Department to monitor human rights violations of Christians; [28643]

(2) what responsibility UK embassies have been given to monitor religious freedom in the host country. [28607]

Peter Hain: Promotion of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion, is at the heart of our foreign policy. We condemn instances where individuals are persecuted because of their faith or belief, wherever they happen and whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

The Human Rights Policy Department (HRPD) is the FCO's central point of advice and expertise on human rights, including freedom of religion. But we emphasise that human rights are everyone's business. Staff at our posts and on geographical desks in London monitor human rights abuses overseas, including persecution of Christians. Human rights is an essential element of training for policy staff, including ambassadors and staff serving overseas as entry clearance officers or managers.

The FCO, in a number of ways, supports practical projects promoting human rights on the ground, including through the Human Rights Project Fund (HRPF). Since its inception in April 1998, the fund has supported over 400 projects and allocated more than £15 million in some 90 countries around the world. Its budget for financial year 2001–02 has been increased to £6.8 million.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of Christians persecuted across the world in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [28608]

Peter Hain: Promotion of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion, is at the heart of our foreign policy. We condemn instances where individuals are persecuted because of their faith or belief, wherever they happen and whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

Staff at our posts and on geographical desks in London monitor human rights abuses overseas, including persecution of Christians. But the FCO does not collate figures on the number of Christians persecuted across the world, not least because of the difficulty in defining this category.

Collecting this information for this PQ would represent a disproportionate cost.

UK Prisoners Abroad

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK citizens are in prisons outside the United Kingdom. [28600]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 306W.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to extend financial assistance to families visiting relatives in prison abroad. [28514]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO has no plans to extend financial assistance to families visiting relatives in prison abroad. However, consular staff overseas can and do help to arrange family visits to prisoners detained abroad.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings there have been with Argentine officials over the future of the Falkland Islands. [28345]

Mr. MacShane: The British Government have held no recent meetings with Argentina about the future status of the islands. We remain committed to the Falkland islanders' right to determine their own future and will not consider a change in the status of the islands unless they wish it. In all our dealings with Argentina we are clear that sovereignty over the Falklands is not open to negotiation.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. [28347]

Mr. MacShane: The Falkland Islands are British. There will be no change in the status of the islands unless that is the wish of the islands themselves.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the circumstances are under which an Argentine national is able to settle on the Falkland Islands. [28346]

Mr. MacShane: The grant of permission to reside in the Falkland Islands is governed by the Falkland Islands' Immigration Ordinance 1999 and all persons, including British citizens, (who do not have Falkland Islands' status), require such permission to be able lawfully to reside in the Falkland Islands. The ordinance does not impose any special restrictions on the residence of Argentine citizens.

Colombia

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to support the full implementation of the UN recommendations on human rights to the Colombian Government before the next session of the United Nations Commission for Human Rights in March; and if he will make a statement. [29225]

Mr. MacShane: We have a regular, continuing dialogue with the Colombian Government about the human rights situation in Colombia, including the implementation of UN recommendations. I had comprehensive discussions about human rights during my visit to Colombia in October last year. The Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain), plans to chair the regular NGO forum prior to the commission on Human Rights (CHR). NGOs will be invited to discuss FCO priorities, including Colombia, ahead of the CHR meeting in Geneva.

We strongly support the work of the UN in Colombia. Since March 2000, we have already given more than £250,000 to support the work of the UN Human Rights Office (UNHRO) there, which helped the UN to open a new office in Cali at the end of last year, something which has been particularly welcomed by NGOs. I am pleased to announce today that we have committed a further £120,000 to the UNHRO in Colombia so that it can continue its good work.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the Government will ensure that aid provided through the recently agreed EU aid package in support of the Colombian peace process is not diverted to illegally armed people; and if he will make a statement. [29226]

Mr. MacShane: The UK, like other EU member states, has stressed to the European Commission in Brussels that EU technical assistance to Colombia must be transparent and be channelled where possible through reputable international and local NGOs working in Colombia. British embassy officials have made the same point to Commission representatives in Bogotá. We particularly welcome the fact that the Commission has recently appointed a representative to Barrancabermeja to oversee the delivery of EU aid to the Magdalena Medio region.

Indonesia

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making about the reported persecution of Christians in Indonesia. [28338]

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to encourage a reduction in the level of sectarian violence in Indonesia. [28924]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK's message to the Indonesian Government is clear and consistent: a long-term solution to regional conflicts can be achieved only through political negotiation and consultation with the people. Together with our European partners we are in regular, top-level dialogue with the Indonesian Government, and urge them to maintain law and order and promote reconciliation in areas of conflict. The most recent direct contact was when our chargé d'affaires in Jakarta called on Manuel Kaisiepo, the Minister for Eastern Indonesia, on 29 November 2001. I myself raised the issue with Vice-President Haz during my visit to Jakarta last August.

Iraq

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the last United Nations weapons inspections in Iraq were made; and what assessment he has made of whether Iraq has acquired weapons of mass destruction. [28893]

Mr. Bradshaw: The last UN inspection team left Iraq on 13 December 1998. There have been no independent weapons inspections since then.

In the absence of any independent inspections, we cannot make any categorical assessment of current Iraqi capabilities. We do, however, judge that since 1999 Iraq has pressed ahead with its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programmes.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his office last had communications with the Libyan authorities concerning the situation in Zimbabwe. [29290]

Mr. Straw: My Department has not discussed the situation in Zimbabwe with the Libyan authorities.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last spoke to the Commonwealth Secretary-General concerning the situation in Zimbabwe. [29288]

Mr. Straw: I last discussed Zimbabwe with the Commonwealth Secretary General at the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meeting on 20 December. I expect to discuss Zimbabwe with him again in the run-up to the next CMAG meeting on 30 January.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last spoke to the Zimbabwean High Commissioner concerning the situation in that country. [29291]

Mr. Straw: I have not formally spoken to the Zimbabwean High Commissioner about the situation in his country.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the action the *(a)* UK, *(b)* Commonwealth, *(c)* EU and *(d)* United Nations are taking to ensure free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. [29324]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 11 January, the EU insisted on invitations to, and accreditation of, international election observers at least six weeks before Zimbabwe's 9 March Presidential election. We are discussing with our European Union partners and others what norms and standards to adopt for judging the electoral process in Zimbabwe.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group said on 20 December 2001 that it expects Commonwealth election observers to be invited and accredited well before the election.

On 15 January, the UN Secretary General called for free and fair elections monitored by the international community.

US/UK Agreements

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what his policy is in respect of the sharing with the US Government of intercept material obtained by GCHQ; and in what circumstances it is deemed inappropriate to share such information for reasons of national security; [28629]

(2) if he will make a statement on the status and importance of the UK/USA Agreement 1948. [28628]

Mr. Straw: It has been the long-standing practice of this and previous Governments not to comment on the detail of confidential arrangements which might exist between the UK and the US for the UK's national security.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many extant US/UK agreements there are the existence of which has not been made public; and if he will make a statement. [28741]

Mr. Straw: All treaties between the UK and US are published and registered with the UN Secretary General. There are however numerous other forms of agreement between the UK and the US, where there is no obligation to publish. Many of these will be in the public domain. The information needed to compile a list of these is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

China and Tibet

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the numbers of political prisoners in *(a)* Tibet and *(b)* China. [28325]

Mr. MacShane: According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch there is a lack of conclusive independent information on the numbers concerned. Unofficial estimates of those imprisoned for political beliefs and activities are that they may number in the thousands, with many more in administrative detention. The detention of democracy activists and the widespread use of administrative detention are among the central concerns we raise with the Chinese authorities.

GCHQ

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is in respect of the monitoring by GCHQ of communications originating and terminating within the UK. [28635]

Mr. Straw: GCHQ may monitor communications originating and terminating within the UK only in accordance with law, and in particular with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the purpose of Morwenstow station: and how many *(a)* US and *(b)* UK personnel are based there. [28584]

Mr. Straw: GCHQ Bude, previously known as the Composite Signals Organisation Station at Morwenstow, employs approximately 200 people and provides intelligence support serving the interest of the UK and its allies. It is long standing policy not to provide details about the operations carried out at Bude or to provide a detailed breakdown of staffing.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by his Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29419]

Mr. Straw: We do not keep separate records of answers that refer to the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. To answer this question would entail checking every answer from FCO Ministers since 1994, which could only be done at disproportionate cost.

The Public Administration Committee's Fourth Report on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions published on 10 November 1999 (HC 821) includes at Memorandum 7 a list of answers provided by the FCO during Parliamentary Session 1997 to 1998 which referred to the Code of Practice. None referred to Exemption 13 of the Code. The Committee's Fourth Report published on 13 December 2000 (HC 61) lists answers provided for the 1998 to 1999 Session. Five questions answered by the FCO refer to Exemption 13. (Memorandum 6.)

The Committee has not yet published a report covering the 1999 to 2000 Session. Two answers from the FCO in that Session referred to Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice.

International Drug Trade

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of developments since September in Afghanistan on the international drug trade. [28632]

Mr. Bradshaw: To date, we have not detected a clear impact on the drugs trade in the UK or Europe but we continue to monitor events closely.

We and our international partners are committed to working with the Afghanistan's Interim Administration to tackle drugs cultivation in Afghanistan. We welcome the Chairman of the Interim Administration's edict banning involvement in the drugs trade. Drug control is an important aspect of reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Intelligence Sharing

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what circumstances material obtained by interception *(a)* by the UK Government about foreign nationals is passed to the domestic authorities of those foreign nationals and *(b)* by foreign Governments about UK citizens is passed to the UK authorities. [28624]

Mr. Straw: It has long been the policy of this and previous Governments not to comment on intelligence-related arrangements that might exist between the UK and other countries. If any material were identified under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, its dissemination would be strictly controlled by the conditions set out in section 15 of the Act.

Mrs. Blair

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions his Department has provided support for Mrs. Blair during the Prime Minister's official visits abroad in the periods *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* since May 2001. [28627]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, and British embassies and High Commissions around the world, have assisted No. 10 in arranging official programmes for Mrs. Blair whenever she has accompanied the Prime Minister on his official visits overseas. This is in accordance with the Cabinet Office Ministerial Code of July 1997. Mrs. Blair has accompanied the Prime Minister on the following number of occasions:

(a) May 1997 to April 1998: 5

(b) May 1998 to April 1999: 3

(c) May 1999 to April 2000: 5

(d) May 2000 to April 2001: 3

(e) Since May 2001: 3.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26830]

Mr. Straw: The following equipment has been stolen from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK since 1 May 1997:

	Items stolen	*Value (£)*
4 June 1997	Laser jet and monitor screen	600
16 June 1997	Computer CPU	750
16 June 1997	Answerphone	100
27 October 1997	Laptop	2,000
27 May 1998	Video player	150
3 July 1998	CD rom player	150
12 November 1998	Computer mouse	30
4 August 1998	Cannon colour printer	140
6 January 1999	Socket mother board Intel processor Hard disk Video card Internal Modem Card	300
13 May 1999	Laptop	2,000
3 September 1999	Laptop	2,000
4 October 1999	Answerphone	100
10 January 2000	Hard disks on 2 computer stations	400
21 January 2000	Hard drives Ram and CPU Processors on 2 computers	900
28 March 2000	Computer components	500
15 April 2000	Laptop	2,000
17 April 2000	Ram and processors	300
26 April 2000	Ram and processors	300
4 May 2000	Ram and processors	300
4 December 2000	Palm pilot computer	500
28 February 2001	Computer and hardware digital Camera CDRW Drives Firecrest PC External CD Rom for laptop	1,200
27 February 2001	Laptop Toshiba	2,000
Unknown	Scanner	300
16 March 2001	Laptop	2,000
11 April 2001	Minidisc player	200
10 April 2001	Telephone	80
13 March 2001	Shortwave radio	200
22 May 2001	Boxed PC including monitor/keyboard	1,200
17 August 2001	Flat screen monitor	450
29 October 2001	Laptop	2,000
10 January 2002	7x17" monitors	1,400

Subcontinent

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the military situation *(a)* between India and Pakistan and *(b)* over Kashmir. [29510]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain concerned by the continuing military and political tensions between India and Pakistan. We hope that India and Pakistan will continue to seek ways to return to dialogue to resolve all the issues between them. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has kept in close contact over the past month with his Indian and Pakistani counterparts, and with other key interlocutors.

Interception of Communications

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 368W, on interception of communications, by what means a statement to the House would be made. [28519]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to matters for which I am responsible.

Should circumstances arise in which a statement of the kind mentioned in my earlier reply needs to be made, I would then consider the appropriate form.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will provide a substantive reply to the letters of 6 July and 18 October from the hon. Member for Billericay regarding the dumping of toxic ash at Pitsea Tip. [12677]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment responded to the letters from the hon. Member on 15 January 2002.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 9 August from the hon. Member for North Shropshire concerning delays in testing for bovine TB in the Market Drayton area of Shropshire. [12633]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* A response to the hon. Member's letter was sent on 15 January 2002. I apologise for the time taken to respond to this letter.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 31 July, 29 August, 26 September, 25 October and 22 November to the Minister for the Environment relating to correspondence from Hertfordshire county council; [18926]

(2) when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters to the Minister for the Environment of 31 July, 29 August, 26 September, 25 October, 22 November and 18 December relating to correspondence from Hertfordshire county council. [25458]

Mr. Morley: The hon. Member's letter of 31 July and subsequent follow up letters have been transferred to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions as flood damage to highways is their area of responsibility.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 15 January 2002, ref. 26357, if she will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in responding to the letter to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford sent to him via the Foreign Office on 12 June 2001 re Dr. Reza Hussain. [28876]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* A response to the hon. Member's constituent's letter of 12 June was sent on 18 January 2002.

Recycling

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of her Department's stationery is recycled. [15361]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* The percentage of recycled stationery used by the Department is 48 per cent. for paper based products and 23 per cent. for general stationery products. There is an on-going programme of working with our users and suppliers to replace products with suitable and affordable recycled alternatives from sustainable sources. The Department expects to improve significantly its percentages of recycled stationery over the next six months.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will establish an assessment, in respect of its relevance to environmental protection policy, of the report published on 23 November by the European Parliament's Scientific and Technological Options Assessment Programme on the possible toxic effects from the nuclear reprocessing plants at Sellafield and Cap de la Hague, France. [19873]

Mr. Meacher: This report is a public document which has already been the subject of independent evaluation by experts appointed by the STOA panel. The contents of the report and these evaluations have been noted, as have the doubts about the report's objectivity which have been raised by some members of the European Parliament and two of the three independent assessors. The Environment Agency which advises the Government on the disposal of radioactive waste into the environment, has been provided with a copy of the report.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to place an obligation on suppliers to purchase from CHP units. [22602]

Mr. Meacher: Government have secured powers under the Utilities Act 2000 to introduce an obligation on suppliers to purchase electricity generated by CHP.

The Government hope that other measures to be outlined in the draft CHP strategy currently being finalised for consultation will be sufficient for CHP to compete effectively with other forms of electricity generation. If however it becomes clear that CHP is not able to compete effectively, the Government are prepared to examine the case for introducing a CHP Obligation.

Foot and Mouth

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her calculation is of the percentage of animal sales made during the foot and mouth disease epidemic that were conducted outside traditional markets on *(a)* video links, *(b)* via the internet and *(c)* by other means; and if she will make a statement on the (i) safety and (ii) cost of these methods. [24388]

Mr. Morley: The closure of livestock markets to prevent the spread of foot and mouth has led producers to develop a number of other means of selling their stock; we do not have information on the number of animals sold in this way. All animal sales are required to meet movement licence conditions, including bio-security requirements.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the total expenditure on *(a)* compensation, *(b)* Civil Service costs, *(c)* decontamination, *(d)* additional rural aid and *(e)* payments to vets, slaughterers and valuers arising from the foot and mouth disease epidemic. [26024]

Mr. Morley: The total estimated expenditure arising out of foot and mouth disease is as follows:

(a) compensation for animals slaughtered and for seized and destroyed items is £1,114,200,000;

(b) total Civil Service costs are not yet available;

(c) costs for cleansing and disinfection are £280,000,000;

(d) additional rural payments are not yet available; and

(e) total costs for vets, slaughterers and valuers is £72,100,000.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when blood tests for foot and mouth disease will be completed; and what the timetable is for blood tests relating to foot and mouth disease. [27622]

Mr. Morley: The blood testing necessary to classify each county in Great Britain as free of foot and mouth disease (FMD) is now complete. Pre-movement blood testing of sheep flocks is also no longer required. Blood testing is still required where a farmer re-stocks with sheep, goats, or camelids following an outbreak. It is expected that most blood testing for re-stocking purposes will be complete by early summer.

Blood samples are sent from the local Animal Health Office by courier to the laboratory to arrive within 24 hours of the sample being taken. The laboratories have a target turn-round time for FMD blood tests of seven days and currently the mean turn-round time is three days. Results from the laboratories are then made available by computer to the local Animal Health Office.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what forms of testing are carried out by her Department in relation to foot and mouth disease. [27625]

Mr. Morley: Tests for the detection of foot and mouth disease virus and antibody are performed according to the protocols described in the chapter on foot and mouth disease (FMD) in the OIE Manual of Standards for Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines (2000) which was written by staff at the Institute for Animal Health (IAH), Pirbright. These tests were performed at IAH, Pirbright and five other laboratories on behalf of DEFRA. In addition, one of the antibody detection ELISA tests was improved. This test was validated and the data have been submitted to OIE for their approval as a prescribed test.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is taking to validate *(a)* alternative and *(b)* complementary testing procedures where positive foot and mouth disease cases are confirmed. [27623]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA supports a programme of applied research and test development at IAH, Pirbright. A priority is the development of more rapid and reliable diagnostic tests for use in the laboratory and in the field. Another priority is to develop better methods for identifying infection among vaccinated animals so that vaccinated animals could be safely kept alive. All such tests must be properly validated to ensure international acceptance.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the remaining movement restrictions on livestock farms in Worcestershire, imposed as a result of the foot and mouth epidemic will be lifted. [28899]

Mr. Morley: There are 15 farms in Worcestershire currently under restrictions. It is anticipated that it should be possible to lift all these restrictions by 23 April unless there is any change to the current disease situation.

Flood Warning Notices

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many flood warning notices were sent by the Environment Agency by *(a)* county and *(b)* constituency in England and Wales in 2001. [25002]

Mr. Morley: Flood defence is a fully devolved function and DEFRA has policy responsibility only for England. Figures are not available at county and constituency level. The table therefore shows total flood warnings issued by Environment Agency in 2001 in England by region:

	Number
North East	61
North West	127
Midlands	363
South West	520
Thames	815
Southern	774
Anglian	684
Total	3,344

Biofuels

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if it is her policy to encourage the growing of crops for biofuels; and if she will make a statement. [26445]

Mr. Morley: This Department allocated support of £29 million to solid biomass crops through the Energy Crops Scheme, part of the England Rural Development Programme. We are also working with other Departments to put in place schemes with funding of £70 million which will develop markets for biomass in heat, combined heat and power and electricity generation. Following the Green Fuel Challenge my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a new duty rate for biodiesel, set at 20p per litre below the rate for Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel, is to be introduced in Budget 2002. Any additional measures to develop biofuels from crops must be based on sound evidence and this Department has recently commissioned a six-month study, on behalf of the Government-Industry Forum on non-food uses of crops, to provide an independent, comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of the comparative energy, environmental and socio-economic costs and benefits of biodiesel production in the UK. The study will compare results with those for other relevant green fuels and relevant energy saving measures.

Farm Incomes

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what were the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net farm incomes for each of the past four years for (i) the highest earning decile and (ii) the lowest earning decile. [26028]

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Mr. Morley: Income data are available only for farms with an economic size of at least eight European Size Units (ESUs), the minimum considered necessary to occupy a full time farmer. Although nearly half the farms in England fall below this 'full-time' size threshold, they account for only 2 per cent. of agricultural output.

The information for farms above this threshold is given in the table. Data for the year 2000–01 will be available on 31 January 2002. The income measure "Cash Income" has been used for gross income.

Ranges of farm incomes for full-time farms in England

£ per farm

	Cash income		*Net farm income*	
	First decile (10th percentile)	*Ninth decile (90th percentile)*	*First decile (10th percentile)*	*Ninth decile (90th percentile)*
1996–97	5,900	110,400	–3,300	68,700
1997–98	–100	85,700	–10,800	40,200
1998–99	–700	78,300	–13,700	35,600
1999–2000	0	69,400	–13,900	32,600

Source:

Farm Business Survey

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the number of individuals in her *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26326]

Mr. Morley: As DEFRA was created on 8 June 2001, the historical information requested is not available. However, the numbers for the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) are as follows:

(a) In the Department:

(i) annual remuneration exceeding £100,000 including benefits (basic salary plus any allowances and bonuses):

1 April 1998: 1

1 April 1999: 1

1 April 2000: 1

1 April 2001: 4

(ii) annual remuneration exceeding £200,000 including benefits:

1 April 1998: 0

1 April 1999: 0

1 April 2000: 0

1 April 2001: 0

(b) In related agencies:

(i) and (ii): none in any year

(c) the information is available in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies" (as referred to in the central answer provided by the Minister for the Cabinet Office).

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers, by region, have arable area payment claims outstanding. [26606]

Mr. Morley: The regulatory deadline for payment of main scheme claims under the 2001 Arable Area Payments Scheme is 31 January 2002. As at 13 January 2002, 33,830 claims (79.15 per cent.) had been passed for payment. Payments of claims is no longer organised on a regional basis, as in previous years. The number of claims unpaid by processing centre is, however, as follows:

RPA processing site	*Unpaid claims*
Cambridge	987
Carlisle	688
Crewe	335
Exeter	3,469
Newcastle	221
Northallerton	1,895
Nottingham	1,098
Reading	219
Total	8,912

Agricultural Bureaucracy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many transactions by correspondence, telephone or e-mail take place on average each year between her Department and farmers subject to each *(a)* quota, *(b)* headage payment and *(c)* area payment. [26693]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The information is not available and records held by the Department are not sufficiently detailed to enable it to be extracted. The total number of letters received by the Department from farmers in the categories mentioned in the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were 32,812 and 34,051 respectively. This excludes claim forms and any covering communications which did not call for a response.

The numbers of claims, payments and quota registrations for the two years were:

	1999–2000		*2000–01*	
	Claims	*Payments*	*Claims*	*Payments*
Headage based schemes	181,285	545,336	320,271	794,527
Area based schemes	73,447	[1]119,159	72,700	[2]91,155
Quota transactions	18,900		18,920	

[1] For 1999–2000 this includes advance payments for oilseeds and separate payments for non food set-aside.

[2] For 2000–01 this includes separate payments for non food set-aside.

Agricultural Subsidies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what area payments are available to producers of *(a)* maize, *(b)* wheat, *(c)* barley, *(d)* oats, *(e)* sugar beet and *(f)* other crops; what is the value of each payment (i) in aggregate and (ii) by volume or area; and what are the conditions upon which payments depend. [26001]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Payments are available to producers under the Arable Area Payments Scheme for crops of Cereals (which include barley, oats and maize), Proteins, Linseed, Rapeseed, Flax, Hemp and Set-aside. Sugar Beet can only be claimed under this scheme for non-food use. It does not attract a payment but may be counted towards a producer's set-aside requirement.

The payment rates for crops claimed in England in 2001 per hectare are £225.6466 for Cereals and set-aside, £264.3094 for Oilseeds, £259.6757 for Proteins and £270.8829 for Linseed, Fibre Flax and Hemp. There is a further supplement to the basic rate available for Durum Wheat of £84.4647.

In 2000, the total value of payments made with respect to English applications was as follows:

£

	Basic payment	*Agri-monetary compensation*
Maize	4,340,419	145,988
Cereals (excluding maize)	583,020,470	19,757,296
Oilseeds	88,204,626	2,984,108
Proteins	53,881,564	1,824,176
Linseed	22,363,270	782,726
Durum Wheat Supplement	1,240,699	12,450
Set-aside	100,965,458	3,456,446
Total	854,016,506	28,963,190

The Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) offers payments per hectare to growers of the crops already mentioned. There are a number of conditions that land and crops being claimed must meet, the main ones being as follows. Eligibility of land for AAPS is as a general rule effectively restricted to land that was in arable rotation on 31 December 1991. In order to qualify for full payment, all producers claiming more than 15.62 ha must set-aside a certain percentage of their claimed eligible land. All crops claimed under this scheme must be shown and maintained in line with local standards and must be maintained until specified dates. Details of the scheme requirements are published annually in literature available to claimants.

IACS Payments

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects payment of arable area IACS for the past year to be completed. [R] [26741]

Mr. Morley: Industrial action, which has been delaying the processing of arable aid (AAPS) claims, was suspended by the trade unions with effect from 11 January. This allowed the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) to step up the amount of overtime being worked beginning in the weekend of 12–13 January. Overtime working will now continue, as long as the suspension remains in place, until the backlog of claim processing is cleared. The RPA expects to be able to pay the vast majority of AAPS claims within the regulatory timeframe which ends on 31 January. However, because of the processing time which has already been lost, it is likely that more claims than usual will be carried over into February. Every effort will be made to keep this to the absolute minimum. As at 13 January 80 per cent. of AAPS claims had been passed for payment.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the average proportion of an arable farmer's income that is made up by an IACS payment at the latest date for which figures are available. [R] [26742]

Mr. Morley: Information on total farm output (including direct subsidies), total input costs, and net farm income for full-time arable farms in England is given in the table. The data relate to 1999–2000. In this year, the average subsidy exceeded the average income.

Data for 2000–01 will be available on 31 January.

Average output (including subsidies), input and income for full-time arable farms in England (1999–2000)

	General cropping farms	*Cereals farms*
Total farm output (£ per farm)	207,200	123,900
of which:		
Direct crop subsidies (£ per farm)	28,800	34,200
Direct livestock subsidies (£ per farm)	2,400	2,300
Direct general subsidies (£ per farm)	600	1,200
Direct crop subsidies (as a percentage of output)	13.9	27.6
Direct livestock subsidies (as a percentage of output)	1.2	1.9
Direct general subsidies (as a percentage of output)	0.3	1.0
Total input (costs) (£ per farm)	199,100	112,200
Net farm income (£)	8,100	11,700

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of arable area IACS payments were made to farmers by *(a)* 1 January 2001 for the preceding year and *(b)* 1 January 2002 for this past year. [R] [26740]

Mr. Morley: By 30 December 2001, 29,075 IACS payments (68.03 per cent.) had been passed for payment, with a value of £495,577,987.14. The figures at the same stage last year was 39,516 (90 per cent.) with a value of £725,996,684.

Fish Stocks

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when, at the rate of depletion in 2000, stocks of *(a)* cod, *(b)* herring, *(c)* mackerel and *(d)* plaice will be fished out in (i) UK and (ii) EU waters; and if she will make a statement. [27164]

Mr. Morley: It is not possible or meaningful to answer the question in the terms asked. Stock levels in future years will depend, in part, on the abundance of future broods of young fish not yet spawned. Also, the stocks are subject to a range of management measures aimed at restoring them, although the outcome of these measures cannot be precisely predicted at present, the assumption underlying the question that these measures will have no effect is not a reasonable hypothesis.

Rather than the rate of depletion of stocks, the indicators used for the state of fish stocks are, for each stock, the spawning stock biomass and the level of fishing mortality. Where these indicators fall below the precautionary benchmarks established by scientists, the scientific advice is that action should be taken to raise them to within safe biological limits. The recovery plans already in place for northern hake and for cod in the North sea, Irish sea and west of Scotland and now proposed by the commission for further stocks, together with the decisions taken by the Council of Ministers to set TACs and quotas for 2002 in line with scientific advice, are aimed at reversing decline in fish stocks where it is occurring and is of concern, rather than allowing it to continue.

Goats

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if goats are to be included with sheep with respect to BSE testing; and what her policy is on the destruction of the national goat herd if BSE is found to be present in sheep. [26898]

Mr. Morley: Goats are included in the testing programme for TSEs which we are putting in place to meet the requirements of EU legislation. If BSE were to be found in the sheep flock, the implications for goats would need to be determined in the light of circumstances at the time, taking into account in particular the views of the Food Standards Agency and the scientific advice offered by the EU's Scientific Steering Committee and by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reasons lie behind the recent changes to the regulations for the transportation of goats for mating. [26765]

Mr. Morley: The movement of animals has been restricted as part of the measures to control the spread of foot and mouth disease. The most recent change to the animal movements licensing scheme affecting goats was introduced on 18 December 2001. From this date, goats were allowed to move freely between At Risk Counties provided an inspection by a Local Veterinary Inspector proved satisfactory. As of 15 January 2002, there are no At Risk Counties in Great Britain. There have been no recent changes to the rules regarding the movement of billy goats for breeding purposes.

Bovine TB

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in which areas the culling of badgers as part of the Krebs trial has restarted; how many badgers have been culled; and what the estimated cost of the trial is. [26754]

Mr. Morley: The badger field trial was suspended in February last year because of the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. Badger culling has not yet recommenced but surveying operations have restarted in all trial areas. Up to the time that the trial was suspended, 2,913 badgers had been culled. The overall cost of the trial has been estimated to be approximately £35 million.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle have been culled since 1995 due to being infected with bovine TB, broken down by year and county. [26751]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the number of animals slaughtered because they reacted to the tuberculin test broken down by county for England, Scotland and Wales for the years 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999,2000 and 2001. A figure by county is not available for Northern Ireland and the relevant figures for each year are shown.

All figures are produced from the State Veterinary Service IT support system. The figure for 1995 is unvalidated raw data. The use of the system for management reporting only began late in 1995 and it is not now possible to validate this data. For the years 1996, 1997 and 1998 the table shows validated agreed data. Statistics meeting 'national statistics' criteria have been used for 1999 and 2000 but the data are yet to be validated and these are therefore provisional. For 2001 the data are provisional and unvalidated as laboratory results are awaited.

Number of Reactor Cattle Slaughtered for TB in UK

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1]	*2001*[1,2]
England	2,211	2,393	2,730	4,120	4,945	5,987	3,558
Avon	153	211	69	159	138	262	122
Bedfordshire	1	3	3	—	—	1	1
Berkshire	5	6	—	4	2	—	1
Buckinghamshire	2	3	—	7	7	8	4
Cambridgeshire	1	3	—	—	—	1	—
Cheshire	36	21	9	43	7	5	—
Cleveland	—	—	2	2	—	—	—
Cornwall	623	462	292	789	840	1,106	633
Cumberia	5	8	21	10	7	4	2
Derbyshire	14	17	47	50	241	58	43
Devon	294	465	440	492	790	1,105	538
Dorset	54	43	103	91	99	78	58
Durham	8	—	1	—	2	—	—
East Sussex	17	9	31	14	18	23	6
Essex	2	1	13	5	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	378	275	490	796	848	1,046	570
Greater London	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	3	1	1	9	1	—	—
Hampshire	—	2	1	1	1	4	2
Hereford and Worcestershire	306	462	556	769	795	957	618
Hertford	5	—	—	13	—	1	—
Humberside	2	—	6	1	1	5	4
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—	1	—	—

Number of Reactor Cattle Slaughtered for TB in UK

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1]	*2001*[1,2]
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	9	7	8	67	5	6	—
Leicestershire	11	13	4	2	4	2	2
Lincolnshire	10	11	2	1	15	3	—
Merseyside	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	2	—	1	—	2	1	1
Northamptonshire	7	4	—	2	1	5	3
Northumberland	19	16	6	8	11	9	38
Nottinghamshire	9	2	4	14	1	8	11
Oxfordshire	2	1	3	13	8	3	24
Shropshire	6	12	24	39	34	194	101
Somerset	115	129	179	236	322	460	116
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	1	—	2	—
Staffordshire	8	112	183	233	334	192	416
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Surrey	2	2	—	—	2	—	1
Tyne and Wear	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Warwickshire	1	3	—	3	8	7	1
West Midlands	—	1	—	3	1	—	—
West Sussex	2	4	—	—	1	1	—
West Yorkshire	—	3	—	5	—	—	—
Wiltshire	92	80	230	236	398	430	242
Wales	289	644	374	765	914	986	1,467
Clwyd	—	1	4	2	6	2	3
Dyfed	125	252	181	406	491	478	1,044
Gwent	127	338	171	226	274	346	222
Gwynedd	6	13	—	26	2	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	—	2	5	4	3	4	1
Powys	30	23	6	56	65	133	163
South Glamorgan	1	2	1	5	—	—	2
West Glamorgan	—	13	6	40	73	43	32
Scotland	56	95	109	73	51	58	23
Aberdeenshire	5	5	15	24	5	21	4
Angus	2	1	1	—	2	—	1
Argyll	1	1	3	—	—	—	1
Ayrshire	3	7	1	1	—	4	2
Banffshire	1	2	9	2	—	2	1
Berwickshire	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Bute	—	38	—	—	—	—	—
Caithness	2	1	8	3	—	2	—
Clackmannan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dumbartonshire	—	—	17	—	—	—	—
Dumfriesshire	6	1	2	7	12	4	—
East Lothian	—	2	1	—	—	—	2
Fife	—	8	2	1	—	—	2
Inverness-shire	1	1	2	—	4	5	1
Kincardine	4	—	1	5	1	1	—
Kinross	—	1	2	—	—	—	—
Kirkcudbright	8	11	8	—	2	4	2
Lanarkshire	1	1	14	4	3	1	—
Midlothian and Edinburgh	—	—	1	1	—	1	—
Moray	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Orkney	1	—	—	—	3	—	—
Peebles	9	—	—	1	—	2	—
Perthshire	2	2	7	—	4	3	2
Renfrew	—	—	2	1	—	—	—
Ross and Cromarty	2	3	1	3	2	—	—
Roxburgh	—	—	2	2	11	1	—
Selkirk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Stirling	—	—	—	1	—	1	4
Sutherland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Lothian	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Wigtown	7	8	7	14	1	5	—
GB Total	2,556	3,132	3,213	4,958	5,910	7,031	5,048
Northern Ireland	3,680	3,615	4,923	6,247	8,814	9,109	8,817

[1] The figures for 1999, 2000 and 2001 are provisional.

[2] Due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease testing has been greatly reduced. In addition a number [illegible] cases await laboratory results.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of bovine TB there have been in the United Kingdom since 1995, broken down by year and county. [26752]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the number of herds affected by new confirmed incidents of bovine TB broken down by country for England, Scotland and Wales for the years 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001. A figure by county is not available for Northern Ireland and the relevant figures for each year are shown.

A new herd incident occurs when a herd which was previously TB free either had cattle that reacted to a tuberculin test or had a tuberculous animal disclosed by routine inspection at slaughter. This becomes a confirmed incident where at least one animal is subsequently confirmed as having bovine TB either through laboratory result and/or evidence at slaughter.

The figures for Northern Ireland relate to new herd incidents only.

All figures are produced from the state veterinary service IT support system. The figure for 1995 is unvalidated raw data. The use of the system for management reporting only began late in 1995 and it is not now possible to validate this data. For the years 1996, 1997 and 1998 the table shows validated agreed data. Statistics meeting 'national statistics' criteria have been used for 1999 and 2000 but the data are yet to be validated and these are therefore provisional. For 2001 the date are provisional and unvalidated as laboratory results are awaited.

New confirmed TB herd incidents by county for UK

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1]	*2001*[1,2]
England	327	339	440	631	741	885	300
Avon	21	19	13	23	22	32	12
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Berkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire	—	—	—	—	1	2	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Cheshire	2	—	—	2	2	3	—
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	82	84	68	132	125	157	47
Cumbria	1	—	—	—	1	1	—
Derbyshire	1	3	—	7	19	10	7
Devon	62	68	87	100	134	182	68
Dorset	5	6	15	8	20	10	8
Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	2	1	4	1	5	2	1
Essex	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	61	56	90	130	133	171	32
Greater London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hereford and Worcestershire	37	59	79	111	128	145	52
Hertford	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Humberside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	—	—	—	3	—	—	—
Leicestershire	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Northamptonshire	2	1	—	—	—	1	—
Northumberland	2	1	—	2	1	2	1
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Oxfordshire	—	—	—	3	1	2	—
Shropshire	1	1	5	3	2	18	8
Somerset	15	14	25	36	42	62	14
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Staffordshire	3	9	24	34	36	27	36
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Surrey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tyne and Wear	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	—	1	—	1	—	1	1
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
West Sussex	1	—	—		—	—	—
West Yorkshire	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Wiltshire	26	14	29	31	66	54	13

New confirmed TB herd incidents by county for UK

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1]	*2001*[1,2]
Wales	69	110	55	86	127	150	104
Clwyd	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Dyfed	28	32	22	49	60	68	67
Gwent	32	60	27	24	36	48	15
Gwynedd	1	2	—	1	1	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	—	1	2	1	1	1	—
Powys	8	12	2	6	13	26	17
South Glamorgan	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	—	3	2	4	15	7	4
Scotland	8	10	8	3	7	4	1
Aberdeenshire	2	2	3	—	2	3	—
Angus	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Argyll	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ayrshire	1	3	—	1	—	1	—
Banffshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Berwickshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Bute	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Caithness	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
Clackmannan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dumbartonshire	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfriesshire	2	—	—	—	1	—	—
East Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Inverness-shire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kincardine	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Kinross	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kirkcudbright	1	1	—	—	1	—	—
Lanarkshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Midlothian and Edinburgh	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Moray	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nairn	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Orkney	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Peebles	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Perthshire	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
Renfrew	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ross and Cromarty	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Roxburgh	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Selkirk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stirling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sutherland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wigtown	—	2	—	1	—	—	—
GB Total	404	459	503	720	875	1,039	405
Northern Ireland[3]	1,742	1,505	1,486	2,069	2,713	2,872	2,479
UK Total	2,146	1,964	1,989	2,769	3,588	3,911	2,884

[1] The figures for 1999, 2000 and 2001 are provisional.

[2] Due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease testing has been greatly reduced. In addition a number of cases await laboratory results.

[3] Figures relate to new herd incidents only, and include all those that were subsequently confirmed.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many badgers have been culled as part of the Krebs trial to date, broken down by year and county. [26755]

Mr. Morley: The number of badgers culled as part of the Krebs trial to date, broken down by year and county, is as follows:

County	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*Total*
Somerset	0	0	100	0	0	100
Wiltshire	0	0	602	142	0	744
Herefordshire	0	0	55	0	0	55
Gloucestershire	0	0	34	0	0	34
Devon	238	158	147	23	0	566
Cornwall	0	246	629	111	0	986
Staffordshire	0	0	428	0	0	428
Total	238	404	1,995	276	0	2,913

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in her Department. [26972]

Mr. Morley: The Department does not intend to commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of its sickness absence, but it is planning to carry out its own analysis.

A comprehensive analysis of sickness absence in the civil service is produced annually by Cabinet Office. Copies of such reports are placed in the Library of the House.

Responsibility for attendance matters within the Central Science Laboratory, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency and the Centre for Environmental Fisheries and

Aquaculture Agency—all former MAFF agencies—has been delegated to the agency chief executives and I have asked them to reply direct. The Pesticides Safety Directorate, the Rural Payments Agency and the veterinary medicines directorate agencies are covered by the departmental response.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the steps that have been taken to control illegal meat imports arriving in the UK via Heathrow airport. [27269]

Mr. Morley: Since April last year we have taken a range of initiatives aimed at improving our ability to prevent and detect illegal imports of animal products. These initiatives have been co-ordinated by officials in the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but involve other Departments such as HM Customs and Excise and the Food Standards Agency, and the local authorities who are responsible for controls at ports and airports.

Checks on imports of animal products at Heathrow airport are primarily the responsibility of Hillingdon borough council. We have regular discussions with council officers about import controls. In addition customs officers and immigration officers are alert to the need to be vigilant to illegal imports of animal products carried in passenger baggage. Local authority officers, customs officers and state veterinary service officers at the airport liaise in organising checks of passenger baggage for illegal animal products.

Posters have been placed at Heathrow and other airports alerting individuals to what products they may bring in. These are now being improved in the light of experience and discussion has taken place with the airport authority to ensure that posters are sited as effectively as possible.

Tenant Farmers

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to meet the Tenant Farmers Association; and if she will make a statement. [27619]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for Rural Affairs, and my noble Friend Lord Whitty, have all met representatives of the Tenant Farmers Association over the last six months. I can assure the hon. Member that the close contact DEFRA has established with the tenanted sector will be maintained. Further, my noble Friend Lord Whitty has agreed to meet with the Tenant Farmers Association when the outcome of the review of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 is known.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make an assessment of the issues facing tenant farmers; and what action she will take to improve their situation. [27620]

Mr. Morley: The Policy Commission on Food and Farming has been established to look at all aspects of the farming industry. DEFRA has been sent a copy of the detailed submission the Tenant Farmers Association (TFA) has made to the commission and departmental officials have met with the TFA to discuss the issues raised. DEFRA has also commissioned a review of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995. This is being conducted by Plymouth university and their draft report should be available to the Department by the end of January.

It is not possible to say what if any specific action will be taken in relation to tenant farming issues before the results of this study and the Policy Commission's recommendations are known. However the Government are committed to the establishment of a sustainable, diverse, modern and adaptable farming industry.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Tenant Farmers Association concerning *(a)* an early retirement and young entrant scheme into the farming industry, *(b)* her Department's free business advice to all farmers, *(c)* farm diversification through best practice guides and *(d)* 50 per cent. rate relief for five years for new non-agricultural enterprises on farms. [27618]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the Tenant Farmers Association (TFA) on 30 October, as did my noble Friend Lord Whitty on 16 July and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs on 21 November. The key topics discussed at these meetings were an early retirement scheme, access by tenant farmers to agri-environment and other schemes under the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the scope for diversification by tenant farmers under existing tenancy legislation. There has, in addition, been correspondence between my officials and the TFA on the free business advice service provided to farmers.

Fur Farming

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) for what reasons the Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme) (England) Order 2001 (SI 2001, No 3853) does not make provision for *(a)* the value of male animals and *(b)* the differential value of different breed of mink; [27755]

(2) for what reasons the Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme) (England) Order 2001 (SI 2001, No 3853) reduces the compensation payable for the value of breeding stock where *(a)* the farmer elected to cease keeping mink after 1 October 2001 and *(b)* the farmer elected to cease keeping mink nine months before the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000 comes into force. [27757]

Mr. Morley: Under section 5(1) of the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000, fur farmers are able to close down at any time between enactment on 23 November 2000 and the coming into force of the ban on 1 January 2003, without affecting their eligibility for compensation. This winding-down period of more than two years allows each fur farmer to choose the best time when to close in order to mitigate any losses, including on breeding and young stock.

Those fur farmers who choose to close at a later date will derive greater returns for each breeding animal from the market, thus reducing the residual breeding value, and hence the level of compensation. Any differential in the value of different breeds of mink will be reflected in the profitability of the enterprise for which compensation is being provided.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reasons the Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme) (England) Order 2001 (SI 2001, No. 3853) specifies *(a)* a fixed sum for the value of breeding stock, and *(b)* a fixed multiplier to determine qualifying income losses; and for what reason there is no appeal under the terms of the order to *(a)* arbitration and *(b)* to the Lands Tribunal. [27751]

Mr. Morley: Under Section 5(1) of the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is required to make a compensation scheme. Due consideration was given to all relevant factors in producing such a scheme. It was not considered appropriate for the Government to leave the determination of the value of breeding stock and the income multiplier to an arbitrator or the Lands Tribunal, if they were to meet their obligation to make a scheme that is fair and reasonable. The calculation of average net trading profits could, however, be referred to an arbitrator or the Lands Tribunal.

Air Pollution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many days of *(a)* moderate, *(b)* high and *(c)* very high air pollution there were (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in Buckinghamshire in each year since 1997; and if she will indicate the suspected causes of high and very high readings. [27790]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA operate a National Automatic Urban and Rural Network that currently includes about 120 sites throughout the UK. Data are produced continuously on an hourly basis. Ratified data are available up to 30 September 2001. After this date care must be taken in interpretation of the pollution levels recorded since high measurements may be the result of instrument error that is still to be identified.

An analysis of moderate, high or very high pollution during 1997–2001 has been undertaken to identify the number and severity of such incidents. Pollution at each site is defined according to the pollutant that is in the highest band during the day. The numbers of days in each band for each pollutant in the United Kingdom since 1997 are given in the table.

There are no National Automatic Urban and Rural Network monitoring sites in Buckinghamshire.

Number of days of moderate, high and very high air pollution in the United Kingdom (at one or more sites) in each year since 1997

	Moderate	*High*	*Very high*
1997	269	70	14
1998	259	49	12
1999	269	51	15
2000	240	38	7
2001	250	69	19

High air pollution episodes due to ozone are only recorded in the summer months. The pollution is linked to hot sunny weather when industrial and motor vehicle emissions react under these conditions to form ground-level ozone. Light easterly winds sometimes bring this pollution across to the UK from central Europe. If conditions are very still for several days then high pollution can be generated by pollution emissions from the UK only.

High air pollution episodes due to sulphur dioxide are either due to emissions from domestic heating systems (coal or oil), or from industrial processes. The former episodes are measured during the winter in urban areas with significant use of these fuel types. Industrial related incidents can be many miles away from the source of the pollution when the plume from the process comes to ground.

High air pollution episodes due to nitrogen dioxide are related to motor vehicle emissions and, although infrequent, are usually during very cold, still conditions in the winter months.

High or very high particulate matter (PM_{10}) can be from a variety of industrial, motor vehicle, construction or "natural" sources such as Saharan dust, volcanic eruptions, agricultural dust or fireworks.

There are no high or very high CO episodes.

Whaling

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the International Whaling Commission on the decision by the Japanese Government to use satellite technology to *(a)* track, *(b)* monitor and *(c)* capture, (i) minke, (ii) sperm and (iii) Bryde's whales. [28086]

Mr. Morley: We are raising this issue directly with the Government of Japan.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what involvement her Department has in *(a)* public-private partnerships and *(b)* private finance initiative projects. [27934]

Mr. Morley: The Department is involved in four private finance initiative projects as follows:

1. Broadland Flood Alleviation Scheme
2. Pevensey Bay Sea Defences
3. Brooklands Avenue Office Development (Cambridge)
4. Countryside Agency's Spirit (IT services).

As yet the Department is not involved in any public-private partnerships.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27974]

Mr. Morley: The Department has only been in existence since June 2001. Information covering earlier periods is therefore not available, and could be constructed retrospectively only at disproportionate cost.

Annual reports which the Treasury prepares on fraud, covering returns from both the former MAFF and DETR, are deposited in the House of Commons Library.

Pesticides

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 919–20W, on carbofuran chlorfenvinphos, if she will set out the measures she is taking to help the trade and user groups. [27841]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* My noble Friend Lord Whitty met representatives of the National Farmers Union and the brassica industry on 19 December to discuss the problems that would be faced by trade and user groups. My noble Friend accepts that there would be severe consequences for swede and turnip growers putting them at a serious disadvantage with European competitors. While the approval for carbofuran expired as planned on 31 December 2001, he has agreed, exceptionally, to allow the approval for chlorfenvinphos to continue until 25 July 2003, the date the use of the compound will expire throughout Europe. Action has already been taken by the Pesticide Safety Directorate to maintain the chlorfenvinphos approvals. However, industry is being urged, as a matter of urgency, to find alternatives.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that the ban on the use of chlorfenvinphos and carbofuran, used in the control of cabbage root fly, comes into force at the same time as in the rest of the EU. [27044]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Pesticide products containing chlorfenvinphos and carbofuran have been reviewed as part of the general review in the UK of all organophosphate pesticides. The review was undertaken because of public concerns about the potential toxicity of this group of chemicals. Only for chlorfenvinphos has there been strong lobbying to retain its use on swedes and turnips. The approval was due to expire on 31 December 2001 but in the light of strong representations from growers at the end of last year my noble Friend Lord Whitty agreed to extend the approval until 25 July 2003, the date when the approval will expire throughout Europe. This should allow industry time to find alternatives. Unlike chlorfenvinphos, no strong representations have been made for the approval of carbofuran to continue. This approval therefore expired as planned on 31 December.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has sponsored into alternatives to chlorfenvinphos and carbofuran. [27046]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* None. DEFRA funds generic research into alternatives to conventional pesticides, for example, biological controls, but not into specific chemical alternatives which are primarily for industry to fund. I understand that the brassica industry has done some work to find alternative methods to control cabbage root fly and is being urged to continue this work.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect on the competitiveness of UK vegetable growers if chlorfenvinphos and carbofuran are banned in the UK before they are banned in the rest of the EU. [27045]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* My noble Friend Lord Whitty met representatives of the National Farmers Union and the brassica industry on 19 December when the industry's assessment of the impact of the loss of these compounds was discussed.

My noble Friend accepts that growers would be seriously disadvantaged by the loss of these compounds. He has therefore agreed, exceptionally, to allow the approval for chlorfenvinphos to continue until 25 July 2003, the date when the approval will expire throughout Europe. This should ensure that UK growers' competitiveness in Europe is maintained. However industry is being urged, as a matter of urgency, to find alternatives.

PIU Energy Review

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the PIU report will be published before the end of January. [28980]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 816W.

Fisheries Policy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the European commission policy on administrative sanctions in enforcing fisheries policy; what assessment she has made of the compatibility of this approach with the European convention on human rights; and if she will make a statement. [28675]

Mr. Morley: Under CFP regulations member states are required to ensure that appropriate measures are being taken to deal with fisheries infringements. These may take the form of criminal proceedings or administrative sanctions. The Government would need to be satisfied that any proposals for a system of administrative sanctions were compatible with the European convention on human rights. Moreover, any proposals to introduce administrative sanctions would be subject to full consultation with the fishing industry and other appropriate interests.

Recovered Vegetable Oil

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if the use of recovered vegetable oil for producing animal feed is to be banned in the UK; and if she will make a statement; [28696]

(2) what regulatory impact assessment has been carried out in respect of the EU Animal By-Products regulation; [28695]

(3) if she will make a statement on the impact of restrictions on the use of recovered vegetable oil upon waste disposal authorities; [28697]

(4) if she will make a statement on the implementation of the EU Animal By-Products regulation. [28694]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The proposed EU Animal By-Products Regulation would ban the feeding of catering waste to livestock. This ban was introduced at a late stage in negotiations and, after political agreement to a common position had been reached, the European commission made it clear that it considered that the ban also applied to used cooking oils. The Government consider that used cooking oils can be safely used in livestock feed if they are protected from contamination by the application of HACCP (Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points) principles and appropriate quality control. If suitable alternative outlets are not in place, a ban could lead to environmental problems. The UK is therefore opposing the ban on used cooking oils which are subject to suitable controls and has been lobbying Members of the European Parliament to make suitable changes at Second Reading. The UK has also made it clear that, in the event of the ban not being reversed, an extended transitional period would be needed to allow time for alternative, sustainable outlets to be developed.

Regulatory impact assessments were placed in the Library of the House on 27 November 2000 and 26 February 2001, along with explanatory memoranda on the regulation (reference 12646/00 and 12648/00). However, as the ban on catering waste had not then been proposed, they did not take account of the costs of such a ban. A revised regulatory impact assessment and a further supplementary explanatory memorandum are in preparation. We expect the Animal By-Products Regulation to come into force in member states towards the end of 2002. Relevant industries and other interests will be fully consulted on its implementation.

Agricultural Shows

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will make an announcement on the exemption of agricultural shows from the 20 day standstill period; [28691]

(2) when she will provide guidance to organisers of county shows on livestock movements for shows. [28693]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* On 18 December, the Government announced changes to the livestock movement controls which it intends to introduce in February 2002. It is proposed that animals may move to and from shows and from show to show without triggering a 20 day standstill provided they are individually identified and are kept in approved isolation facilities on the farm of origin before moving to and on returning from shows. The rules will reflect existing protocols and herd health rules. Officials have held detailed discussions with interested parties and written guidance will be issued by the Department as soon as possible.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will reply to the letter from The Surrey County Agricultural Society on the County Show in time for the show organisers to make plans for the animal show on 3 June. [28692]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* We have no record of having received the letter dated 3 June referred to by the hon. Member from The Surrey County Agricultural Society on the County Show.

Livestock Burial

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has held with other EU agriculture Ministers about on-farm burial of livestock. [28860]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The EU Animal By-Products Regulation contains provisions which relate to the burial of livestock. A common position on the regulation was adopted at the November Agriculture Council, following political agreement at the June Agriculture Council. However, the Secretary of State did not discuss the provisions relating to burial at those Councils; discussions had already taken place at official level.

Livestock Markets

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when livestock markets will reopen. [29475]

Mr. Morley: On 18 December, the Government announced changes to the livestock movement controls which they intended should be implemented from February 2002 provided there was continued progress in eradicating FMD. Further details will be announced shortly and we hope to have the new system in place from Monday 11 February.

From the start of these arrangements, cattle markets will be allowed to resume, but for sheep and pigs, slaughter markets only will be allowed initially. The question of whether to allow other sheep and pig markets will be kept under review in the light of veterinary and scientific advice.

When markets do reopen, they will be subject to strict conditions to ensure that an appropriate level of biosecurity is maintained.

Flood Defences

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken *(a)* to replace and *(b)* to repair flood defences nationwide that are due to reach the end of their design life over the next decade. [27114]

Mr. Morley: I plan to reduce the risk of flooding by investing in effective flood warning arrangements and in flood and coastal defences in the highest risk areas, and existing flood defences are being repaired, renewed, maintained and improved. As the bulk of expenditure is ultimately met by taxpayers, both DEFRA and the operating authorities have a responsibility to ensure that value for money is obtained when funding works.

This Department provides grants for flood and coastal defence capital works, and associated studies, which meet essential technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score (based on departmental priorities, urgency and benefit:cost ratio). Further to increases in the last two Spending Reviews, additional funding of £51 million over the four years from 2001–02 was announced in November 2000 following the severe flooding. In all DEFRA flood and coastal defence funding is set to increase from £66 million in 2000–01 to £114 million in 2003–04. Funding for future years will be considered in the Spending Review process.

Responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the operating authorities. The operating authority for each area draws on its local knowledge to decide what needs to be done, including the appraisal of design standards within the economic justification of projects.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 496W, on flood defence, when the validation will be complete; and whether it will identify when councils completed this task. [27474]

Mr. Morley: A list of local authorities that have provided valid information on their flood defence assets to the Environment Agency has been placed in the Library of the House.

This information was received by the agency in the period to July 2001. Where the agreed programme of inspections requires it, a second round of inspections is under way.

The ability of some local authorities to carry out inspections, and the Environment Agency's ability to receive and assess that information, and to follow up the non-receipt of inspection reports, was severely impaired by the aftermath of the 2000 floods. I have therefore agreed that the agency should provide a fully validated report for the period to March 2002 which covers all inspections to that date, summarises the condition of defences, and sets out the agreed approach to inspections.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she is making in securing adequate flood defences for Lewes. [27537]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Operational responsibility for flood management rests with operating authorities, such as the Environment Agency. The agency has repaired defences in Lewes so that they are largely up to the standard they were before the floods in autumn 2000. The agency is also undertaking a strategic study of the River Ouse catchment with a view to identifying sustainable defence options for Lewes and other towns. I understand that the agency is keeping local interest groups informed of their consideration of defence options. This Department has provided funding for both the emergency repairs and for the strategic study.

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 96W, on nuclear accidents, what assessment has been made of the need to distribute iodine tablets to the population; and how long it will take average prevailing winds to carry fallout from France to the south coast of England. [22353]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

Potassium Iodate tablets are held at or around various nuclear industry sites throughout the United Kingdom including Ministry of Defence sites as part of the detailed emergency planning arrangements in the vicinity of nuclear power plants. Other stocks are also held centrally.

As part of the on-going contingency planning the Department is reviewing stocks and supplies of potassium iodate tablets for use in the unlikely event of a nuclear accident at a nuclear power installation either in the UK or abroad.

Advice from the Meterological Office is that there is no "average prevailing wind" from France. However, depending upon the meteorological conditions at any given time, the quantity and source location of the radioactivity on the French coast and the area of the south coast in question, it may take a few hours.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

MI5 Records

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his policy on the release of post-1945 MI5 records into the Public Record Office. [28638]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government's policy on the release of post-1945 MI5 records into the Public Record Office is that such records should be released when they are over 30-years-old unless release would pose a risk to national security. The Security Service is responsible for determining the sensitivity of the records it holds.

Special Branch (Historical Records)

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the extent of preserved police special branch historical records, and his policy in respect of release of such material into the Public Record Office. [28626]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The records of the Metropolitan police special branch created up to April 2000 are designated public records and are subject to the review and disposal requirements of the Public Records Act 1958.

During the review process records that are of no historical importance nor of continued administrative use are routinely destroyed. Records that have a long-term historical value are selected for preservation and are transferred to the Public Record Office where they are to be found in class MEPO 38. The records in the class cover a wide range of subjects and are intended to reflect the range of duties performed by the branch. They include both policy files and individual case papers. The earliest surviving records of the branch date from 1888.

The MEPO 38 class currently holds records created for the most part up to 1936. Of these, a number are still withheld from public inspection. They are being assessed for continuing sensitivity using the criteria set out in the 1993 White Paper, "Open Government", (Cm 2290), and will be made available to the public when no longer considered sensitive according to those criteria.

Records created after 1936 are also being reviewed and those of historical importance will be selected for permanent preservation.

HM Land Registry

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Chief Executive of HM Land Registry will reply to the letter of 24 November 2001 from Dr. and Mrs. Pim about case reference 700/01/202. [29374]

Mr. Wills: Correspondence about individual land registration cases is a matter for the Chief Land Registrar. The Land Registry's target for responding to letters connected with a complaint is five working days. In the current financial year to December 2001, it met this target in 92 per cent. of cases. I understand that, owing to an administrative error, Dr. and Mrs. Pim's letter was regrettably mislaid in the Land Registry and a reply was not sent within the target time. I also understand that the Chief Land Registrar wrote to Dr. and Mrs. Pim on 18 January to apologise for the delay in writing to them and to give them the information they required.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what equipment has been stolen from the Lord Chancellor's Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26832]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This answer relates to the Department's offices and courts throughout England and Wales. Of the total figure for the year 2000–01 of £151,603.48 (listed in the table), £129,000 resulted from four separate incidents of theft. This comprises the separate figures of £73,000 (12 April 2000), £15,000 (18 May 2000), £16,000 (28 June 2000) and £25,000 (11 November 2000). Of these amounts, the cheques included in the figure of £73,000 have been recovered and the remainder (cash) was borne by one of the Department's PFI contractors. The figure of £15,000 was also borne by a PFI contractor. The figures are as in the table.

Date of incident	*Items stolen/lost*	*Value (£)*
Financial year 1997–98		
11 April 1997	Cash	200.00
26 April 1997	Cash	55.00
1 May 1997	TV/video	450.00
11 May 1997	Cash	500.00
11 May 1997	Printers x 4	1,000.00
16 May 1997	Video recorder	350.00
20 May 1997	Printer	250.00
22 May 1997	Laser printer fax machine	250.00
3 June 1997	Laptop	1,000.00
1 July 1997	Recorder and CD	1,000.00
23 July 1997	PC mouse	10.00
17 August 1997	Laser printer	250.00
18 August 1997	Pen	150.00
9 September 1997	Laptop	1,500.00
15 September 1997	Video recorder	250.00
7 November 1997	Desk tops x 5 and printer	300.00
22 November 1997	Video recorder	250.00
16 December 1997	PC	1,500.00
22 December 1997	Laptop	1,500.00
6 January 1998	Laptop	1,000.00
9 January 1998	PC	1,000.00
12 January 1998	PC mouse	10.00
12 January 1998	Printer, keyboard and telephone	250.00
17 February 1998	Answering machine	73.00
5 March 1998	Assorted cutlery	65.00
12 March 1998	External security light	100.00
19 March 1998	Laptop	50.00
19 March 1998	Colour TV and file server	50.00
20 March 1998	File server and chips	3,000.00
21 March 1998	Cufflinks	50.00
27 March 1998	Cash	160.00
29 March 1998	Keyboards x 4, mouse and barcode reader	300.00
29 March 1998	Pocket memo recorder	10.00
Total		16,883.00
Financial year 1998–99		
03 April 1998	Cash	230.00
14 April 1998	Contents of payphone	80.00
18 May 1998	PC	150.00
19 May 1998	CPU's missing	1,000.00
29 May 1998	Video recorder	200.00
29 May 1998	Printer cables	20.00
2 June 1998	Mobile phone	100.00
12 June 1998	Computers x 4	4,000.00
12 June 1998	PC	250.00
24 June 1998	Laptop	1,300.00
27 June 1998	TV and CD radio	800.00
29 June 1998	TV/video, TV, radio	800.00
6 July 1998	CD	49.00
10 July 1998	Wallet	130.00
11 July 1998	Safe and laser printer	50.00
14 July 1998	Laptop	2,000.00
15 July 1998	Safe	1,015.00
20 July 1998	Cash	102.00
21 July 1998	Roof Lead	1,500.00
21 July 1998	External security camera	200.00
24 July 1998	Laptop	1,300.00
27 July 1998	First aid boxes	148.00
5 August 1998	Pen and lighter	90.00
6 August 1998	Office CD	350.00
12 August 1998	CD/radio	129.00
20 August 1998	Mobile phone	95.00
17 September 1998	Video recorder	350.00
24 September 1998	Printer	200.00
9 October 1998	Printer	49.00
21 October 1998	Handbag and contents	110.00
21 October 1998	Laptop	49.00
29 October 1998	Printer	700.00
20 November 1998	Laptop	49.00
10 December 1998	Laptop	2,500.00
14 December 1998	Handbag and contents	50.00
16 December 1998	Vacuum cleaner	100.00
19 March 1999	Laptop	49.00
29 March 1999	Specialist phone	50.00
1 April 1999	Payphone and cash	500.00
Total		20,844.00
Financial year 1999–2000		
10 April 1999	Cash	67.00
26 April 1999	Payphone	505.00
9 May 1999	Roof Lead	500.00
10 May 1999	PC	49.00
15 June 1999	Mobile phone	113.00
4 July 1999	Union flag and rope	65.00
11 August 1999	PC	1,500.00
16 August 1999	Keyboard and printer	49.00
17 August 1999	Payphone	340.00
20 August 1999	Laptop	1,500.00
20 August 1999	Laptop	1,500.00
24 August 1999	Payphone	340.00
15 September 1999	Cash	340.00
16 September 1999	Payphone	200.00
26 September 1999	TV and CD player	318.85
13 October 1999	Mobile phone	158.25
21 October 1999	Mobile phone	50.00
28 October 1999	PC	49.00
29 November 1999	Wallet and contents	120.00
30 November 1999	Attempt to defraud court service	49.00
9 December 1999	Laptop	200.00
10 January 2000	Hard drives x 3	600.00
13 January 2000	Video camera	500.00
20 January 2000	Purse	49.00
1 February 2000	Laptop	49.00
2 February 2000	Payphone	50.00
19 February 2000	Union flag	40.00
16 March 2000	Dictaphone	69.81
19 March 2000	Vending machine	340.00
Total		9,710.91
Financial year 2000–01		
3 April 2000	Barrier rope	116.00
3 April 2000	Rope	116.32
12 April 2000	Cash and cheques	73,000.00
12 April 2000	Cashbox	49.00
21 April 2000	Electronic postal scales	500.00
29 April 2000	Tape recorder	38.42

Date of incident	*Items stolen/lost*	*Value (£)*
18 May 2000	PC base units x 15	15,000.00
13 June 2000	Handbag and personal palm pilot	400.00
22 June 2000	TV/video	250.00
28 June 2000	PC's x 54	16,000.00
1 July 2000	Laptop	1,500.00
3 July 2000	Mobile phone	50.00
3 July 2000	Mobile phone	50.00
27 July 2000	Cash	2,300.00
8 August 2000	Mobile phone	117.50
10 August 2000	Laptop	1,000.00
30 August 2000	Union flag	109.24
20 September 2000	Payphone	550.00
21 September 2000	Laptop	500.00
27 September 2000	Laptop	1,500.00
27 September 2000	Laptop	1,500.00
28 September 2000	TV/video	160.00
28 September 2000	TV/video	160.00
6 October 2000	PC	150.00
11 November 2000	Laptops x 9, keyboards x 2, projector and mobile phone	25,000.00
15 November 2000	Laptop	500.00
16 December 2000	Cash	140.00
8 January 2001	PTO break in	49.00
11 January 2001	Department mobile phone	100.00
2 February 2001	CCTV camera	600.00
21 March 2001	Laptop	49.00
26 March 2001	Data stolen	49.00
Total		151,603.48

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Luff: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the sum imposed as fines by magistrates courts in the latest 12-month period for which figures are available; how much of that total was collected; and if he will make a statement. [28595]

Mr. Wills: Magistrates courts committees are responsible for the collection of a range of debts imposed through the courts, including fines, fees, compensation, confiscation orders, legal aid contributions and some maintenance orders. It is not possible to separate out just the fines from the total.

The total amount imposed by magistrates in the period October 2000 to September 2001 was £358,702,837. Further amounts were imposed by other agencies, including the Crown court, making a total of new impositions which the magistrates courts had responsibility for collecting of £374,440,914.

The total amount of money collected by the courts in the same period was £232,220,021. Most fines etc are paid by instalment, by agreement with the court. Some of the instalments on impositions made in 2000–01 are therefore not yet due for payment. The gap between the amount imposed and the amount collected is due in part to defendants' inability to pay as well as their attempts to avoid payment. Severe sanctions are available to the courts for non-payment, including the seizure of goods and imprisonment. Nevertheless the present situation leaves much room for improvement. The Access to Justice Act 1999 strengthened the powers of the magistrates courts committees to take effective action against defaulters and we have introduced an information sharing arrangement with the Department of Work and Pensions, which enables magistrates courts committees to trace a significantly increased proportion of defaulters.

Private Finance Initiative

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 172W, what progress has been made with the PFI scheme for a new court house in Colchester. [28677]

Mr. Wills: Work on completing the outline business case for the provision of new and refurbished magistrates courts across Essex is in progress. It is anticipated that the business case will be ready for submission to the Essex magistrates courts committee, its paying authorities, my Department and the Office of Government Commerce's project review group for approval by the end of February.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Costs

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimates are of the administrative costs, in total and per claimant household, of *(a)* child benefit and *(b)* working families tax credit. [11672]

Malcolm Wicks: Child benefit is a universal, non-means tested payment made to families regardless of the level of income. The latest estimates for child benefit are that the total administrative cost is[1] £125 million, or an average cost per family of £0.34 per week.

WFTC is an individually assessed, income-related payment made to families with children where at least one partner works for at least 16 hours a week. The amount of the payment is dependent upon a range of factors including the hours worked, the size of the family and the age of the children. It may also take account of expenditure the family incurs in respect of child care. It is administered by the Inland Revenue; and they estimate that the total administrative cost is £133.8 million (£1.92 per family per week). I understand that they will publish further figures shortly.

Notes:

[1] The figures for child benefit are the estimated administrative costs for 1998–99 taken from the Social Security Departmental Report: The Government's Expenditure Plans for 2000–01 to 2001–02.

[2] These figures are estimates for the 12 months to March 2001.

Benefits (Belgium)

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made of the speed with which *(a)* UK nationals who have worked in Belgium but live in UK and *(b)* Belgians who have worked in UK get benefit claims dealt with by the Belgian authorities; [17375]

(2) how many people living in the UK are in receipt of supplementary benefit pending satisfaction of claims against the Belgian authorities in relation to employment benefits. [17376]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the time taken to process benefit claims from UK nationals which rely on contribution records from the Belgian authorities could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information on the speed with which benefit claims from Belgian nationals are dealt with by the Belgian authorities is solely a matter for those authorities.

As at 30 November 2001 there are two people living in Great Britain and in receipt of income-based jobseeker's allowance while we are awaiting details of their contribution record from the Belgian authorities. The Northern Ireland Assembly is responsible for social security matters in Northern Ireland.

Income Support

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will rank each local authority area in England by the percentage fall in the number of households claiming income support between March 1997 and March 2001. [17771]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information has been placed in the Library.

Social Exclusion

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to the *(a)* state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22401]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22408]

(3) if he will publish a list of the grants made under the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22416]

(4) if he will list the competitive grant schemes, administered by the Department and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants, *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisation; [22429]

(5) how many competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22435]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 482W and 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 783–84W.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* the constituency of Buckingham and *(b)* the UK have been prosecuted twice or more for benefit fraud in each year since 1992. [22522]

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* the Epsom and Ewell constituency and *(b)* the UK have been prosecuted at least twice for benefit fraud in each year since 1992. [23426]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on benefit fraud at constituency level is not available. Nationally, our research suggests that approximately 5 per cent. of prosecutions involve a person with a previous conviction for benefit fraud. We are putting in place mechanisms to identify second and further convictions.

Age Discrimination

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on age discrimination in financial services. [23218]

Mr. McCartney: We have recognised the importance of tackling age discrimination in employment sectors, including the financial services sector. That is why we have targeted this sector among others, as part of our age positive campaign. Through working with Age Champions, we have been challenging ageism in the financial sector by promoting the business benefits of age positive employment practices. We are considering ways of strengthening the campaign over the coming year.

Our new website, www.agepositive.gov.uk, includes initial research we have undertaken to identify ageist employment practices across a range of sectors which include financial services. The research is also available in the Library.

Benefit Application Forms

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit application forms his Department and agencies produce; to which benefits these forms relate; and if he will place copies of each form in the Library. [24213]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There are 64 benefit application forms produced by the Department for Work and Pensions. These relate to the following benefits:

Attendance Allowance
Back to Work Bonus
Bereavement Benefit
Child Benefit
Child Maintenance Bonus
Disability Living Allowance
Guardian's Allowance
Housing and Council Tax Benefits
Income Support
Industrial Injuries
Jobseeker's Allowance

Maternity Allowance
Minimum Income Guarantee
Retirement Pension
Social Fund
Vaccine Damage Payment
Invalid Care Allowance
Incapacity Benefit.

Copies of all forms have been placed in the Library.

Winter Fuel Payments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people living in tenements in Scotland have received half their entitlement to the winter fuel payment because of a computer error relating to residents in separate tenement flats at the same street number; and what action is being taken to ensure they are paid their full entitlement as soon as possible and that the problem will not recur. [25871]

Mr. McCartney: To ensure all eligible people in a household receive the correct level of winter fuel payment, the addresses are matched to ascertain how many people live at each address. The Department is aware that there have been problems regarding people living in tenements in Scotland and, to alleviate this, the Department clerically matches the addresses in areas where there are many tenement flats. This should ensure that the correct payment is made, and this system ought to prevent problems reoccurring. We are unable to provide the figure in the form requested but where an underpayment has come to light, corrective action has been taken.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money is estimated to have been overpaid in winter fuel payments in each year since 1997 *(a)* to people who have been paid more than they are entitled and *(b)* to people who are ineligible for the benefit; and how much of this money has been recovered. [27762]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available in the format requested.

The Department makes every effort to ensure that addresses are matched with household composition to avoid overpayments. Where we become aware of either overpayments or underpayments, corrective action is taken to put it right and prevent this reoccurring.

Stakeholder Pension

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Stakeholder Pension; and how much this will add to the total value of a pension. [25926]

Mr. McCartney: As set out in our 1998 Green Paper "Partnership in Pensions" the Government's long-term pension reforms are designed to ensure that all pensioners have a decent income in retirement, building on the foundation of the basic state pension available to all. This means everyone recognising their responsibilities; with those who are able, saving for their retirement, the Government supporting those who cannot save, and the private sector providing affordable and secure second pensions.

Before April 2001, many of those who could put money aside to provide for themselves in retirement had no straightforward, good value way to enter a pension scheme. Stakeholder pensions, which were introduced from that date, offered such people a good value, flexible product. Annual charges are capped at 1 per cent. of the fund's value, meaning more of what people pay in goes towards their pension. There are no additional charges for stopping and starting payments or transferring between stakeholder schemes. They are widely available but are particularly aimed at moderate to higher earners who do not already have access to an occupational pension or a good personal pension with an employer contribution. Stakeholder pensions are an important part of the framework this Government have now put in place to give everyone access to a good value pension arrangement and a decent income in retirement.

The added value of a stakeholder pension will vary according to the charging structure of the particular scheme, the investment returns achieved and the individual's pattern of payments.

Poor Households

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of persons in poverty in working households without children are working more than 30 hours per week and are aged 25 years or over. [25979]

Malcolm Wicks: Poverty and social exclusion are complex multi-dimensional issues, affecting many aspects of people's lives—including their living standards, health, housing, the quality of the environment and not just low income. The third "Opportunity for all" report (Cm 5260) sets out the Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and presents the latest information on the indicators used to measure progress against this strategy. Specific information regarding low income is available in "Households Below Average Income 1994–95 to 1999–2000".

Pension Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he will allow annuity holders *(a)* to draw down the assets and *(b)* to set up phased annuity schemes for the purposes of assessing entitlement to the proposed pension credit. [26019]

Mr. McCartney: Income drawdown plans may be taken out by personal pension fund holders, but most drawdown providers generally only recommend this option for people with significant funds. Personal pension savings may be split in parts and annuitised separately. Income and potential income from private pensions will be relevant for the purposes of assessing entitlement to pension credit.

Share Ownership

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many shareholders there are in each region; and what proportion of the adult population of their areas they represent. [26240]

Malcolm Wicks: The information available for the latest year is in the following table.

Stocks/shares/unit trusts/PEPs/ISAs holders in 2000–01

Government office region	*Number of adult stocks/shareholders in the region (Thousand)*	*Proportion of adult population of the region who are stocks/shareholders (Percentage)*	*Number of adult stocks/shares/unit trusts/PEPs/ISAs holders in the region (Thousand)*	*Proportion of adult population of the region who are stocks/shares/unit trusts/PEPs/ISAs holders (Percentage)*
North East	240	11	510	23
North West and Merseyside	940	18	1,630	31
Yorkshire and Humber	700	18	1,220	31
East Midlands	570	17	1,020	30
West Midlands	560	15	1,080	29
Eastern	980	24	1,590	39
London	1,080	20	1,740	32
South East	1,560	26	2,510	42
South West	730	21	1,290	36
England	7,360	20	12,580	34
Wales	270	12	570	25
Scotland	630	16	1,070	27
Total Great Britain	8,250	19	14,220	32

Notes:

1. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for tenure, Council Tax Band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.

2. Questions on assets are a sensitive part of the FRS questionnaire and have relatively low level of response, and hence higher levels of imputation, compared to other parts of the survey. Responses are imputed in around 1 in 10 cases. Evidence also suggests some under reporting of capital by respondents.

3. The final two columns of the table refer to adults reporting one of more of the categories: stocks and shares, unit trusts, PEPs and ISAs.

4. The results are for Financial Year 2000–01 and the number of adults figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Source:

Family Resources Survey (FRS)

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received in respect of the appropriateness of the application form for disability living allowance for haemodialysis patients; and what proposals he has to make amendments to it. [27545]

Maria Eagle: No such representations have been received and no changes are planned to the disability living allowance claim which would affect haemodialysis patients.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for each of the last three years, how many and what percentage of *(a)* applicants for disability living allowance whose applications were accepted and *(b)* appeals against these decisions to reject applications were upheld; and how many of them were haemodialysis patients. [27546]

Maria Eagle: Information is not available in the form requested.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he plans to conduct a review of the operation of the disability living allowance. [29519]

Maria Eagle: As with other social security benefits, the operation of disability living allowance is kept under review. We have recently made significant improvements to the DLA claim form, we are currently piloting revised arrangements for obtaining relevant information from claimants' general practitioners, and in consultation with organisations representing disabled people, are testing an alternative system for extra-costs disability benefits based on activities for managing life.

Statistics and Reports

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the publication dates of statistics and reports due to be released by his Department and its agencies during calendar year 2002. [28392]

Mr. McCartney: Information on the release dates of statistics published by the Department under the national statistics banner is notified in the National Statistics Update issued by the Office for National Statistics and is available in the Library. Release dates four months ahead are given and the information is rolled forward one month at the end of each month.

Correspondence

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Chelmsford, West (Mr. Burns), of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 430W, on numbers of letters received by his Department, if the details of letters received between 20 June and 20 July are available. [29888]

Maria Eagle: In my written answer of 5 December I said that information between 20 June and 20 July was not available in the format requested. That was incorrect. The information requested is as follows.

We received 1,137 letters for ministerial reply between 20 June and 20 July. Of those 814 (72 per cent.) were answered within 20 working days, 244 (21 per cent.) were answered within 21–40 working days and 79 (7 per cent.) were answered in more than 40 working days.

Unemployment (South Tyneside)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has to help unemployed people over 50 years of age back into work in south Tyneside. [15022]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are committed to helping people of all ages back into work. Our range of back to work programmes, including new deal 50 plus, new deal 25 plus and new deal for disabled people have helped to ensure that the employment rate for the over-50s has increased each year for the last four years. All of these programmes are operating in south Tyneside. In addition, extra support is available in south Tyneside through the local action team for jobs and work-focused interview site.

Benefits Agency

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the staffing levels for each of the last five years in the Benefits Agency offices at *(a)* Elthorne road, London N19, and *(b)* Seven Sisters road, London N7, the number of callers per day for the equivalent period and the average waiting time. [23637]

Malcolm Wicks: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Jeremy Corbyn, dated 9 January 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking, if he will state the staffing levels for each of the last five years in the Benefits Agency offices at (a) Elthorne Road London N19 and (b) Seven Sisters Road London N7, the number of callers per day for the equivalent period and the average waiting time.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information that is available is in the attached table.

I hope this is helpful.

	Seven Sisters Road Finsbury Park office	*Elthorne Road Highgate office*
Average staff days per month		
1996	443	315
1997	377	329
1998	348	304
1999	379	402
2000	369	427
Average number of callers per month		
1996	5,912	5,340
1997	5,631	4,936
1998	5,217	4,602
1999	5,695	5,050
2000	5,039	4,553
Initial waiting time 10 minutes or less based on the average number of callers (shown as a percentage)		
1996	57	72
1997	57	43
1998	43	68
1999	34	70
2000	41	63
Initial waiting time 30 minutes or less based on the average number of callers (shown as a percentage)		
1996	82	98
1997	94	85
1998	91	100
1999	87	100
2000	85	97

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

GCSE Point Scores

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average annual change in points score at GCSE in *(a)* specialist, *(b)* grammar and *(c)* all secondary schools in each of the past five years. [19239]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: The information requested on the change in average GCSE/GNVQ point score for schools in England is shown in the table:

(a) Specialist

	Score in former year	*Score in latter year*	*Change*
1995–96 and 1996–97	38.8	39.9	1.1
1996–97 and 1997–98	40.1	41.5	1.4
1997–98 and 1998–99	40.7	42.2	1.5
1998–99 and 1999–2000	41.5	42.5	1.0
1999–2000 and 2000–01	41.8	42.4	0.6

	(a) Specialist	*(b) Selective*		*(c) All schools*	
	Change	*Score*	*Change*	*Score*	*Change*
1996–97	1.1	57.0	0.6	35.9	0.5
1997–98	1.4	59.4	2.4	37.0	1.1
1998–99	1.5	60.7	1.3	38.1	1.1
1999–2000	1.0	62.1	1.4	38.9	0.8
2000–01	0.6	62.8	0.7	39.3	0.4

Note:

As the number of specialist schools increases year on year, the column for 'specialist schools' refers to schools which were designated as specialist for both the appropriate academic years, hence two figures are given for each year. For example, throughout the academic years 1995–96 and 1996–97 there were 102 specialists. Throughout 1996–97 and 1997–98 there were 174 specialists. In the table above the 39.9 figure in the first row refers to the average point score of the 102 schools in 1997. The 40.1 figure in the second row refers to the average point score of the 174 specialists in 1997.

Adult and Community Learning

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the spending per head of population is on adult and community learning in *(a)* Buckinghamshire and *(b)* the Chesham and Amersham constituency. [27124]

John Healey: Spending per head of population (adults 19 and over) on adult and community learning in Buckinghamshire was £4.74 in 1999–2000[1]. Figures for the Chesham and Amersham constituency are not available, as expenditure is calculated on an LEA basis only.

[1] Source: Audit Commission

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the spending per head of population is on *(a)* adult and *(b)* community learning in the Greater London area, broken down by constituency in this financial year. [27265]

John Healey: Set out is information for each London borough and for London overall for 1999–2000. This is the latest year for which final published data are available from LEA returns to the Audit Commission. Information is not available by constituency. The figures are £s per adult (aged 19 and over).

London boroughs	£
City of London	n/a
Camden	4.64
Greenwich	n/a
Hackney	7.35
Hammersmith and Fulham	14.60
Islington	3.57
Kensington and Chelsea	5.89
Lambeth	7.76
Lewisham	8.90
Southwark	3.21
Tower Hamlets	13.32
Wandsworth	5.37
Westminster	15.61
Barking and Dagenham	6.47
Barnet	0.74
Bexley	15.61
Brent	6.26
Bromley	9.49
Croydon	10.39
Ealing	0.52
Enfield	0.28
Haringey	8.95
Harrow	2.22
Havering	1.18
Hillingdon	4.83
Hounslow	4.66
Kingston-upon-Thames	8.47
Merton	6.42
Newham	5.79
Redbridge	7.38
Richmond-upon-Thames	1.92
Sutton	17.49
Waltham Forest	7.32
London overall	6.99

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the use of claims based on individual learning account funds to support terrorist activities. [26774]

John Healey: We have no evidence that ILA funds have been used for terrorist activity.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many ILA learning providers have to date *(a)* had complaints and *(b)* had no complaints made against them. [27158]

John Healey: We have had complaints concerning non-compliance with the ILA rules and regulations against 565 ILA learning providers out of a total of approximately 8,500 registered on the England ILA database.

We had serious concerns about 86 providers and are in the process of investigating 82 of these.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of those ILA learning providers that have had no complaints made against them have received all payments owed to them for the ILA scheme. [27159]

John Healey: We have as a matter of priority been working to validate outstanding claims to providers. On 21 December, all learning providers that have had no complaints made against them received payment for claims they had submitted up to 21 November.

We intend making a further payment by Friday 25 January 2002 for learning confirmed between 21 November and 23 November.

Officials will be writing to learning providers once arrangements for future payments for learning that was booked on the ILA system up to its closure on 23 November are finalised.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if consultation on a replacement scheme for individual learning accounts will be by invitation only; and if she will consider submissions from all interested parties. [27161]

John Healey: Although the views of providers, account holders and other key partners are being particularly sought, we welcome and will consider submissions from anyone who feels they have a contribution to make on a successor programme to ILAs.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what equipment has been stolen from her Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26821]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The table details the equipment stolen from the Department for Education and Skills since 1 May 1997 along with the approximate value of the stolen equipment.

Description	*Number of items*	*Approximate value of item (£)*	*Total approximate value (£)*
Financial year 1997–98			
Laptop PC	5	1,000	5,000
Printer	2	300	600
PC chips	4	125	500
PC hard drive	1	900	900
IT kit	13	1,035	13,455
Power drill	2	145	290
CCTV camera	1	1,000	1,000
Mobile phone	1	200	200
Total			21,945
Financial year 1998–99			
Laptop PC	7	1,000	7,000
Palmtop PC	1	250	250
PC chips	From 205 PCs	423.57	86,831
Total			94,081
Financial year 1999–2000			
Laptop PC	5	1,000	5,000
Palmtop PC	1	250	250
PC processing unit	2	1,000	2,000
Mobile phone	1	60	60
Total			7,310
Financial year 2000–01			
Laptop PC	2	1,000	2,000
Palm pilot PC	1	300	300
Nokia WAP phone	1	200	200
Mobile phone and charger	1	100	100
Total			2,600

Description	Number of items	Approximate value of item (£)	Total approximate value (£)
Financial year 2001–02			
Laptop PC	3	1,000	3,000
Mobile phone	2	100	200
Video phone	1	200	200
Phone charger	1	25	25
Dictaphone	1	40	40
Chair	1	80	80
Total			3,545

The total number of items stolen since 1 May 1997 amounts to 265 at a total approximate value of £129,481

Note:

Electronic security tags are fitted to all portable IT equipment held in London. The tags raise an alarm at reception of an unauthorised person attempts to remove the kit. The level of theft outside London is so low that it is not justified to extend tagging to the Darlington, Runcorn and Sheffield sites of the Department.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [28001]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The table details items valued at £50 or more which have been stolen from the Department for Education and Skills in each of the last four years.

Description	Number of items	Approximate value per item (£)	Total approximate value (£)
Laptop PC	7	1,000	7,000
Palmtop PC	1	250	250
PC chips	From 205 PCs	423.57	86,831
Total			94,081
Financial year 1999–2000			
Laptop PC	5	1,000	5,000
Palmtop PC	1	250	250
PC processing unit	2	1,000	2,000
Mobile phone	1	60	60
Total			7,310
Financial year 2000–01			
Laptop PC	2	1,000	2,000
Palm pilot PC	1	300	300
Nokia WAP phone	1	200	200
Mobile phone and charger	1	100	100
Total			2,600
Financial year 2001–02			
Laptop PC	3	1,000	3,000
Mobile phone	2	100	200
Video phone	1	200	200
Chair	1	80	80
Total			3,480

The total number of items valued at £50 or more that have been stolen or lost in the last four years amounts to 263 at a total approximate value of £129,416

Note:

Electronic security tags are fitted to all portable IT equipment held in London. The tags raise an alarm at reception if an unauthorised person attempts to remove the kit. The level of theft outside London is so low that it is not justified to extend tagging to the Darlington, Runcorn and Sheffield sites of the Department.

Nursery Provision (London)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what records are kept by her Department on the extent of early years nursery provision in each London borough for the last five years; and if she will publish such records. [28082]

Margaret Hodge: The Department collects data on the numbers of three and four-year-old children taking up free early years education places at (1) maintained nursery and primary schools, and (2) maintained early years settings (other than maintained nursery and primary schools), independent schools, and private and voluntary early years settings in England, that are registered with Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, in each local education authority area in England. These data are collected each term throughout the year as part of the Department's Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.

The Department also collects data on the numbers of three and four-year-old children taking up early years education places in the spring term at (1) maintained nursery and primary schools in England, as part of its annual Schools Census data collection exercise, and (2) maintained early years settings (other than maintained nursery and primary schools), independent schools, private and voluntary early years settings in England, that are registered with Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, as part of its annual Early Years Census data collection exercise.

Figures for 1997 to 2001 for LEA areas in England for three and four-year-old children in maintained nursery and primary schools were published in Statistical Bulletin 11–2001 "Provision for children under five years of age in England—January 2001" which is available from the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/ or the Library. In addition, figures for three and four year old children taking up free early years education places in maintained nursery and primary schools and maintained early years settings (other than maintained nursery and primary schools), independent schools, private and voluntary early years settings were published in a table alongside the bulletin on the Department's website.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she last used the railway service in connection with her official duties; what station she left from and what was the destination; and whether it is her intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28102]

Estelle Morris: I last used the railway service on Thursday 6 December to travel from Paddington to Bristol. I use the network on a regular basis in connection with my official duties and for travel to and from my constituency.

All travel is conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document, "Travel by Ministers".

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the pay entitlement of a teacher who has achieved the upper pay spine when changing schools. [28189]

Mr. Timms: Crossing the threshold entitles a teacher to be paid on point 1 of the upper pay scale. That entitlement continues to apply when a teacher changes schools. Further progress on the upper pay scale will be on the basis of discretionary performance points awarded by individual governing bodies. The School Teachers' Review Body is considering whether such points should be portable, as we have proposed. Portability would be consistent with expecting all schools to take account of the same general criteria in awarding such points. It would also facilitate movement between schools.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking to ensure consistency between schools in allocating upper pay spine awards. [28190]

Mr. Timms: Progress on the upper pay scale for classroom teachers will be on the basis of discretionary performance points awarded by governing bodies at individual schools. The Department sent guidance on school salary policies and performance points to schools last September. This said that points should reward substantial and sustained performance and contribution to the school that showed greater breadth and depth than the threshold standards. The guidance also made it clear that schools would have to interpret and develop these general criteria in the light of local circumstances and priorities.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes she plans to the head teachers' retirement package arrangements; and if she will make a statement. [29264]

Mr. Timms: £10 million of standards fund money was made available in each of 2000–01 and 2001–02 to support an early retirement scheme for head teachers. This was a two-year scheme aimed at raising the standard of leadership in schools. Although the financial support that this scheme provided will not continue beyond the end of this financial year, it will still be open to employers to grant early retirement to head teachers where they believe that doing so would be beneficial.

Rural Transport

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a direct grant allocation to Shropshire county council to support the additional transport costs incurred by a rural county. [28332]

Mr. Timms: In 2002–03 Shropshire's Education SSA will increase by £6.88 million or 6.16 per cent. Shropshire will also benefit from an overall increase in Standards Fund grant of almost £160 million; and an increase of 2.75 per cent. in the direct grant for schools. We believe that this is a good settlement sufficient to cover all the cost pressures on Shropshire next year, including the additional transport costs incurred by a rural county.

However, we are currently working up a new funding system for introduction in 2003–04. As part of that work we are taking account of the costs associated with rural areas such as home to school transport.

School Expulsions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are in place to ensure that an expelled pupil is able to carry on in education; and what steps are taken if a pupil continues to disrupt. [28344]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department's guidance to local education authorities is that ideally many permanently excluded pupils should rejoin a mainstream or special school within days or weeks of exclusion. Those permanently excluded pupils who are not re-integrated into a new school should be offered opportunities in Pupil Referral Units (PRU), FE colleges and or on work experience. Rapid re-integration is particularly important for excluded primary pupils and I expect that most of them would be re-integrated within one term. Conversely, for pupils approaching the end of compulsory schooling, a return to school may be unrealistic and in those cases alternative provision like a PRU or FE college is more appropriate.

The guidance does not direct that alternative provision must be found immediately for a permanently excluded child. The Discipline Committee must meet to review the decision no later than 15 school days after notification of the exclusion. During this time the guidance states that the head teacher should plan for the child's continued education. This can be by setting and marking work for the child to do at home. Where a parent lodges an appeal, I expect the school and LEA to work together to secure the pupil's on-going education. Following an unsuccessful appeal, reintegration into a school or PRU may take some time.

Reintegration Panels are responsible for co-ordinating services for excluded pupils. They must draw up an individual re-integration plan for each excluded child. This plan should be in place within a month of the governors upholding the exclusion and it is reviewed on a monthly basis. It should include a target date for return to school, once the school to which the child will return has been identified.

Pupils who continue to be disruptive may be excluded from their new school or, as a last resort, from a Pupil Referral Unit. However, we now have a network of Learning Support Units in schools and Pupil Referral Units to support our drive to tackle poor behaviour and continue to raise standards in schools.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils in the Uxbridge constituency have been statemented in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the last five years. [28487]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The available data are shown in the table:

Number of pupils with statements of SEN in the Uxbridge constituency—position in January each year

	Primary schools	*Secondary schools*
2001	122	163
2000	115	174
1999	100	170
1998	105	175
1997	107	180

Source:
Annual Schools Census

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average percentage of special needs children is in *(a)* all schools in England and *(b)* faith schools in England. [28609]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The available information is shown in the table:

Maintained primary and secondary schools: percentage of pupils with Special Educational Needs—as at January 2000

		Percentage
	All schools	*Faith schools*
SEN pupils with statements	2.0	1.5
SEN pupils without statements	18.7	17.1

Source:

Annual Schools Census

Primary School Heads

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of primary school heads are estimated to earn more than £60,000 per annum. [28572]

Mr. Timms: The School Teachers' Review Body's leadership group pay survey for 2000 estimated that 0.2 per cent. of primary school heads earn more than £60,000 per annum.

Education (Somerset)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much the Government have spent on education in Somerset in each of the financial years since 1996–97, broken down by areas on which the funding has been spent. [28743]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is contained in the following table:

Somerset

			£ million
	SSA	*Grants*	*Total*
Cash			
1996–97	150.908	1.558	152.465
1997–98	150.711	6.912	157.623
1998–99	165.321	2.392	167.713
1999–2000	175.623	6.161	181.784
2000–01	186.168	16.266	202.435
2001–02	194.974	24.882	219.855
Change[1]	44.066	23.324	67.390
Real terms: prices 2000–01			
1996–97	166.659	1.720	168.379
1997–98	161.463	7.405	168.868
1998–99	172.299	2.493	174.792
1999–2000	178.722	6.269	184.992
2000–01	186.168	16.266	202.435
2001–02	190.218	24.275	214.493
Change[1]	23.559	22.555	46.114

[1] Change since 1996–97

Notes:

1. Figures reflect Education SSA plus all school related revenue grants.
2. Real terms figures are calculated using GDP deflators published by the Treasury 20 December 2001.
3. 2001–02 figures are provisional.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much her Department spent on advertising in Somerset between 31 December 2000 and 31 December 2001. [28744]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In the period 31 December 2000 to 31 December 2001, the Department for Education and Skills spent £11,513 on advertising on Somerset local radio. There was no expenditure on advertising in Somerset local press.

People living in Somerset will also have been exposed to national advertising run by the Department for Education and Skills. It is not possible to calculate what percentage of spending on television advertising can be allocated to Somerset because half of the county falls into the HTV West television region and the other half falls into the West Country television region.

Sex Education

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her policy on sex education in schools. [28767]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The responsibility for determining a school policy on sex and relationship education rests with governing bodies and head teachers. Our Sex and Relationship Education guidance, published in July 2000, clearly states that governing bodies and head teachers should consult parents in developing their sex and relationship education policy to ensure that the views of parents and the community are reflected. All schools must have a policy, which is made available for inspection and to parents.

The Department recommends that sex and relationship education should be supported by a school's wider curriculum for Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship. In this way, schools can ensure that pupils receive their sex education in the wider context of relationships and are prepared for the responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Standards Funds

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the standards funds allocated to Stoke-on-Trent local education authority in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [28771]

Mr. Timms: The table shows allocations for the standards fund for Stoke-on-Trent local education authority in 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02. The figures include both Government and local authority contributions.

Standards fund allocations for city of Stoke-on-Trent council

	£
1999–2000	
Administrative Support in Small Schools	57,084
Applications for Education Action Zones	30,000
Books for Schools	1,585
Class Size Initiative	1,080,242
Computer Systems for Chairs of Education	2,000
Drug Prevention	39,355
Early Years Training and Development	67,342
Education and Health Partnerships	19,000
Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots	1,024,683
Ethnic Minority Achievements	614,112
Laptops for Heads of Small Primary and Special Schools	15,466
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	119,500
Local Education Authority Music Services	148,000
Local Recruitment Measures	50,000
National Grid for Learning	1,000,000
Playing for Success	100,000
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	687,782
Qualifications	46,275

Standards fund allocations for city of Stoke-on-Trent council

	£
School Asset Management Plans	33,610
School Improvement	1,445,382
School Leadership	122,631
School Security	115,898
Social Inclusion	342,484
Special Educational Needs	272,855
Support for Parent Governor Representatives	1,000
Work Related Learning at Key Stage 4	49,500
Working Environment Fund	99,860
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	277,910
Total	7,863,556
2000–01	
Administrative Support for Small Schools	172.735
Beacon Schools	56,000
Best Practice Research Scholarships	34,335
City Learning Centres: Design and Capital Costs	300,000
Class Size Initiative	1,165,476
Developing and Extending Maintained Nursery School Services	69,032
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	1,501,654
Early Years Training and Development	67,858
Education and Health Partnerships	33,706
Ethnic Minority Pupils and Traveller Achievement	614,112
Excellence in Cities: Development	25,676
Excellence in Cities: Excellence Challenge	12,739
Excellence in Cities: Gifted and Talented Children	361,000
Excellence in Cities: Learning Mentors and Learning Support Units	676,000
Key Stage 3 Numeracy: Secondary Schools Conference	14,656
Literacy and Numeracy: Summer Schools and Key Stage 3	132,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	238,000
National Grid for Learning	1,000,000
New National Curriculum	90,500
Maintained Nursery Capital	92,200
Performance Management Training	207,252
Pilot Education Maintenance Allowance	2,397,843
Playing for Success	125,000
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	860,176
Qualifications	36,429
School Improvement	1,640,597
School Laboratories for the 21st Century	155,850
School Leadership	85,985
School Security	114,362
Seed Capital Challenge	172,790
Small Education Action Zones	20,000
Small School Support Fund	86,834
Social Inclusion, Drugs and Youth	1,067,179
Special Educational Needs	341,025
Specialist Schools	158,386
Study Support	180,886
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Pupils	18,000
Support for Parent Governor Representatives	1,200
Teacher Incentives	13,682
Teaching Assistants	758,183
Teenage Pregnancies	93,000
Working Environment Fund	99,860
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	247,392
Total	15,539,590
2001–02	
Adult:Pupil Ratios in Reception Classes	346,792
Advanced Skills Teachers	152,000
Child Protection Co-ordinators	39,600
Children in Public Care	41,661
Children of Asylum Seekers	3,500
City Learning Centres	2,400,000
Class Size Initiative	1,255,664
Devolved Capital	2,226,443
Drug Prevention and Advisers	65,760
Early Professional Development	264,800
Early Years Training and Development	76,293
Education Health Partnerships	32,798
Ethnic Minority Achievement	614,112
Excellence in Cities: Beacon Schools	70,000
Excellence in Cities: Excellence Challenge	211,101
Excellence in Cities: Secondary[1]	1,778,000
Gifted and Talented Children Summer Schools	18,000
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	441,363
Information Management Strategy	153,893
Key Stage 3: National Implementation	274,803
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	100,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	264,400
Maintained Nursery School Service	140,650
National Curriculum	90,336
National Grid for Learning	1,356,063
NDS Condition Funding	1,696,708
Performance Management	136,283
Playing for Success	120,036
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	927,979
Qualifications	15,870
School Achievement Awards	340,950
School Improvement	997,000
School Laboratories	287,409
School Leadership	95,563
School Security	112,855
Seed Capital Challenge	191,087
Sick Children	11,903
Small Education Action Zones	415,414
Small Schools Fund	336,606
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	1,282,329
Special Educational Needs	434,461
Specialist Schools	341,809
Study Support	284,029
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	40,000
Teachers' Sabbaticals	36,000
Teaching Assistants	1,118,490
Teenage Pregnancies	93,000
Truancy Buster Awards	8,000
Year 6 Booster Classes	261,114
Year 9 Booster Classes	76,500
Total	22,079,427

[1] Including Gifted and Talented Children, Learning Support Units and Learning Mentors

Specialist Colleges

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have applied for specialist college status in the last six months. [28925]

Mr. Timms: The total number of schools that have applied for specialist college status in the last six months is 261.

HIV

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what requirements there are for HIV prevention work to take place in *(a)* schools, *(b)* colleges and *(c)* universities. [28931]

Mr. Timms: Sex education, which must include teaching about HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, is compulsory in all maintained secondary schools. It is discretionary in primary schools. There are no requirements for HIV prevention work to take place in further or higher educational establishments.

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who is responsible for funding HIV prevention work in *(a)* schools, *(b)* colleges and *(c)* universities. [28932]

Mr. Timms: The Government distribute funding to local authorities through formula assessed Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs). Local education authorities then distribute funding to the schools they maintain, enabling them to fulfil their statutory obligations. Local NHS funding could be used to fund or contribute to HIV prevention within schools, colleges and universities, for example in the production of information resources. Alternatively, schools, colleges and universities may choose to buy in or work with non-statutory local organisations.

Leeds Schools

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many whole-time equivalent teachers were employed in Leeds schools in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [28976]

Mr. Timms: Full-time equivalent regular teachers in the maintained schools sector in Leeds were as follows:

	Number
January 1997	5,900
January 2001	6,040

Teacher numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many environmental appraisals have been published by her Department since 1 January 2001; and if she will list the last four. [29048]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* None.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the last occasion was on which she requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29049]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Department for Education and Skills has procedures in place to ensure that environmental appraisals take place when necessary. Examples of policy decisions which included appraisal of environmental impacts are: guidance to schools in England on energy and water management which Ministers aim to issue in spring 2002; obtaining accreditation in 2001 for environmental management of one of our headquarters sites to an international standard; and, in the school curriculum, the Growing Schools programme. This last initiative, launched in 2001, encourages teachers to use farming and growing to help pupils explore different aspects of sustainable development such as the effects of climate change, the life cycle of plants and animals, the values and traditions of rural communities, and the place of agriculture in today's economy.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what procedures her Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [29050]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Administrative procedures are monitored by an inter-site facilities management working group. This is supported by our procurement policy, which includes guidance on including environmental considerations in whole-life purchasing decisions. On policy, our business planning process reminds policy officials to consider their policy impact on the environment in annual planning, which senior officials review at key points in the year.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans her Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29051]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* As part of this Department's Spending Review submission to the Treasury we will, in common with other Departments, report on the sustainable development impact of our bids, including any environmental impact.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many officials from her Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29052]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* No officials from my Department attended the first of these courses. The course will run three times a year, and has been brought to the attention of my officials. Officials learn about environmental issues through on the job training and written guidance, as well as formal courses by the Civil Service and other training providers.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* Hertfordshire spent on education as a percentage of SSA in each of the past five years. [29076]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is given in the following table:

Education as a percentage of SSA

Year	*£*
Staffordshire	
1996–97	102.0
1997–98	102.3
1998–99	101.3
1999–2000	101.1
2000–01	100.5
Hertfordshire	
1996–97	102.7
1997–98	101.8
1998–199	100.8
1999–2000	99.7
2001–01	100.1

Note:

1. Information is taken from data published in the 2001 and previous years' Departmental Annual Reports. Budget figures up to 1999–2000 were taken from local authorities' latest Revenue Account returns submitted to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and for 2000–01, from LEAs s52 Budget statements.
2. From 1997–98 Staffordshire does not include Stoke-on-Trent

Foreign Language Programmes

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the use of foreign language television and radio in *(a)* secondary school education and *(b)* post-secondary school education. [29095]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Foreign language broadcasts which have been carefully scripted with content, structure and language level appropriate to the target learners can be a valuable resource for teaching school pupils and older students. They can provide access to a range of authentic native speakers, up to date and topical materials, and opportunities for introducing cultural elements to language learning.

Broadcasts aimed at the native-speaker audience which are accessed from abroad, normally require selection and mediation by a teacher to ensure suitable content, accessible language and effective use for learning purposes.

Student Debts

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of the extent to which the possibility of having incurred a debt upon graduation affects the numbers of people who attend university; and what plans she has to change the relative contributions of *(a)* students and *(b)* Government to higher education funding. [29108]

Margaret Hodge: Some research, such as that published by the Department in 2001 on "Issues Affecting Decisions on Participation by Lower Socio-Economic Groups" (SEGs), indicates that finance and concern about debt are factors which can deter people from going on to higher education. However, assessing the deterrent effect is difficult in the light of welcome increases in entry numbers. Final UCAS figures for autumn 2001 show that acceptances of English domiciled full-time higher education students are up by 5.9 per cent. compared to the same time last year, building on the rising trend of previous years. But as yet there is no evidence that the proportion of lower SEGs entering HE has increased significantly. Our review of student finance is considering both the student debt issue, particularly in relation to the lower socio-economic groups, and the relative contributions of students, parents and the Government to student support. We expect to make an announcement on the outcome later this year.

Ofsted

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection into Gloucestershire local education authority. [29260]

Mr. Timms: My officials have discussed the report with the council's lead members and officers. I am assured that the authority recognises the weaknesses identified by Ofsted, and will be addressing the recommendations in the year ahead. I await the authority's post-Ofsted action plan, which will set out the action proposed.

Teacher Shortages

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of teacher shortages in Gloucestershire; what steps she is taking to improve the situation; and if she will make a statement. [29261]

Mr. Timms: Information on the number of teacher vacancies in local education authorities is collected once a year in January as part of the annual census of teachers and vacancies. In January 2001, the vacancy rate for Gloucestershire was 0.3 per cent. compared with 1.4 per cent. nationally. This amounts to a total of 14 vacancies across the maintained sector. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out our longer term proposals for teachers and teaching in a pamphlet, "Professionalism and Trust", published in November 2001.

Grammar and Spelling Tests

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on grammar and spelling tests in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education. [29302]

Mr. Timms: In order to make sense of what they read children need a clear awareness of grammar for both literal and inferential understanding, both of which are assessed in the reading tests at each key stage. At Key Stage 1 and 2 spelling is assessed by a separate test. At Key Stage 1 the outcome of the test is reported separately, while at Key Stage 2 it contributes to an overall level for writing. At Key Stage 3 spelling is an integral part of the judgment leading to an overall level for writing. Grammar is assessed within the context of pupils' writing at all key stages. Criteria for grammar that allow teachers and markers to make judgments about pupils' performance are integral to the mark schemes.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by her Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29414]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information available is shown in the table.

Year	*Number*
1996–97	3
1997–98	1
1998–99	4
1999–2000	2

Prior to 1996 the information was not collected.

Community Learning

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the spending per head of population on adult and community learning in *(a)* Worcestershire and *(b)* the West Midlands; what is the average spending per head in (i) the shire counties and (ii) England; and if she will make a statement. [26404]

Mr. Healey: The following is the average spend on adult education per adult (aged 19 and over):

Worcestershire: £0.36

West Midlands*: £2.78

County Councils: £3.80

England: £4.42

*For the West Midlands Region. Figures calculated on the basis of the population 18-65. (*Source*: Audit Commission figures for 1999–2000.)

These figures reflect decisions taken by individual local authorities on the nature and scale of adult and community learning (ACL) in their area. Since 1999–2000 all areas including Worcestershire have benefited from significant increases in funding. In 2002–03 we will be providing a record £167 million for ACL in England, a 9 per cent. increase in recurrent funding for adult education on 2001–02. Since April 2001 responsibility for adult and community learning has rested with the Learning and Skills Council. One of the objectives behind this change in responsibilities is over time to reduce inequalities in opportunities between areas.

Schools Spending

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the total spending on schools in each London borough in each of the last 10 years.

[28177]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is contained in the table. Expenditure in running these authorities was affected by schools becoming grant-maintained during the early part of this period, and by the return of grant-maintained schools to LEA-maintained status in 1999–2000.

Net institutional expenditure[1]

£ million

London authorities		*All sectors*									
LEA name	*LEA no.*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
City of London	201	0.457	0.616	0.711	0.733	0.761	0.808	0.830	0.797	0.855	0.949
Camden	202	45.457	52.452	53.300	51.394	50.328	53.280	56.664	57.310	58.500	72.210
Greenwich	203	78.867	78.255	85.843	83.782	87.994	90.972	93.758	87.796	96.735	109.433
Hackney	204	55.790	62.233	63.317	57.181	66.951	64.959	66.288	68.743	70.663	81.482
Hammersmith and Fulham	205	37.264	38.810	41.915	43.281	43.294	42.879	44.203	45.983	47.374	55.246
Islington	206	45.795	61.737	75.272	68.639	55.063	61.704	61.675	65.165	65.323	67.182
Kensington and Chelsea	207	23.424	27.869	25.236	25.239	24.699	27.099	26.479	27.881	28.807	34.967
Lambeth	208	57.424	65.382	68.624	69.624	63.629	60.189	56.362	64.542	63.565	92.356
Lewisham	209	65.517	68.233	65.033	72.597	74.904	80.350	80.578	90.030	93.794	107.164
Southwark	210	64.814	65.988	66.224	59.549	61.919	68.458	70.382	73.393	80.902	105.177
Tower Hamlets	211	69.583	79.720	84.052	96.829	95.239	99.152	104.346	102.995	110.154	125.519
Wandsworth	212	65.671	73.924	67.513	54.490	55.076	54.506	49.255	50.343	53.413	90.383
Westminster	213	34.185	52.072	44.889	45.636	45.608	46.574	49.295	49.686	53.011	54.171
Barking and Dagenham	301	42.632	45.810	50.196	51.444	55.179	58.364	61.674	62.652	69.252	74.408
Barnet	302	69.253	79.162	90.885	83.599	66.345	68.799	73.678	74.283	78.312	126.585
Bexley	303	51.545	56.351	57.978	59.756	56.434	58.330	61.781	64.175	70.925	86.209
Brent	304	59.098	64.424	67.128	51.972	45.151	45.152	47.351	51.575	55.738	105.460
Bromley	305	61.423	59.857	53.196	50.180	51.215	47.047	42.582	43.776	48.168	108.076
Croydon	306	69.349	78.298	83.105	78.762	68.111	76.522	79.009	79.640	84.937	118.172
Ealing	307	76.826	79.802	70.017	68.895	69.944	71.799	74.338	75.745	81.036	108.799
Enfield	308	66.894	78.218	83.569	79.795	74.649	77.335	84.951	87.727	94.540	119.979
Haringey	309	56.588	61.198	66.749	75.059	77.838	82.195	87.263	88.067	91.712	96.460
Harrow	310	47.399	52.058	58.719	57.319	62.193	64.302	67.205	66.538	69.757	75.762
Havering	311	56.957	62.829	69.007	61.451	64.297	65.078	66.123	67.812	70.998	86.336
Hillingdon	312	57.856	54.832	50.422	42.060	38.617	40.609	42.035	41.072	42.528	98.818
Hounslow	313	56.593	62.483	71.891	70.047	72.494	73.523	77.119	77.458	83.255	94.208
Kingston upon Thames	314	30.942	34.493	37.406	31.503	31.903	31.841	32.422	31.560	33.985	48.316
Merton	315	39.133	42.586	48.938	46.024	48.242	46.783	48.604	49.516	51.652	59.060
Newham	316	67.077	74.398	82.244	81.463	87.535	90.663	102.744	102.969	106.445	119.340
Redbridge	317	52.732	60.647	68.704	72.055	74.107	77.169	81.436	83.533	90.317	103.514
Richmond upon Thames	318	28.811	32.416	36.249	37.091	39.573	40.818	41.977	43.524	44.938	46.781
Sutton	319	37.152	38.980	36.405	32.337	36.787	37.090	39.089	40.433	44.144	67.998
Waltham Forest	320	65.673	67.816	67.467	68.529	65.281	74.027	73.812	76.509	80.809	97.962

[1] Total funding on schools is given by Net Institutional Expenditure which covers all school-based recurrent spending, including teaching and non-teaching staff salaries, school premises costs, equipment and supplies, and unspent balances held by schools at the year end. It excludes spending on special schools, central administration and support services such as transport and school meals as well as capital expenditure.

NIE includes school balances for most years. However, balance information was not available for some previous years, and in some cases for special schools. Therefore, NIE figures across the series may not be strictly comparable

Expenditure data for 1990–01 to 1998–99 inclusive are taken from RO1 returns; data for 1999–2000 taken from local authorities' S52 outturn statements.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prosecution (Official Secrets)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been begun in each year since 1972 under Official Secrets legislation; and what the outcome was in each case.

[28631]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to England and Wales for the years 1979 to 2000 is shown in the table. This covers proceedings under the Official Secrets Act 1911 and 1989 and tabulates the outcomes of cases completed in the years shown by category.

It is no longer possible, from the data held centrally, to identify court proceedings for such legislation prior to 1979, nor is it possible to identify summary offences under the Official Secrets Act 1920.

Persons proceeded against for offences under the Official Secrets Acts, by outcome, England and Wales 1979 to 2000

				Type of sentence				
	Proceeded against	*Withdrawn, dismissed acquitted*	*Found guilty and sentenced*[1]	*Fine*	*Community service order*	*Partly suspended sentence*	*Fully suspended sentence*	*Immediate custody*
1979	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
1980	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
1981	4	—	3	1	2	—	—	—
1982	8	—	7	—	—	—	2	5
1983	4	—	3	2	—	—	—	1
1984	13	1	5	3	—	—	—	2
1985	3	11	—	—	—	—	—	—
1986	—	1	2	1	—	—	1	—
1987	3	1	4	—	—	—	2	2
1988	11	3	3	—	—	2	—	1
1989	—	—	8	—	—	—	8	—
1990	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1991	5	3	2	—	—	—	—	2
1992	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1993	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
1994	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1995	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1996	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1997	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
1998	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
1999	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
2000	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Persons shown as found guilty may have been proceeded against in earlier years. In some cases a Voluntary Bill of Indictment was issued, so no magistrates' court proceedings will have taken place.

Government Technical Assistance Centre

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of the Government Technical Assistance Centre; and what *(a)* its budget and *(b)* establishment are in the current financial year. [28640]

Mr. Blunkett: The role of the Government Technical Assistance Centre, now known as the National Technical Assistance Centre (NTAC), is to provide assistance to the investigations of United Kingdom intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

It will do so by providing techniques for lawful interception of modern multimedia communications and by processing those lawfully intercepted communications in order to provide intelligible material to the intercepting agencies. NTAC also provides techniques to derive intelligible evidence from lawfully seized computer data.

NTAC was established in response to the 1999 Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit report "Encryption and Law Enforcement". It is a Unit within the Home Office and operates from the headquarters of the Security Services.

NTAC is not an investigative facility. Its function is to process lawfully acquired data on behalf of its customers so that such data may be made intelligible and then acted upon by investigators within the relevant customer agency.

Since the summer of 2001 NTAC has been operational in its role in respect of lawfully seized computer data. It plans to commence operational work in respect of lawfully intercepted communications in summer 2002.

Budget 2001–02:

The NTAC budget for 2001–02 is £16 million. Of this, £1 million is Running Cost provision and £15 million is capital provision from an overall three-year Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF) allocation of £25 million. The purpose of the CMF moneys is to establish the technical facilities necessary for NTAC to undertake its operational role.

Establishment 2001–02:

The current (January 2002) operational establishment of NTAC is 16 and will rise to 18 by the end of the current financial year. This includes senior management, operational and support staff. The establishment will rise further as new operational capabilities come on stream.

NTAC also runs a technical programme which is developing its technical facilities. This currently comprises 14 staff and will disband when NTAC is fully operational.

Surveillance

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what controls exist to regulate the monitoring of the location of individuals through signals sent by mobile phones. [28327]

Mr. Denham: Communications data, including location data, may be supplied voluntarily for specified purposes (e.g. investigation of crime) under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Telecommunications Act 1984. It may additionally be supplied in obedience to Court Orders.

A new regulatory regime will be provided by Chapter II of Part I of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. This will be brought into force in due course.

Under Chapter II, an authorising officer must consider that the communications data are necessary for one of the purposes specified by the Act and that the conduct involved in obtaining them is proportionate to what it seeks to achieve.

Access to communications data will be subject to oversight by the Interception Commissioner.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been initiated under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000; what the outcome was in each case; and if he will make a statement. [28634]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: None.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26838]

Angela Eagle: A list of equipment stolen from my Department in the last four years and approximate value of each item stolen is provided in the following tables.

Description of the item	*Value (£)*
Analysis of 30 items of reported theft in 1997–98	
Laptop computer	6,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	1,500
Laptop computer	1,500
Personal computer	1,550
Personal computer	1,005
Personal computer	434
Computer printer	1,593
Computer printer	329
Computer monitor	500
Computer keyboard	40
Computer mouse	22
Computer mother board	150
Fax modem	130
Mobile phone	118
Video camera	1,500
Video camera	800
Video	300
Tools	500
Tools	131
Field gates	240
Pressure Washer	3,317
Armoured cable	200
Desk fan	41
Desk fan	40
Total value of 30 cases of theft	37,490
Analysis of 15 cases of reported theft 1998–99	
VCR taken from classroom—HMP	98
Missing video recorded and four blank videos HMP	106
Missing telephone/answering machine from Cleland House—HMP	25
IT equipment missing—HMP	0
Theft of laptop containing inmate records during course—HMP	69
Loss of computer discs and equipment—HMP	800
Loss of computer discs from Education Department—HMP	992
Break-in at FSS outstation	3,150
Missing IT equipment—HMP	33,773
Theft of various computer items after break-in at Salford—DPAS	Not known
Handheld computer stolen from car—HMP	400
Theft of laptops from storeroom—HMP	20,421
Stolen memory from laptop—FSC	0
Theft of hired video recorder—HMP	80
Theft of Camcorder—HMP	399
Total value of 15 cases of theft	60,313
Analysis of four cases of reported theft 1999–2000	
Computer keyboard stolen from office in QAG	80
Theft of computer equipment from Grenadier House	16,500
Theft of 25 PCs, servers and equipment from Quest House	11,000
Theft of components from sun server from Quest House	74,000
Total value of 4 cases of theft	20,580

Description of the item	*Value (£)*
Analysis of 25 cases of reported theft 2000–01	
Theft of 7 laptops	31,000
Theft of IT equipment	100
Theft of 2 Home Office computers from iCL premises	6,000
Theft of computer parts	4,000
Laptop and projector stolen on away day	8,000
Video player stolen from locked room	100
Theft of modem linking franking machine to supplier	180
Eternet card discovered to be missing from laptop PC	80
Laptop stolen in house burglary	1,200
HMPS—Laptop computer unlocatable	1,000
HMPS—Laptop computer taken from locked cabinet	229
HMPS—Theft of pressure washer	125
HMPS—Dictation machine gone missing	377
HMPS—Theft of laptop computer (mugging)	2,000
HMPS—Bicycle stolen from outside prisoner's place of work	89
HMPS—A Hewlett-Packard laser jet printer stolen	1,085
HMPS—Theft of laptop, printer and mobile phone	73
HMPS—Theft of two video cassettes	128
HMPS—Theft of industrial hoover	200
HMPS—Prison Service employee house burgled—computer and printer stolen	2,650
HMPS—Prison Service issue laptop stolen from boot of car	1,000
HMPS—Training and development unit burgled	5,000
HMPS—Theft of 3 canteen bags	39
HMPS—Theft of portable generator	340
HMFSI—Disappearance of 4 laptops from locked room	9,000
Total value of 25 cases of theft	73,995

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum-seekers are receiving *(a)* accommodation and subsistence support and *(b)* subsistence support only from the National Asylum Support Service. [28779]

Angela Eagle: As at the end of September 2001 the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation was 32,890[1,2]. A further 19,900[1,2] asylum seekers (including dependants) were receiving voucher only support from NASS.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to produce guidelines for the protection of women seeking asylum based on the Immigration Appellate Authority's adopted comprehensive gender guidelines. [28073]

Angela Eagle: We have not identified a need to issue separate guidance on dealing with women asylum seekers. However, in 2000 we reviewed our instructions to asylum caseworkers and incorporated some of the suggestions and principles contained in the guidelines produced by the Refugee Women's Legal Group.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people claimed asylum from *(a)* Zimbabwe, *(b)* Afghanistan, *(c)* Macedonia, *(d)* Yugoslavia and *(e)* Pakistan in each month since January 2000; and how many have *(a)* been accepted, *(b)* had their applications rejected, *(c)* returned to their country of origin and *(d)* are yet to have their application resolved; [28237]

(2) how many people claimed asylum in the United Kingdom each month since January 2000; and how many have *(a)* been accepted, *(b)* had their applications rejected, *(c)* returned to their country of origin and *(d)* yet to have their application resolved. [28238]

Angela Eagle: The number of applications lodged in the United Kingdom between January 2000 and September 2001, both in total and by nationals of the requested countries, is shown in Table 1. Information on the decision outcomes and removals relating to these applications is not readily available.

The number of asylum and exceptional leave to remain (ELR) grants made to nationals of the requested countries, and in total, and the number of applications refused are shown in Table 2. However, these initial decisions do not all relate to applications made in the same period. A proportion of applications which received an initial refusal result in an appeal being lodged.

Between January 2000 and September 2001, 15,810 principal asylum applicants (to the nearest five) were removed from the United Kingdom, including persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under assisted voluntary returns programmes. This figure excludes 570 dependants of asylum seekers who departed during the period April to September 2001. Comparable information on the numbers of Zimbabwean, Afghan, Macedonian, Yugoslavian and Pakistani asylum seekers removed over the same period is not available.

The number of applicants who have applied for asylum since 1 January 2000 and are currently awaiting an initial decision on their asylum application, and the number awaiting the outcome of appeal determinations, is not available, and would be available only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case files.

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[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Cases which have had their support ceased are excluded from these figures.

Information on asylum applications, initial decisions and removals are published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Table 1: Applications[1,2,3] received for asylum in the United Kingdom from selected nationalities, excluding dependents, January 2000 to September 2001

Number of principal applicants

	Afghanistan	*Zimbabwe*	*Pakistan*	*FRY*[4]	*Macedonia*	*Other nationalities*	*Total*
January	315	30	335	895	5	4,530	6,110
February	460	50	225	780	5	4,590	6,110
March	365	75	305	545	5	5,390	6,680
April	510	55	315	380	5	5,595	6,855
May	430	85	310	450	10	5,435	6,725
June	395	115	260	590	10	5,175	6,545
July	405	75	265	475	5	5,645	6,870
August	495	70	220	410	*	5,570	6,770
September	535	90	215	395	5	5,555	6,790
October	560	90	230	485	10	5,860	7,230
November	550	130	250	405	5	6,155	7,500
December	535	150	230	250	5	4,960	6,125
January	510	125	215	270	*	5,260	6,380
February	615	125	170	375	*	4,235	5,520
March	680	145	175	330	15	4,470	5,815
April	700	110	220	375	25	3,570	5,000
May	900	130	180	200	30	3,855	5,290
June	910	115	235	160	25	3,855	5,300
July	825	145	300	165	125	4,560	6,125
August	930	150	265	285	140	4,905	6,670
September	745	190	225	175	125	4,600	6,060
Total	12,365	2,235	5,155	8,400	550	103,765	132,470

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5 with * = 1 or 2.

[2] May exclude some cases lodged at local enforcement offices between January and March 2000.

[3] Provisional figures.

[4] The Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) is comprised of Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro but the majority of FRY applications are thought to be from Kosovars.

Table 2: Initial decisions[1,2,3,4] made on applications from selected nationalities, January 2000 to September 2001

Number of principal applicants

	Zimbabwe	*Afghanistan*	*Macedonia*	*FRY*	*Pakistan*	*Other nationalities*	*Total*
Total initial decisions	2,035	12,245	405	24,285	8,200	159,010	206,180
of which considered under normal procedures							
Granted asylum	85	2,315	*	500	265	15,995	19,160
Granted ELR	40	6,310	45	2,335	220	17,605	26,555
Refused	1,865	3,615	355	21,245	6,965	114,760	148,810
of which considered under backlog clearance exercise[5]							
Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria	35	10	5	165	685	9,425	10,325
Refused under backlog criteria	5	*	*	35	65	1,225	1,335

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5 with * = 1 or 2.

[2] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

[3] Decisions figures do not necessarily relate to applications received in this period.

[4] Provisional figures.

[5] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre-1996 asylum application backlog.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people claimed asylum in the United Kingdom each month since January 2000 *(a)* having apparently arrived via another EU country, *(b)* having apparently arrived via a safe country outside the EU and *(c)* having apparently arrived direct from their country of origin; and how many have (i) been accepted, (ii) had their applications rejected, (iii) returned to their country of origin and (iv) yet to have their application resolved. [28239]

Angela Eagle: I regret that reliable information on the entry routes of asylum seekers from their country of origin to the United Kingdom is not available. In 2000 more than two thirds of applications (68 per cent.) were made in-country (that is by people who had already entered the United Kingdom).

Information on asylum applications, initial decisions and removals are published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 28 February 2002 on the Home Office

Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Civilian Casework Officers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of civilian casework officers in the police force to help reduce the paperwork of police officers; and what plans there are to increase their numbers. [13501]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 November 2001]:* While recruitment is a matter for individual chief officers, we are committed to encouraging broader use of support staff to handle the paperwork involved in case preparation. The recently published "Diary of a Police Officer" found that police officers were spending almost as much time in the police station as they were on the street. A large part of this problem results from paperwork and changes are needed to enable officers to focus on delivering policing. The requirement for additional powers to enable support staff to deal with more of this work is being considered as part of the police reform programme.

In the White Paper "Policing a New Century", published on 5 December 2001, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced that he was setting up a task force, chaired by Sir David O'Dowd, to consider how to take forward the recommendations in "Diary of a Police Officer", and other relevant reports, in order to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on the police.

Essex Constabulary

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers from the Essex constabulary are seconded to metropolitan London. [28422]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* I understand from the chief constable of Essex police that there are no officers from Essex police on secondment to the Metropolitan police.

Police Salaries

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the starting salary is for police officers in *(a)* London and *(b)* the rest of the UK; after how long a new police officer will receive a pay rise; and if he will make a statement on police pay with special reference to rises they have had since 1997, and pay rises they will receive. [27672]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* A police officer will earn £17,733 on recruitment, rising to £19,842 upon completion of initial training, which is generally after 32 weeks. Police officers in London, who joined after 1 September 1994 and who are not in receipt of housing allowance, receive an additional London allowance of £4,338 plus London weighting of £1,773.

Police pay is increased annually by reference to the median percentage of the manpower index of non-manual private sector workers. In 1997 the increase was 3.5 per cent, in 1998, 4 per cent, in 1999, 3.6 per cent, in 2000, 3 per cent. and in 2001, 3.5 per cent.

Police officers progress up their pay scales by annual increments until they reach the top of their scale.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the public service agreement target for the average staff cost per investigation where an irregularity is corrected was achieved by March 2001. [21289]

Angela Eagle: There has been no such public service agreement target for the Home Office.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for departmental efficiency. [16914]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) commitment to deliver 3 per cent. per annum running costs gains in each of the years, 1999–2002.

This target has been successfully delivered in both 1999–2000 and 2000–01, and work is under way to achieve the current year target.

Community Service

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had concerning the introduction of compulsory community service for young people. [15014]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had no such discussions recently. The Home Office is currently considering how young people, particularly those not in further education or employment, might participate more in community based activities. This may include participation in the development of millennium volunteers, the participative content of the citizenship and democracy programme in schools, the development of such programmes in further education and the opportunities for volunteering and community support offered by the Experience Corps.

Crime (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the proportion of violent crime and burglary associated with drug addiction; and what plans he has to tackle this problem *(a)* in Coventry and *(b)* in the UK. [28884]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* While there is strong evidence to show a relationship between drug misuse and acquisitive crime, the current research is insufficiently advanced to reveal a precise link with individual types of crime. Work is on-going in this area through, for example, the new English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring programme of interviewing and testing arrestees in eight locations.

We have in place a number of initiatives aimed at diverting drug misusers away from crime and into treatment. These include interventions such as arrest referral, drug treatment and testing orders, and the piloting of drug testing at various points in the criminal justice system under the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. In the current financial year we also launched the Communities Against Drugs

Programme (CAD) with £220 million of central Government funding aimed at tackling drug markets and other drug-related crime at local level.

Security Service

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give individuals who obtain access to their Security Service files the right to challenge perceived inaccuracies in those files; [28032]

(2) whether an individual requesting access to his Security Service file will *(a)* be granted access to all the contents of his or her file other than any items which would involve harm to national security or *(b)* be denied access to his or her entire file if some, but not all, of its contents would involve harm to national security if disclosed; [28034]

(3) what estimate he has made of the average time which will be taken to furnish an individual who has requested access to their Security Service file with the contents of that file; [28037]

(4) whether it will be considered to be in the national interest for the Security Service to be obliged to disclose discontinued files on Government Ministers to those individuals while they remain in their posts; [28029]

(5) whether discontinued Security Service files on the *(a)* Deputy Prime Minister, *(b)* Foreign Secretary and *(c)* right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) will be released if requested by those individuals; [28028]

(6) what advice he has been given about the implications of the Human Rights Act 1998 on access by individuals to files on them compiled by the Security Service; [28033]

(7) if it is his intention to impose charges on individuals who request access to their Security Service files; [28036]

(8) what overall assessment he has made of the effect on the security of the Security Service of enabling individuals to have access to their Security Service files; [28038]

(9) what personnel will be allocated by the Security Service for the processing of applications by individuals to see their Security Service files; [28035]

(10) if he will make a statement on access by individuals to files about their activities compiled by the Security Service, with special reference to his placing a certificate relating to this in the Library; and what criteria will be applied in determining whether the release of a Security Service file on an individual to that individual will harm national security. [28027]

Mr. Blunkett: The Security Service complies with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Section 7 of the Act creates a general entitlement for an individual to ask and be told whether personal data on them is being processed and if it is, be told certain information about that data. However, the Act also provides at section 28 an exemption on grounds of safeguarding national security that applies, among other provisions, to section 7.

As I stated in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 492W, I have signed, at the request of the Security Service, a new certificate describing in general terms the personal data that the Security Service may process that requires exemption under the Act under section 28. A copy of that certificate, with the public reasons for my signing it, was placed in the Library. I have placed a condition on the Security Service to report to me on their use of the certificate.

Anyone can make a subject access application to the Security Service, including Government Ministers. The Security Service will seek to respond as quickly as reasonably possible.

Without anticipating the outcome of any such application, one of the Security Service's statutory functions is protecting national security. In perhaps the great majority of cases the service will need to rely on the section 28 exemption to avoid damage to national security. That will include use of the long established "neither confirm nor deny" approach—an approach acknowledged by the national security panel of the Information Tribunal. In response to a subject access application, the service will, consistent with section 28, consider whether the neither confirm nor deny approach needs to be followed and, if not, to what extent the withholding of all or some information is still necessary to safeguard national security.

The Director General of the Security Service has informed me that he is keeping under review the resources required. In line with the Act, the service charges a £10 subject access application-handling fee.

The Data Protection Act 1998 is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Police Officers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have left the *(a)* Metropolitan police, *(b)* West Midlands and *(c)* Greater Manchester police, in each month in each of the last three years for which figures are available; how many and what proportion (i) resigned, (ii) retired, (iii) transferred to another force and (iv) were dismissed; and if he will make a statement. [27842]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The information requested was not collected centrally on a monthly basis. Information on the categories of wastage requested is collected once a year by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and is set out in the tables.

(a) Metropolitan Police

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Resigned[1]	337	365	435
Retired	1,100	838	676
Transferred to another force	234	244	382
Dismissed[2]	60	45	31
Deaths	19	16	12

[1] Retirements includes officers retiring on medical grounds

[2] Dismissals include officers required to resign

(b) West Midlands Police

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Resigned[1]	76	86	101
Retired	203	181	171
Transferred to another force	47	42	59
Dismissed[2]	17	5	9
Deaths	0	9	2

[1] Retirements includes officers retiring on medical grounds
[2] Dismissals include officers required to resign

(c) Greater Manchester Police

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Resigned[1]	44	41	57
Retired	282	235	238
Transferred to another force	13	15	28
Dismissed[2]	13	13	4
Deaths	7	7	3

[1] Retirements includes officers retiring on medical grounds
[2] Dismissals include officers required to resign.

Prison Sentences

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison sentences of five years and more were handed down in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [27894]

Beverley Hughes: The information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to England and Wales, shows that 3,823 persons were sentenced to immediate custody for five years or over in 1998, 4,009 in 1999 and 4,033 in 2000.

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

Rape

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the attrition rates for reported rape offences in the last 15 years are compiled on the same basis in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in terms of the proportion of cases *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* resulting in a conviction for rape. [27861]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I understand that neither the Scottish Executive nor the Northern Ireland Office produce attrition rates for rape offences. My officials have contacted officials in the Scottish Executive and in the Northern Ireland Office and our understanding is that were they to produce attrition rates, they would be compiled on much the same basis as those produced for England and Wales.

The number of offences recorded and detected by the police together with the number of offenders convicted or cautioned (although in Scotland a caution is a sanction following a charge being proved in court) would be directly comparable, to the extent that each country uses its own principal offence rule for statistical purposes where offenders are convicted of more than one type of offence at the same time.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27985]

Angela Eagle: The estimated costs of losses to the Home Office, its agencies and non-departmental public (NDPB) bodies through theft and fraud are set out in the table.

Fraud and thefts

£000

	Home Office	*Agencies*	*NDPB's*	*Total*
Accounting periods				
1997–98	—	—	—	[1]113
1998–99	3.8	114.4	70.1	188.3
1999–2000	204.3	165.4	0.0	369.7
2000–01	79.8	84.4	0.0	164.2

[1] Analysis between Home Office, executive agencies and non-departmental bodies cannot be provided.

Note:

Cumulative total for 1997–2001 is £835.2 million.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27967]

Angela Eagle: The Department does not maintain central records of the cost of every building refurbishment project carried out by the Department including its Executive Agencies and to provide the information requested would be at disproportionate cost. However, in central London and Croydon, the approximate position over the last three years is as follows:

	£ million
1999–2000	6.7
2000–2001	35.2
2001–01	[1]11.5

[1] Up to end of November 2001.

I would also refer to the response given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 218W.

Immigration

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications from *(a)* long stay and *(b)* indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom there were from (i) wives of UK men and (ii) husbands of UK women as at 31 December 2001. [28025]

Angela Eagle: I regret that information on individual types of cases undecided cannot be determined.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of time was taken to process the application of a wife of a UK citizen who has been married for over 12 months and living in the UK, over the most recent 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [28026]

Angela Eagle: We do not routinely publish average processing times for individual types of application. We aim to decide all straightforward applications within three weeks, but at present it is taking up to eight weeks due to the exceptionally high number of applications received in 2001, especially in recent months, and process changes

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which are being introduced to improve our longer term performance. We are working to reduce this to three weeks as soon as possible.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of breached antisocial behaviour orders resulted in a custodial sentence in Staffordshire in 2001; [26926]

(2) how many antisocial behaviour orders were breached in Staffordshire in 2001. [26927]

Mr. Denham: Information on court proceedings for 2001 will not be available until the autumn.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police recruits were undertaking the 18 weeks training and 10 weeks street duty course during each of the previous 24 months. [26942]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has provided the following figures for Metropolitan police service recruits undertaking the 18-week training course at Hendon during each of the previous 24 months. The figures include a small number of experienced officers rejoining the service who undertake a two-week refresher course.

Year/month	*Number in training school*
1999–2000	
December	316
January	409
February	357
March	325
April	412
May	324
June	368
July	384
August	277
September	275
October	394
November	441
December	494
2001	
January	576
February	458
March	652
April	689
May	783
June	830
July	833
August	913
September	685
October	709
November	940
December	993

Street duty courses are run locally on each of the 32 boroughs. The numbers undertaking this course are not recorded centrally and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Football

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he takes to monitor football players and club officials travelling overseas for matches; and if he will make a statement. [27169]

Mr. Denham: This is a matter for the football authorities and their specialist security advisers. The Government are kept informed and liaise with them regularly.

Road Accidents (Breath Tests)

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance he issues to police officers on breathalysing drivers immediately following a road accident in which there is fatality or serious injury; and if it is normal practice to breathalyse drivers in these circumstances; [26720]

(2) if he will ensure that it becomes normal practice for police officers to breathalyse drivers immediately following a road accident in which there was a fatality or serious injury. [26719]

Mr. Denham: It is the policy of the Association of Chief Police Officers that all drivers of vehicles involved in a collision where police attend should be breath-tested. This has been the position since 1996. I am satisfied that the policy is applied appropriately by all police forces.

Police Numbers (Rural Areas)

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of police officers serving in rural areas. [26963]

Mr. Denham: The allocation of resources to rural areas is a matter for individual chief constables. This Government responded positively to the outcome of independent research into the policing- of sparsely populated areas by the creation of the Rural Policing Fund to direct extra resources to rural forces.

In 2000–01 £15 million was allocated to 31 forces with more sparsely populated areas. In 2001–02 this was increased to a full-year allocation of £30 million. We are making available a further £30 million in 2002–03 to the same forces. Essex police benefit from the Rural Policing Fund and were allocated £503,710 in 2001–02. They will receive the same in 2002–03. It is for chief constables to determine how this money should be used to improve the policing of rural areas.

In addition the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) is enabling all forces to take on a total of 9,000 extra recruits, over and above their previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003. Essex police has been allocated 197 CFF recruits over the three years.

Police Houses

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what right to buy would be enjoyed by a serving Metropolitan police officer with a secure tenancy of a police house since July 2000, with non-secure tenancies from 1995 to 2000 and with a wife who was previously a long-term local authority secure tenant. [26952]

Mr. Denham: Those Metropolitan police service tenants who became secure tenants as a result of the changes to the Housing Act 1985 made in the Greater London Authority Act 1999, would not normally be eligible for a right to buy until July 2002.

From the details provided, it is not possible to establish precisely the impact of a spouse who was previously a long-term local authority secure tenant.

Police Numbers (Thames Valley)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were serving in the Thames Valley police force on 1 January *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [27151]

Mr. Denham: Figures are not collected for police strength at 1 January. Figures for police strength at 31 December in the years 1999 to 2001 have been provided by the Chief Constable of Thames Valley police. The force is unable to provide information for the position on 31 December in the years 1996 to 1998. For these years the table shows strength figures at 30 September provided in statistical returns to the Home Office.

Year and month	*Number of officers*
30 September 1996	3,682
30 September 1997	3,705
30 September 1998	3,790
31 December 1999	3,732
31 December 2000	3,750
31 December 2001	3,763

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26969]

Angela Eagle: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". This report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

The Home Office and its agencies have introduced new guidelines, policies and procedures with a view to meeting its target to reducing sickness absence, published in its Service Delivery Agreements for April 2001 to March 2004.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26984]

Mr. Blunkett: Each campaign may use national and regional media. The target audience and information to be conveyed influences the choice of media used. For national campaigns a mix of broadsheets and tabloids is frequently used. For regional advertising, space has been taken in many prominent regional newspapers as well as local papers.

A breakdown of expenditure on newspaper advertising by title could be supplied only at disproportionate costs. Figures for Home Office expenditure on advertising were given in response to a question from the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 478W.

Police Paperwork

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce paperwork for police officers. [28476]

Mr. Denham: On 1 November 2001, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published PA Consulting's study "Diary of a Police Officer" which had considered what more could be done to free police officers from the unnecessary paperwork and other obstacles which prevent them from spending more time in public.

In the White Paper "Policing a new century" (CM 5326), published on 5 December 2001, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced that he was setting up a taskforce, chaired by Sir David O'Dowd, to consider how to take forward the recommendations in this, and other, relevant reports, in order to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on the police.

Drug Offences (Uxbridge)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug-related offences were committed in the Uxbridge constituency in each of the last five years. [28535]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Recorded crime figures include statistics on drugs offences, such as possession, but do not record whether other offences are related to offenders' drug habits. Furthermore, the information that is collected on the number of drug offences is only available for the Metropolitan police force area as a whole and would therefore not be a useful guide to the number of drug offences in Uxbridge.

The NEW-ADAM research programme of interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police sheds some light on the links between drugs and crime, although again the conclusions do not relate specifically to Uxbridge. Research so far, based on eight locations in 1999–2000, indicates that more than three-fifths (by value) of acquisitive crime is committed by users of both heroin and cocaine/crack.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent discussions his Department has had with other EU Governments about the list of aggravating circumstances relating to drug trafficking; [28377]

(2) what recent discussions his Department has had with EU Governments regarding the minimum and maximum sentence tariffs for drug trafficking offences. [28376]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: On 23 May 2001 the European Commission published a draft European Council Framework Decision laying down minimum provisions on the constituent elements of criminal acts and penalties in the field of illicit drug trafficking. It sets out proposals for common minimum, maximum sentence tariffs as well as common aggravating circumstances for drug trafficking offences. The proposal is currently being discussed at official level in the European Union Council working groups responsible for drugs and criminal law. Home Office officials are represented on these working groups.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions his Department has had with Turkey regarding drug control measures. [28378]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government have developed close co-operation with Turkey at an operational level because it is a key country on the supply route of heroin to the United Kingdom. In addition between 1994 and 1999 we provided over £1 million for anti-drugs assistance, mainly in the form of training, and we expect to provide up to £300,000 for training and equipment in 2001–02.

Police Numbers (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there are in Portsmouth, South; how many are from ethnic minorities; and if he will make a statement. [24943]

Mr. Denham: The deployment of officers within the Hampshire Constabulary is an operational a matter for the chief constable.

I am told by the chief constable that the Portsmouth division had 399 police officers on 31 December 2001, of whom eight (2 per cent.) were from minority ethnic communities.

It is not possible to provide figures for the Portsmouth, South constituency as it is an integral part of the Portsmouth division and officers will be deployed around the division in response to need.

Graffiti

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* reported incidents of, *(b)* arrests for and *(c)* charges brought for graffiti there were in the Metropolitan police area in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 2000–01. [27278]

Mr. Denham: It is not possible to distinguish offences of graffiti from other types of criminal damage in the Home Office figures for recorded crime, arrests or court proceedings as the details of individual offences are not collected centrally.

Football Matches

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of policing football matches *(a)* in the Metropolitan police area and *(b)* other police areas has been in each of the last five years; and what proportion of these costs was paid for by the football industry. [27592]

Mr. Denham: The information is not centrally held and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners (Drug Deaths)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison inmates died while in custody as a result of illegal drug misuse during 2001. [28077]

Beverley Hughes: No prisoners died as a result of illegal drug misuse in prisons in England and Wales during 2001.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many HGV drivers were prosecuted in each of the last five years for driving a goods vehicle with maximum loaded weight of over 7.5 tonnes in the offside lane of a motorway with three or more lanes in England and Wales. [17408]

Mr. Denham: The offence of driving a heavy goods vehicle having a maximum laden weight exceeding 7.5 tonnes within the offside lane of a motorway with three or more lanes is contrary to Regulation 12 of the Motorways Traffic (England and Wales) Regulations 1982.

The Home Office Court Proceedings Database does not identify this specific offence separately from others within the offence category 'motorway offences (other than speeding)', of which there were in total 3,213 offences proceeded against in 2000.

The 'motorway offences (other than speeding)' category includes offences committed under the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984, s17(4) and the Motorways Traffic (England and Wales) Regulations 1982, Regulations 5–12 and 14.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Service Pensions

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he plans to change the civil service pension scheme to allow widows and widowers to retain their pension after remarrying; and if he will make a statement. [29262]

Mr. Leslie: The civil service will be introducing new pension arrangements with effect from 1 October 2002. New entrants will be given a choice between a new final salary pension scheme and a stakeholder pension with an employer contribution. We are giving active members of the current pension scheme an option to move into the new final salary scheme on 1 October if they wish. The new scheme, which has a higher employee contribution rate than the current scheme, will allow widows and widowers to retain their pension if they remarry. We have no plans to change the arrangements in the current scheme whereby widows and widowers will normally lose their pension entitlement should they remarry.

Civil Service Secondments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the salary and other costs of a civil servant from one UK Government Department who is on loan to another UK Government Department are met from the budget of the Department of origin of the civil servant or the Department to which the civil servant is transferred on loan. [29520]

Mr. Leslie: There are no central rules on this. It is a matter to be settled between the two Departments involved.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28093]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I last returned from official business in Hull by train on Monday 21 January.

BBC Monitoring

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for what reason the Winter Supplementary Estimates 2001–02 included provision to transfer sums from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence to the Cabinet Office in respect of BBC monitoring. [28330]

Mr. Leslie: Since 1997, funding to support BBC Monitoring's capability to monitor, translate, and report items of interest from foreign broadcasts and media has been provided by four stakeholders: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, BBC World Service Broadcasting, and the Cabinet Office. Following a review, the four stakeholders agreed in May 2001 to redistribute funding between them in a way which reflected more fully the relative scale of their requirements for BBC Monitoring's services. The sums transferred in the winter supplementary estimate give effect to that change.

Lobbying

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether Government agencies are permitted to incur expenditure on lobbyists where the Government itself is the intended recipient of such lobbying. [28323]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 97W. Decisions on expenditure will be for individual Government agencies to take in accordance with the guidance on Government accounting.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by the Cabinet Office under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29418]

Mr. Leslie: As far as I am aware, only one answer to a parliamentary question has been refused, in this House, under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 23 January 2002

WORK AND PENSIONS

SchlumbergerSema

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the objectives in key areas which SchlumbergerSema must meet by May 2002 in order for the company to be granted a contract extension to 2005. [24401]

Mr. Nick Brown: *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The agreement with SchlumbergerSema contains performance and delivery conditions for a contract extension to August 2005. It emphasises the need for the company to meet and improve service standards and commits them to a programme of doctor recruitment. The amendment further requires the contractor to co-operate in the introduction of more fundamental changes in the gathering and presentation of evidence and reports together with the introduction of new processes to reduce the numbers of people who fail to turn up for examinations. It also requires them to agree and document actions to support processes around the intervention regime to be operated in Job Centre Plus as part of the Government's "Welfare to Work" agenda. The agreement to extend the contract must be confirmed or revoked before 31 May 2002.

Pension Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he will allow the taking of annuities at any age up to 75 years for the purposes of assessing the proposed pension credit entitlement. [26018]

Mr. McCartney: A personal pension may be taken from age 50, but an annuity must be purchased by age 75.

The income from an annuity purchased from a pension fund is treated in the same way as other second pensions within the minimum income guarantee.

Currently, if a person over 60 has not taken an annuity he is treated as having the income he could obtain if he used his pension fund to buy an annuity.

We intend to adopt a similar approach in pension credit.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was; [26822]

(2) if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [27994]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Of a total of approximately 109,224 personal computers and laptops owned by the Department 179 have been stolen in the period in question—this represents 0.16 per cent. The total value of these items is estimated to be £217,300.

Information on items of a lesser value are recorded in the table .

Thefts in Department for Work and Pensions
1 May 1997 to end of year 2001

Category	*Quantity*	*Estimated total cost*
CPU	64	44,400
Monitor	27	5,290
Keyboard	23	260
Memory Chip	6	3,600
Tape Drive	3	525
Cordless Telephone	1	70
Modem	9	900
Video Camera	2	2,250
Mobile Telephone	9	1,800
Print Sharer	1	100
Digital Camera	1	1,000
Disk Drive	1	200
Multi-media projector	1	3,000
DVD Player	1	281
Server	3	7,500
Card Reader	2	100
Pager	1	50
Mouse	22	511
Printer	72	44,650
Hard Drive	10	1,500
Motherboard	1	150
Fax	3	1,950
Miscellaneous[1]		1,445

[1] Includes such items as server cable, cassette recorders and telephones.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of East Riding of Yorkshire council. [30521]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) report was published today in respect of East Riding of Yorkshire council and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

BFI found the council was striving to provide an efficient, secure benefits service and to maintain effective counter fraud performance against a background of staffing difficulties and re-organisation.

Overall, inspectors identified many good features in the council's performance and examples of effective work. There was a clear commitment to customer service and efforts had been made to raise levels of fraud awareness throughout the council. Additionally, the council has introduced inspectors powers and the "Do Not Redirect" scheme.

Despite this, the report notes there were a number of areas where performance fell short of requirements. Inspectors consider a key constraint to the council's performance was the high rate of staff turnover and difficulty in maintaining a fully trained complement of staff.

Inspectors found that the work backlogs resulting from the staffing difficulties were having an adverse effect on standards of service with some delays in processing claims, changes of circumstances and applications for reviews of determinations. Inspectors found the council was addressing shortfalls in performance through a fundamental review of its organisation which included the benefits service.

The report notes that internal and external audit reports had been responded to promptly which inspectors considered was an indication of the council's commitment to maintaining secure systems.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Plymouth city council. [30522]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report was published today in respect of Plymouth city council and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

BFI inspectors report that the benefit service had been through a period of considerable change prior to the inspection, including a restructure, the introduction of a document image processing (DIP) system and a change in political control. In addition, during the BFI inspection, the council was implementing the Verification Framework and managing a backlog. Overall, inspectors consider the benefit service was having difficulty in an environment of major corporate change.

Before the inspection the council had taken steps to secure the gateway to benefit with the introduction of the Verification Framework, a new claim form and a system of management checks. Although the council has service level agreements with the local BA and ES, inspectors found the management of these SLAs was limited.

The report notes that the council works hard to keep payments right with a proactive approach to the follow up of renewal claims and reminders to claimants and landlords of their duty to report changes in circumstances. However BFI considers more could be done to target visiting and tailor benefit periods using risk assessment.

In common with some authorities, the council's overall performance in the management and control of overpayments is poor. Inspectors report that prompt action to identify overpayments is negated by ineffective recovery processes.

Although inspectors found fraud investigation work was poor, the report notes that the council had already recognised this and had introduced various policies, guidance and an extensive training programme aimed at improving the quality of the fraud investigations.

The report concludes that the council has recently made major policy and procedural changes. These changes need to be further developed and implemented before tangible improvements will be realised.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Asbestos Judgment

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the Appeal Court decision in the Fairchild case; and if he will introduce legislation to reinstate the principle of apportionment in mesothelioma cases. [25114]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are looking closely at the implications of the Appeal Court decision on the Fairchild case. It is too early to determine what action may be necessary.

PRIME MINISTER

North Ayrshire

Q17. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next expects to visit North Ayrshire. [27103]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans at present to do so.

Arms Sales

Tony Baldry: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what discussions he had with the Indian Government on his recent visit concerning the BAE Systems bid to supply Hawk jets; and if he will make a statement. [28301]

(2) what discussions he held with the Pakistani Government on his recent visit concerning United Kingdom arms sales; and if he will make a statement. [28294]

The Prime Minister: During my recent visits to India and Pakistan, I discussed a wide range of issues of mutual interest with the Governments of both countries. These covered a number of defence and security matters including defence export opportunities. The Government continue to support the proposals that BAE systems has made for the supply of Hawk jets to India.

Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made since 11 September 2001 of the security of nuclear plants and radioactive materials in transit against terrorist attack; and if he has discussed the security of nuclear facilities with *(a)* his European Union counterparts and *(b)* the United States President, since that date. [28646]

The Prime Minister: Security and safety precautions at nuclear sites are kept under regular review. The UK's civil nuclear sites apply stringent security measures regulated by the security regulator, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security.

The security of nuclear material in transit is similarly kept under review. We are also reviewing the transportation of other radioactive materials.

I have discussed the issue with the Irish Taoiseach. Officials have also discussed the matter with their overseas counterparts since 11 September.

It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites, or of nuclear materials in transit.

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 297W, on Lord Birt, under which section of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information he withheld information on the projects worked upon by Lord Birt. [29653]

The Prime Minister: Information relating to internal discussion and advice is not disclosed under Exemption 2, Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Afghanistan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 11 December 2001, concerning the UN-led conference at Bonn of the main Afghan factions on 27 November, for what reason the Northern Alliance has been allowed to keep troops in Kabul in breach of the Bonn agreement. [28021]

The Prime Minister: The Bonn agreement gave a basis for an Interim Administration to be formed in Afghanistan. That Administration is responsible for security within Afghanistan, and is using its police forces in Kabul to provide this with the support of the International Security Assistance Force. Under the terms of the Military Technical Agreement between the Interim Administration and the International Security Assistance Force (signed on 4 January), some military units have left Kabul. All other armed groups in the Kabul area are confined to designated barracks.

International Criminal Court

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his written answer of 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 89W, on the International Criminal Court, if he will place in the Library copies of the written demarches sent to Secretary of State Powell on ratification of the statute of the International Criminal Court. [29654]

The Prime Minister: Further to my answer of 14 January, two demarches were sent to the US Department of State by the Belgian presidency. One was written, and I am happy to place a copy of that in the Library. The other, I now understand, was changed from a written to an oral demarche by the Belgian presidency.

WALES

Manufacturing

8. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on Government support for manufacturing industry in Wales. [27064]

Mr. Touhig: Despite recent labour market statistics which reflect the fundamental strength of the Welsh economy, some parts of the economy, such as manufacturing, continue to face real and sustained difficulties.

There are no simple solutions at hand to ease these problems, but the Government are helping British manufacturing to raise its game and to shift its focus from competing on the basis of cost alone towards high skill, high value-added products and processes.

10. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about Government support for manufacturing industry in Wales. [27066]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minister regularly to discuss a range of issues, including manufacturing in Wales.

Despite recent labour market statistics which reflect the fundamental strength of the Welsh economy, some parts of the economy, such as manufacturing, continue to face real and sustained difficulties.

There are no simple solutions at hand to ease these problems, but the Government are helping British manufacturing to raise its game and to shift its focus from competing on the basis of cost alone towards high skill, high value-added products and processes.

Miners' Compensation

9. **Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on the number of claims in Wales under the miners' compensation scheme for respiratory disease that have been settled in full. [27065]

Mr. Touhig: I regularly discuss coal health compensation issues with my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy and attend the UK Coal Health Monitoring Group that he chairs.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales established the Welsh sub-group of the Coal Health Claims Monitoring Group specifically to address coal health issues in Wales and to report back to the GB-wide group. I am convinced the measures discussed, and the actions so far agreed, will further speed up the processing of coal health claims.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy attended the Welsh sub-group of the Coal Health Claims Monitoring Group in November to discuss the operation of the scheme in Wales.

Special Advisers

12. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many special advisers he has working for him. [27068]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have two special advisers.

14. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the number and cost of special advisers in the Wales Office. [27070]

Mr. Paul Murphy: They are paid in accordance with the Cabinet Office pay scales for special advisers: these are currently under review.

Rural Economy

13. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to discuss regeneration of the rural economy with National Assembly for Wales Secretaries. [27069]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the Welsh Assembly secretaries regularly to discuss a range of issues, including the Welsh rural economy.

Welsh Language

15. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what instructions are given to his offices in Wales on whether to answer the telephone in Welsh or English. [27071]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Cardiff office is served by the National Assembly for Wales switchboard, which answers with a bilingual greeting.

Dairy Farming

16. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the Agriculture Secretary to discuss dairy farming in Wales. [27072]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has regular meetings with the Assembly Agriculture Secretary and discusses many aspects of Welsh agriculture.

The recent FMD outbreak has exacerbated an already difficult situation for Welsh farmers. I therefore welcome the Assembly's strategy "Farming for the Future", which sets out a vision for the industry to achieve future sustainability, supported by the Assembly and key stakeholders. I would encourage farmers to work with the Assembly and its partners to face up to the changes necessary to create a viable agricultural future for Wales.

EU Structural Funds

17. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly about the progress of the Objective 1 programme in Wales. [27073]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minister regularly to discuss a range of issues, including progress with the Objective 1 programme. At 9 January 2002, 421 Objective 1 projects had been approved, worth a total of £280 million in European grants. £64.3 million worth of Objective 1 grant has already been paid out by the Assembly.

Proportional Representation

18. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the operation of the proportional representation system in National Assembly for Wales elections. [27074]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The electoral system is that outlined in the White Paper "A Voice for Wales" which was subsequently endorsed by the people of Wales in a referendum. The electoral system is a matter reserved to Parliament under the devolution settlement and the Government have no plans to bring forward legislation to change it.

Crime

19. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the Government to tackle crime in Wales. [27075]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Communities in Wales are gaining the full benefits of our partnership approach to fighting crime. With funding running into millions of pounds, local partnerships are implementing projects targeted at crime hotspots, domestic violence and drug related crime. Much of this funding is being channelled specifically into the most deprived communities and is going a long way towards building safer and more inclusive communities.

Regional Selective Assistance

20. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales about the operation of regional selective assistance in Wales. [27076]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minister regularly to discuss a range of issues. Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) is the most important grant available to businesses in Wales looking to invest to grow. 240 companies received RSA grants between January and December 2001, to the value of £130.5 million in grant funding and £553 million in total investment. This funding will result in the creation of 8,700 jobs and the safeguarding of another 4,700 jobs.

New Deal

21. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the operation of the new deal in Wales. [27077]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The new deal has been a huge success story in Wales. There has been a 75 per cent. fall in the number of young people aged 18–24 claiming JSA in Wales since launch of new deal and a 50 per cent. fall in the number of long term JSA claimants over 25.

Economy

22. **Albert Owen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales and Cabinet colleagues about the performance of the Welsh economy. [27078]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minister and Cabinet colleagues regularly to discuss a range of issues, including the Welsh economy. I very much welcome last week's labour market statistics which show that unemployment in Wales fell by 7,000 over the last quarter.

Heroin Addiction

23. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the latest figures for heroin addiction in Wales. [27079]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There is currently no statutory requirement in the UK to report drug users to any central database; therefore there are no comprehensive data for heroin addiction in Wales.

There is a report from the Welsh Drug Misuse Database (WDMD) for the years 1999 and 2000, which offered an analysis of reports from reporting agencies to the WDMD relating to problem drug users who presented for help and treatment during 1999 and 2000. The increase shown in heroin as a main drug in treatment cases does not necessarily indicate a rise in the number of people dependent on the drug.

In May 2000, an 8-year strategy was published by the National Assembly entitled: "Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales: A Partnership Approach". The strategy covers not only illegal drugs but also alcohol, over-the-counter and prescription drugs and volatile substances. The four aims of the strategy embrace those of the UK strategy Tackling Drugs to build a better Britain.

The National Assembly made £2 million available through the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Fund (DATF) in 2001–02 to support drug and alcohol treatment services in Wales and to improve access to treatment, particularly for vulnerable young people. The fund is administered through Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATs) and has supported many treatment services including those who provide services to people with a heroin dependency. This fund is in addition to expenditure from key agencies including health, the police and probation.

Electoral System

24. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will bring forward proposals to change the system for election of Members of the National Assembly for Wales. [27080]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have no plans to do so.

Rail Services

25. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has held with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions regarding rail services in Wales since October 2001. [27081]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which include rail services.

I welcome the SRA's 10-year strategic plan, a forward looking plan which will deliver good results for rail passengers and freight users across Wales.

The Assembly have developed a good working relationship with the SRA and the Wales and Borders Single Franchise is being taken forward as a priority in the strategic plan. This provides a real opportunity to increase the quality and frequency of services and the new franchise is expected to be operational next year.

Correspondence

26. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters he received from hon. Members during July 2001; and if he will make a statement. [27082]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the reply in the Library of the House.

Countryside

27. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet representatives of the farming community to discuss the crisis in the countryside. [27083]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am planning to meet representatives of the National Farmers Union shortly. During last year both my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and myself travelled extensively through Wales and met members of the farming community.

I welcome the recent announcement by the National Assembly for Wales that they have spent almost £28 million to the end of December to help the rural economy recover from the effects of foot and mouth disease. In Wales, this is in addition to over £51 million paid out as compensation for culled animals and over £60 million paid out under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme.

Alcoholism

28. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales and others on the mechanisms for co-ordinating policy for reducing alcoholism in Wales. [27084]

Mr. Touhig: I have not recently discussed with Assembly colleagues the issue of alcoholism in Wales.

However I am aware that the Assembly is tackling the problem of substance misuse, including alcohol abuse, through its 8-year substance misuse strategy "Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales: A Partnership Approach".

Incineration Plant (Wrexham)

29. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will hold discussions with the First Minister and the Environment Secretary on the cross border impact of the proposals for an incineration plant at Wrexham. [27085]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I understand that the National Assembly has received a number of requests to call-in this planning application. It is for the Assembly to decide how to proceed. I will however draw the hon. Member's concerns to the attention of Assembly Ministers.

Health Service

30. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Minister regarding the state of the national health service in Wales. [27086]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet regularly with the National Assembly First Minister and the Assembly Health and Social Services Minister to discuss a range of issues, including the NHS in Wales.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy to limit funding for investment by Railtrack and its successors to the total in the regulatory settlement for Control Period 2. [26296]

Mr. Spellar: The funding available to Railtrack and its successor is the regulatory settlement for Control Period 2, as supplemented by the agreement between Railtrack and the Department in April 2001. If bidders for Railtrack consider that this is insufficient, they will need to include proposals for additional funding in their bids.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what minimum notice Railtrack gives to train operating companies for planned maintenance work. [26059]

Mr. Jamieson: Current timetabling arrangements require Railtrack to have notified the train operators of intended works 26 weeks before taking possession of the network.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy for a not-for-profit company to replace Railtrack plc. [28738]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 195–97W.

Rail Safety

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many rail track failures have been recorded by Railtrack in each of the last five years. [26073]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand from Railtrack that the number of broken rails in each of the last five financial years were:

	Number of broken rails
1996–97	709
1997–98	755
1998–99	952
1999–2000	918
2000–01	697

Road Deaths

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many deaths there were in motor accidents during the period of the annual Christmas anti-drink campaign in each of the last five available years in which a contributory factor was *(a)* consumption of alcohol, *(b)* consumption of non-prescription drugs and *(c)* tiredness of the driver. [27379]

Mr. Spellar: Information is not available for the periods requested. National estimates of drink drive fatalities are only made based on the involvement of a driver who had consumed over the legal limit of alcohol. These estimates are not produced for time periods of less than one calendar month. No estimates are made of road deaths involving the use of non-prescription drugs or tiredness of a driver.

London Underground

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff came in *(a)* one hour and *(b)* two hours late on each London Underground line and in total in (i) the last five years and (ii) each of the last 12 months; and what were the reasons given for the absence. [27710]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd., who have advised that the information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the drop out rates of persons applying for management positions on the London Underground *(a)* within one month, *(b)* one to two months and *(c)* two to six months after the application was received, within the last 12 months. [27708]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd., who have advised that within the last 12 months the number of applicants for management positions who withdrew applications, did not attend interviews or refused job offers is as follows:

(a) within one month of receipt of application—20 applicants

(b) one to two months afterwards—75 applicants

(c) two to six months afterwards—37 applicants.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how long it took on average to recruit new management staff for London Underground from *(a)* previous internal positions and *(b)* external positions in the last 12 months. [27707]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd., who have advised that in the last 12 months it took, on average, 8.8 weeks to recruit management staff from previous internal positions, and 10.6 weeks from previous external positions.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the meetings he has had in the last 10 months with London Underground. [28481]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend and ministerial colleagues meet London Underground representatives on both a regular and ad hoc basis, to discuss a variety of relevant matters.

Air Traffic Control Centre, Prestwick

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the National Air Traffic Service Prestwick Centre will be completed. [27730]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The events of 11 September 2001 have led to a review of the phasing of the National Air Traffic Services (NATS) capital investment plan, which includes the New Scottish Centre (NSC). Work on the NSC building has been suspended, but continues on evaluating systems solutions.

My officials continue to be in close discussion with NATS, who are keeping the position under review. NATS will commission further work at NSC as soon as traffic forecasts make it prudent to do so.

Oil Tankers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to refuse access to UK waters of single hull oil tankers; and if he will make a statement. [28045]

Mr. Spellar: The rights of innocent or transit passage, as provided in the United Nations convention on the law of the sea, benefit UK ships in foreign territorial waters and prevent the UK from refusing access through UK territorial waters to single hull oil tankers. However, it was recently agreed that after 2007 the oldest (unprotected) type of single hull tankers will not be allowed to operate anywhere; and the UK will not permit newer single hull tankers, fitted with partial protection, to enter its ports after 2015, exercising a new right which that agreement has given.

Correspondence

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to respond to the concerns raised by the Cally Rail Group in letters of 4 October 2001 to himself, and of 24 October and 17 December 2001 to his Department, in connection with the carrying out of Channel Tunnel Rail Link work on and around Caledonian Road, London N1. [28039]

Mr. Byers: My Department wrote to the Cally Rail Group on 17 October and 5 December 2001 and has subsequently provided a holding reply to their letter of 17 December. A further substantive reply has now been sent offering a meeting with representatives of the group.

Strategic Rail Authority

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether his Department's statements and the SRA plan have taken into account the delays in establishing the first special purpose vehicles in estimating completion dates for infrastructure investments. [28567]

Mr. Spellar: To avoid possible delays the Strategic Rail Authority has set aside funds within its strategic plan to help reduce commercial risk in projects before competitions to build them are held.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which new recommendations from multi-modal studies have been included in the SRA plan. [28565]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority is working with my Department on the processes by which the study outcomes will be taken forward in the short, medium and long terms. The authority is currently undertaking further work on the access to hastings study.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what impact the Strategic Rail Authority's new strategic plan will have on plans for the proposed Worcester Parkway station at Norton; and if he will make a statement. [28597]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan makes it clear that £430 million will be available over the next 10 years for the Rail Passenger Partnership Scheme which is designed to provide partnership funding for local schemes which support local and integrated transport objectives. The scheme was recently relaunched by the authority and the bidding criteria were not affected or altered by the strategic plan.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what mechanism the £7.5 billion public sector funding will be used to lever in the new commitments that will deliver the *(a)* short and *(b)* medium term priorities set out in the SRA strategic plan. [29232]

Mr. Jamieson: The private sector investment will be levered in through the franchising process, Special Purpose Vehicles and specific funding schemes such as the Rail Passenger Partnership fund.

Central Trains

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason a two-year extension to the Central Trains franchise is expected to achieve an early increase in capacity. [28573]

Mr. Spellar: An extension to the existing Central Trains franchise will provide an opportunity to secure early new investment in, for example, new rolling stock and additional services.

Rail Network

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the *(a)* capacity and *(b)* levels of usage of the rail network to carry individual services. [28548]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority has carried out numerous studies to gauge rail use and travel patterns in order to help determine priorities for investment. It has also carried out specific capacity studies to determine where enhancement is required. The priorities for investment have been identified in the authority's strategic plan.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the changes to subsidy resulting from the implementation of cost plus agreements on the railways. [28561]

Mr. Spellar: Under 'cost plus' agreements, the franchisee does not commit to a subsidy/premium profile for several years at a time. Instead, the franchisee is paid an agreed margin on the costs it is expected to incur in running the franchise in the coming year.

Prolonging these arrangements has led to a number of problems and the Strategic Rail Authority intends, as soon as possible, to replace those franchises on 'cost plus' terms with longer-term franchise contracts negotiated through competitive processes.

Freight Facilities

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether additional funds are being made available to the relaunched Freight Facilities Grant scheme. [28558]

Mr. Spellar: The Freight Facilities Grant scheme now covers coastal and short sea shipping. Additional funding is accordingly being sought under SR2002.

Fuel Taxes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the impact of fuel taxes on road and rail passenger usage. [28571]

Mr. Spellar: The Department's latest assessment of the impact of changes in the cost of fuel, including taxes, on road use is given in Annex C of "Modelling using the National Road Traffic Forecasting framework for 'Tackling Congestion and Pollution' and 'Transport 2010: The 10-Year Plan'—Technical Report".

In this assessment, the long run elasticity of car use with respect to fuel cost per car kilometre is 0.23. This means, for example, that an increase (decrease) in fuel cost per car kilometre of 10 per cent. would lead to a 2.3 per cent. decrease (increase) in car kilometres.

As announced in the 10-Year Plan, the Department is developing its multi-modal modelling capability. This will enable estimates to be made of the impact on rail passenger usage of changes to fuel taxation.

Rail-Air Links

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if it is his policy that rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports will not receive public funding for completion before 2010. [28569]

(2) if it is his policy that Airtrack will not receive public funding for completion before 2010. [28568]

Mr. Jamieson: No. The SRA's strategic plan makes it clear that a number of major schemes, including Airtrack and direct rail links to Edinburgh and Glasgow airports, are being explored further in terms of feasibility and value for money. If increased funding becomes available, particularly through partnerships with other parts of the public sector, it may be possible to make earlier progress on some of them than intimated in the current strategic plan.

East London Line

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much of the proposed East London line will be complete by 2006; [28549]

(2) whether he expects the East London line to be extended to Wimbledon by 2006. [28564]

Mr. Spellar: By 2006 the SRA expect to have completed and commissioned the new East London line infrastructure from New Cross Gate and Old Kent Road junction in the south to Dalston junction in the north. The new rolling stock is also expected to have been delivered by that date. The planned service to Wimbledon will be possible once the relevant South Central works by GoVia, and, if powers are granted, the relevant Thameslink 2000 works, have been completed.

South West Trains

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when work on extending South West Trains suburban platforms will be completed; [28555]

(2) what assessment he has made of the timeframe for *(a)* establishing a special purpose vehicle and *(b)* completing work on the planned extension of South West Trains suburban platforms. [28542]

Mr. Jamieson: The establishment of a Special Purpose Vehicle and the timing of works on platform extensions are both the subject of negotiations between the Strategic Rail Authority, Stagecoach and Railtrack. The SRA are keen to progress the project, which will allow the operation of longer trains to help reduce overcrowding, as soon as possible.

Tyne and Wear Metro

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the common usage by light and heavy rail services of the Tyne and Wear metro route. [28574]

Mr. Spellar: In December 1999 the Deputy Prime Minister, then Secretary of State for Transport, announced approval of funding for the extension of the Tyne and Wear metro system to Sunderland. The new line is due to open in March. In addition to building new tracks from the centre of Sunderland to South Hylton, this scheme has made use of excess capacity on existing heavy rail Railtrack lines. The promoters have worked closely with the HSE to ensure that the scheme complies with all the necessary safety requirements to enable common usage of heavy rail infrastructure.

London Rail Termini

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the impact on capacity at London rail termini of the presence of more than one train operator. [28551]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has identified opportunities for improvement in capacity at key London termini by bringing services under single operator control where possible.

Waterloo

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether it is his policy to retain a single train operator at Waterloo. [28588]

Mr. Spellar: Eurostar, Wales and Borders and South West Trains currently operate from London Waterloo. The Strategic Rail Authority has stated that it proposes to simplify the train operator franchise structure by bringing services at key London termini under single control wherever possible.

Thameslink 2000

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what date a special purpose vehicle will be established in respect of the financing of Thameslink 2000. [28589]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA is currently investigating options for the funding of the Thameslink 2000 project, if powers are granted. These options include the possibility of establishing a special purpose vehicle. It is not possible at this stage to predict when an SPV would be in place.

Cotswold Line

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of impact on investment plans for the Cotswold line between Worcester and Oxford of a two-year extension of the Thames Trains franchise; and if he will make a statement. [28598]

Mr. Spellar: A two-year extension of the current Thames Trains franchise is one of the options which the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is currently considering. Proposals for further investment in the Cotswold line and others included in the franchise are matters to be considered by the SRA in deciding whether to agree an extension.

Rail Freight

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what financial incentives are available to companies wishing to move freight from road to rail. [28382]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority operates two grant schemes to help companies switch traffic from road to rail. The Freight Facilities Grant helps companies with the capital cost of providing rail facilities and the Track Access Grant helps rail freight operators to meet the charges paid to Railtrack for access to the network, which in turn allows operators to offer a more competitive price to companies.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the quantities were of freight carried on Britain's rail network in each of the last four years. [28383]

Mr. Spellar: Freight moved is measured in net tonne kilometres (NTKMs). This takes into account the net weight of the goods carried (excluding the weight of the locomotive and wagons) and the distance carried. The total amount carried in each of the last four years is shown in the table:

Billion NTKMs

	Freight moved
1997–98	16.9
1998–99	17.3
1999–2000	18.2
2000–01	18.1

Growth in 2000–01 was not achieved because of the Hatfield derailment and subsequent network-wide problems.

Trans-Pennine Franchise

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if, in advertising the Trans-Pennine franchise, the Strategic Rail Authority will ensure that the service continues to stop at Stalybridge station. [28508]

Mr. Spellar: There is currently an hourly Trans-Pennine service for Stalybridge station that is protected by the Passenger Service Requirement (PSR). Bidders for the new Trans-Pennine Express franchise have been instructed by the Strategic Rail Authority that services protected by the PSR must be maintained.

Metropolitan Line

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many delays were caused by signal failures on the Metropolitan line in each of the last five years. [28482]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under- Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on 18 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 197W. London Underground advise me that it is not possible to separate the data for signals and points.

Postal Voting

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many votes were cast by post in the *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001 general elections, broken down by constituency as (i) a percentage of total votes cast and (ii) a percentage of the electorate. [28475]

Dr. Whitehead: Figures of the number of votes cast by post, the total votes cast and the total electorate for the 1997 general election were published, by constituency, in Table 4 of "Election Expenses" (House of Commons Paper 260) in February 1999. Publication of the corresponding data for the 2001 general election was the responsibility of the Electoral Commission and is contained in the report entitled "Postal Votes, Proxy Votes and Spoilt Ballot Papers at the 2001 General Election" published on 17 January. Copies of both publications are in the Libraries of the House.

Thames Trains

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many and what percentage of trains operated by Thames Trains departed late from West Drayton station in each month of *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [28484]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority do not keep performance figures disaggregated to station level. However, the following table shows a summary, by four weekly reporting period of the number of Thames Trains arriving at their destinations punctually:

Industry period	*Percentage of Thames Trains arriving at destination punctually and reliably*
Period beginning 2 January 2000	
0010	87.4
0011	92.4
0012	92.1
0013	92.8
April 2000	
0101	91.0
0102	90.8
0103	86.1
0104	87.2
0105	90.9
0106	88.7
0107	85.8
0108	65.9
0109	62.8
0110	76.1
0111	83.8
0112	84.5
0113	81.4
April 2001	
0201	82.8
0202	82.8
0203	81.6
0204	73.8
0205	79.1
0206	78.8
0207	78.5
0208	76.7
0209	73.5
Period ending 5 January 2002	
0210	81.2

Speed Cameras (Uxbridge)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed cameras are operating within the Uxbridge constituency. [28491]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally.

Nuclear Transportation

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray), on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 601W, on nuclear transportation, if he will list *(a)* the dates and *(b)* the reasons for the last five occasions on which the International Atomic Energy Agency radioactive materials transport standards have been revised as a result of reviews. [28590]

Mr. Spellar: The IAEA's Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material, originally published in 1961, are kept under continuous review and revised from time-to-time, as necessary, to ensure they remain effective in the light of up-to-date radiological protection standards, technological advances and operational experience. Revisions have been made in response to proposals for change and problems identified by experts from member states and concerned international transport organisations, most recently as follows:

Year of publication/Title	*Main reason(s) for revision*
2000	
Regulation for Safe Transport of Radioactive Material, 1996 Edition (Revised), Safety Standards Series No. TS-R-1 (ST-1, Revised)	Minor editorial amendments to 1996 Ed. Pressure test requirements aligned with International Standards
1996	
Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material, 1996 Edition, Safety Standards Series No. ST-1	Major revision incorporating: additional air transport requirements (Type 'C' package); additional requirements for uranium hexafluoride; enhanced immersion test requirements; updated activity limits; modified, radionuclide-specific exemption values.
1990	
Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material, 1985 Edition (As Amended 1990). Safety Series No. 6	Consolidation into a single volume of the original 1985 Edition, the two previous supplement documents and inclusion of further minor changes and changes of detail.
1988	
Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material 1985 Edition Supplement 1988, Safety Series No. 6—Supplementary 1988	Further amendments arising from a request to member states to identify problems applying the Regulations and proposals for change. Also incorporates amended texts to the supporting documents to the Regulations.
1986	
Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material 1985 Edition Supplement 1986, Safety Series No. 6—Supplementary 1986	Corrects minor errors and introduces changes of detail, unanimously agreed by the member states by direct replacement pages to the original text.

Year of publication/Title	*Main reason(s) for revision*
1985 Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material 1985 Edition, Safety Series No. 6	Fully revised edition carried out by expert panels beginning in 1979 and approved by the Board of Governors in 1984. International System (SI) of units introduced as primary units. Implements the new system of dose limitation of the 1982 Edition of the IAEA's Basic Safety Standards.

Train Company Competition

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means he intends to promote competition between train companies following the introduction of longer franchises and a single franchise serving each London terminus. [28737]

Mr. Jamieson: The main competition for rail operators is from road and other modes of transport, and this competitive pressure would not be reduced by the introduction of larger franchises or a policy of single franchises serving each London terminus. The aim would be to produce a more reliable, cohesive and attractive service for passengers.

Railways

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what additional capacity is *(a)* planned and *(b)* under consideration for the railway lines between (i) London and Portsmouth, (ii) London, Southampton and Lymington and (iii) Bristol and Brighton, and for Island Line; when he expects each improvement to be complete; what the cost will be; and how much of the cost will be met from public funds; [28732]

(2) what improvement is *(a)* planned and *(b)* under consideration for major stations on the railway lines between (i) London and Portsmouth, (ii) London, Southampton and Lymington and (iii) Bristol and Brighton, and for stations on Island Line; when he expects each improvement to be complete; what the cost will be; and how much of the cost will be met from public funds. [28733]

Mr. Spellar: Capacity on the Portsmouth and Southampton routes will be increased in stages over the early years of the replacement South West Trains franchise through rolling stock investment. It is proposed that capacity be increased to facilitate a half-hourly service on the Bristol to Portsmouth route. Longer term increases in capacity will depend on infrastructure investment to permit longer trains to operate. These projects, and their financial arrangements, are subject to the outcome of commercial negotiations for the new South West Trains and Wessex franchises. The Strategic Rail Authority are developing a franchise proposition for the replacement of the Island Line franchise, in consultation with the Island council. Further announcements will be made by the authority in due course.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under the 10 year plan for rail, how much public money will be available in each of the next 10 years to support *(a)* infrastructure investment and *(b)* subsidies for operating costs to (i) the Railtrack successor body and (ii) the train operating companies. [29233]

Mr. Jamieson: The £33.5 billion of government support to the rail industry over the next 10 years, is projected to be profiled as in the table. A breakdown is provided between government capital investment and resource (revenue) expenditure.

The level of future Government subsidy provided through existing franchise contracts is detailed in the 2001 SRA annual report. No other breakdown can be provided for individual companies over each of the next 10 years.

£ billion[1]	*Resource*	*Capital*	*Total*
2001–02	1.6	0.6	2.2
2002–03	1.4	1.5	2.8
2003–04	1.4	2.5	4.0
2004–05	1.5	2.4	3.9
2005–06	1.5	2.9	4.4
2006–07	1.5	2.7	4.2
2007–08	1.5	2.2	3.6
2008–09	1.6	1.3	2.9
2009–10	1.5	1.2	2.7
2010–11	1.5	1.2	2.7
Total	14.9	18.6	33.5

[1] Rounded

Rail Services (Disabled Access)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of *(a)* rail stations and *(b)* rolling stock are accessible for those who are mobility impaired; and what plans there are to increase the percentage. [28819]

Ms Keeble: This information is not currently held centrally. The answers will also depend on the definition of "mobility impairment" which is used—some stations and rolling stock may not be wheelchair accessible but can be accessed by other mobility impaired people. The Strategic Rail Authority will announce shortly a requirement for train operators to prepare new disabled people's protection policies. When available, these will allow national information to be provided.

Rail Infrastructure Investment

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of investment in infrastructure has been in each year since 1997 on main railway lines in the UK. [28618]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* Information on rail infrastructure investment is available from Railtrack's annual report and accounts for each of the relevant years. These figures are not publicly available by individual route.

Driving Test Examiners (West Yorkshire)

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many driving test examiners were employed in each test centre in West Yorkshire in *(a)* January 2002, *(b)* July 2001 and *(c)* January 2001; and how many in each category were (i) full-time and (ii) part-time. [28354]

Mr. Spellar: The following number of driving examiners were based at test centres in West Yorkshire:

	January 2002		*July 2001*		*January 2001*	
	Permanent	*Other*[1]	*Permanent*	*Other*[1]	*Permanent*	*Other*[1]
Car						
Bradford (Eccleshill)	2	2	2	2	2	2
Bradford (Heaton)	3	2	3	2	3	2
Halifax	3	1	3	1	4	0
Heckmondwike	2	1	2	2	2	1
Huddersfield	4	2	4	2	4	2
Keighley	3	0	3	0	3	0
Leeds (Horsforth)	4	2	4	2	4	2
Leeds (Harehills)	8	1	8	1	8	1
Wakefield	3	1	3	1	3	1
Total	32	12	32	13	33	11
Motorcycle						
Bradford (Eccleshill)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Halifax	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leeds (Horsforth)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	1	1	1	1	1	1

[1] Other = driving examiners not employed on a permanent, full-time basis: contract examiners (with work guaranteed for a minimum of 10 days per month) or fee-paid examiners (paid on a test-by-test basis to cover for short notice absence of permanent staff).

In addition, other driving examiners were on occasions detached to test centres to cover for annual leave, sickness, and other duties, and to reduce waiting times:

	January 2002		*July 2001*		*January 2001*	
	Permanent	*Other*	*Permanent*	*Other*	*Permanent*	*Other*
Car						
Bradford (Eccleshill)	14	4	14	4	15	3
Bradford (Heaton)	10	4	10	5	11	3
Halifax	10	8	10	9	10	7
Heckmondwike	12	7	12	6	13	6
Huddersfield	10	2	10	3	11	1
Keighley	4	1	4	1	5	0
Leeds (Horsforth)	14	2	14	2	16	2
Leeds (Harehills)	8	7	8	7	9	6
Wakefield	15	4	15	4	13	4
Total	97	39	97	41	103	32
Motorcycle						
Bradford (Eccleshill)	2	0	2	0	2	0
Halifax	3	0	3	0	3	0
Leeds (Horsforth)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5	0	5	0	5	0

Housing

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures his Department is taking to improve the quality of housing in areas of deprivation. [28769]

Ms Keeble: In July 2000 the Government set a target to bring all social housing up to set standards of decency by 2010, tackling one-third of the problem by March 2004 with most of the improvement taking place in deprived local authority areas.

"The Way Forward for Housing", the Government's housing policy statement, set out a range of measures many of which would contribute towards achieving this target, including:

a significant increase in investment—an additional £1.8 billion was provided in the last spending review on top of increases announced in 1998 and 2000—much of which will benefit deprived areas;

a range of investment options for local authority housing including transfer of homes to registered social landlords and arms-length management arrangements; and

the introduction of local housing strategies.

A copy of the policy statement is in the Library.

Congestion

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when targets for congestion will be agreed as part of the 10-year transport plan. [28906]

Ms Keeble: "Transport 2010: The 10-Year Plan", published in July 2000, contained a target

> "to reduce road congestion on the inter-urban network and in large urban areas in England below current levels by 2010 by promoting integrated transport solutions and investing in public transport and the road network".

Fire Service SSA

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform the standard spending assessment allocation for fire services taking into account fire prevention work; and if he will make a statement. [28919]

Dr. Whitehead: In partnership with the Local Government Association and other local authority organisations we are reviewing the local government finance grant distribution formula. We have already made the commitment that, when the new formula is introduced for the 2003–04 Local Government Finance Settlement, the perverse incentive of the fire calls indicator (whereby fire authorities are effectively penalised for reducing the number of calls) will be removed. Other options that are being considered include increasing the share that is allocated for fire safety education.

Fishing (Light Dues)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will calculate the amount paid in light dues by British registered fishing vessels in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what proposals he has to exempt British registered fishing vessels from the payment of light dues. [29086]

Mr. Jamieson: The amount of light dues invoiced to UK registered fishing vessels for the financial year 2001–02 (April to March) is £672,326. We have no current plans to exempt fishing vessels from the payment of light dues, but we intend to consult all users of the general lighthouse authorities' aids to navigation on the charging structure.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those European Union member nations which levy light dues on their domestically registered fishing vessels; and what assessment he has made of the effect of light dues on the competitiveness of British registered vessels in comparison with vessels from fishing fleets of other European Union member nations. [29087]

Mr. Jamieson: The lighthouse authorities in the UK and Ireland are funded through the general lighthouse fund, which is administered by DTLR. The Irish Government make a contribution to the fund towards the costs of provision of aids to navigation in the Irish Republic, and do not require fishing vessels in the Irish Republic to pay light dues. We do not have information on arrangements for covering the costs of provision of aids to navigation in other member states.

Road Maintenance Survey

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reasons the present form of the annual road maintenance survey is to be discontinued; how the replacement statistical series will differ; and if he will make a statement. [28907]

Mr. Jamieson: The National Road Maintenance Condition Survey (NRMCS) reports on the condition of roads, footways, kerbs and verges in England and Wales. It was introduced in 1977 as a visual survey of defects and subsequently extended to include surveys of structural condition and skidding resistance. Recent technical advances and organisational changes affecting the management of the national and local road networks have provided the opportunity to collect the information more efficiently.

In future, the data for statistics of road maintenance conditions will be those which each authority now collects in order to manage its own network and to produce best value performance indicators. This has a number of advantages. Firstly, there will be cost savings to authorities as they will no longer be asked to collect separate data for NRMCS. This should also give rise to increased response rates. Secondly, the new methods of data collection use latest technology to monitor the whole of the road network, as opposed to a sample of 100 m road lengths as in the old NRMCS. As a result, we will be able to publish meaningful comparisons at authority and regional level for the first time which will also serve to improve the accuracy of the national results.

The new survey will be more comprehensive than the old NRMCS. Coverage will include motorways (excluded from the old visual survey), and roads with a concrete running surface will come within the survey for the first time. In addition the condition of cycleways will be recorded.

The new information will also enable the monitoring of two objectives in the 10-Year Plan for Transport—halting local road deterioration by 2004 and eliminating the backlogs in their maintenance by 2010–11. The new survey will continue to provide information on the condition of roads but should also enable the calculation of more precise estimates of the amount of outstanding maintenance than those currently derived from the visual survey.

These new arrangements are being phased in over three years. Each part of the new survey will run in parallel with the corresponding part of the old survey for a period of one year to ensure consistency over time.

Ministerial Meetings (Scottish Parliament)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met the Scottish Minister for Transport; and what issues were discussed. [29483]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State met Wendy Alexander, the Scottish Minister for Transport, on Wednesday 16 January. A number of issues were discussed including the SRA Strategic Plan, the ScotRail franchise, and the recent industrial action on the Scottish railways.

Wind Power

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is relating to guidance to district councils concerning the grant of planning consent for siting smaller wind turbines *(a)* singularly and in pairs, *(b)* in the support of farmers seeking to diversify through earning revenue through wind power generation and *(c)* to local communities for local power generation for the benefit of the community. [29283]

Ms Keeble: Guidance on planning policy for renewable energy is set out in PPG 22. This provides local planning authorities with guidance on a range of issues that affect the siting of renewable energy projects, including the siting of one or two wind turbines.

English Partnerships

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consultations are taking place over the future of English Partnerships. [29388]

Ms Keeble: As part of stage one of the current review of English Partnerships, a range of EP's partners and stakeholders, including the regional development agencies, have been consulted. Consultations have also taken place with groups of staff from English Partnerships and with the management of the organisation.

A dedicated e-mail address has also been set up to encourage comments from anyone interested in the review.

Rail Delays

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the total weekly rail delays, in minutes, for each week from 1 May 1997 to 21 January 2002, broken down to show delays *(a)* attributable to Railtrack and *(b)* attributable to train operating companies; and if he will make a statement. [27054]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government Expenditure Review

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the timetable for the review of local government expenditure. [29328]

Dr. Whitehead: We will implement reform of the local government grant distribution system in time for setting out the provisional 2003–04.

Rail Industry (EU Guidelines)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he has given to the Strategic Rail Authority on the implications of the European Council's Broad Guidelines of the Economic Policies of the Member States and the Community on the future structure of the rail industry. [29121]

Mr. Byers: The Government's policies, including those of the Strategic Rail Authority, are consistent with these Broad Guidelines.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Solicitor-General what equipment has been stolen from her Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26840]

The Solicitor-General: I am not aware of any departmental equipment being stolen from the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers since 1 May 1997.

The details of other Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible are as follows:

£

Year	*Equipment*	*Valued at*
Crown Prosecution Service		
1997–98	—	—
1998–99	1 computer	2,000.00
	1 laptop computer	800.00
1999–2000	2 computers	4,000.00
	1 laptop computer	2,842.00
	1 computer and printer	2,700.00
2000–01	1 mobile telephone	170.00
2001–02	1 mobile telephone	150.00
Treasury Solicitor's Department		
1997	1 date stamp and pad	2.07
	1 calculator	5.50
	Computer memory chips	1,144.36
1998	1 mobile telephone	95.00
	3 dictaphone machines	196.00
1999	—	—
2000	—	—
2001	1 mobile telephone	174.00
	1 laptop computer	850.00
Serious Fraud Office		
1997	—	—
1998	—	—
1999	—	—
2000	1 mobile telephone	65.00
2001	2 mobile telephones	130.00
	1 laptop computer	1,600.00

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Solicitor-General what costs have been incurred by her Department in connection with the Saville inquiry; and what her estimate is of the final cost to her Department. [29066]

The Solicitor-General: The Departments for which the Attorney-General answers in Parliament are the Crown Prosecution Service, the Serious Fraud Office and the Treasury Solicitor's Department, as well as his own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers.

The Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office have not incurred any costs in connection with the Bloody Sunday inquiry and do not expect to do so.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department carries out legal work for other Departments, such as the Ministry of Defence, on a full cost recovery basis. While substantial work has been done by the Treasury Solicitor's Department in relation to the inquiry, in so far as that work is directly connected with the inquiry, the cost will be recovered or has been recovered from the client Department or Departments represented. The Treasury Solicitor's Department has provided representation before the inquiry for two ex-members of staff. The cost of this representation, which has been borne by the Department, is approximately £15,500.

The Attorney-General and lawyers in both the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers will, in the normal course of their duties, have been called upon to give advice on certain matters arising as a result of the Bloody Sunday inquiry. In so far as these costs can be assessed, an approximate figure would be £70,500. No assessment can be made of what the final cost may be as it will depend on whether further advice or assistance is sought or becomes necessary.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Wind Power Generators

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the EU grant aid has been issued to farmers in Objective 1 areas for siting small scale wind power generators; and what steps her Department is taking to ease access to these funds. [29285]

Alan Johnson: No EU grant aid from the structural funds has been issued to farmers for siting small scale wind power generators in Objective 1 areas.

The Department's website has information on the structural funds and potential sources of match funding. The website of each Government office in the regions gives details of the programmes for the region. These sites also contain advice on how applications can be made.

Consumer Protection

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review consumer protection laws in relation to internet purchasing of goods and services. [26076]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Existing consumer protection laws, such as the Distance Selling Regulations and the Sale of Goods legislation, apply equally to internet purchasing as when shopping on the high street. In November 2001 I launched a campaign with my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness to raise awareness of consumer rights when e-shopping and to demonstrate that internet shopping is safe as long as shoppers follow basic guidelines.

Consumer protection laws will be reviewed to ensure, in compliance with the E-Commerce Directive, that they do not prevent contracts being concluded by electronic means. The E-Commerce Directive will also create some additional safeguards for those purchasing goods and services online.

Radioactive Waste (North-East Atlantic)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the minimum length of time the isotopes deposited west of Land's End in the 1960s and 1970s will remain radioactive. [27190]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Radioactive waste was deposited at several locations in the north-east Atlantic during the 1960s and 1970s. This waste contained many different radioactive isotopes with widely varying rates of decay. For example, plutonium-239 (Pu-239) has a half-life of around 24,000 years, whereas tritium (H-3) has a half-life of 12.3 years. In view of this, it is not possible to make a single estimate of the length of time that the material will remain radioactive. Details of the radionuclides which the material contained are included in the "Report of the Independent Review of Disposal of Radioactive Waste in the North East Atlantic" (HMSO, 1984), copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Places of Worship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate she has made of the cost to English Heritage of administering the VAT/grant recovery scheme for places of worship; and if she will make a statement; [28915]

(2) for what reason the administration of the VAT/grant recovery scheme for places of worship is administered by English Heritage; and if she will make a statement. [28914]

Dr. Howells: CSL Group Ltd. are DCMS's appointed contractors for the Listed Places of Worship (LPW) Grant scheme. Initial estimates are that the LPW Scheme could be worth up to £30 million per year. There is no cap on the scheme; all listed places of worship that meet the criteria will receive a grant. This Department has been asked to make a small contribution to the costs of the scheme. We have asked English Heritage to help us meet this commitment, which they have chosen to do through the redirection of £2 million in grant-in-aid from the Joint Places of Worship (JPOW) scheme.

Film Council

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the criteria employed by the Film Council to assess the suitability of applications to each of its funds. [29429]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Film Council sets out its criteria for assessing the suitability of applications in the published application guidance for the relevant fund. Each guidance complies with the policy and financial directions issued to the Film Council under sections 26 (1), (3), (3A) and (4) of the National Lottery Etc. Act 1993 (as amended by the National Lottery Act 1998).

In respect of its film financing funds—the development fund, the new cinema fund and the premiere fund—the eligibility and selection criteria are clearly linked back to attaining the objectives for the relevant fund. The guidance also states that applications for development or production finance will be assessed on the creative merits of the projects by the head of the relevant fund. Their creative judgment to fund a project is complemented by an assessment of financial and contractual matters all under the control of the Film Council's chief executive officer.

In respect of the training fund the key criteria are that the application meets the various training specifications as set out and that the project meets the objectives of the fund.

In respect of the regional investment fund for England, the Film Council is in the process of delegating decision-making on applications to new regional film agencies. These agencies will operate under a detailed framework agreement which sets out the parameters within which any decisions should be made.

A similar framework agreement which includes parameters for creative, operational and financial criteria is in place with the council's delegate body responsible for "First Light"—a fund for film making by children and young people.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make an estimate of the value to the Film Council of *(a)* profit share schemes, *(b)* shares in copyright and *(c)* other property or rights received, as a result of grants made under each of the Film Council's funds since 1 April 2000. [29430]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The valuation of film rights is not made under the headings listed in the question. The valuation is made in accordance with the additional disclosure requirements of the accounts direction given by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for the Film Council's national lottery fund.

The Film Council prepares a valuation of film rights at the end of each financial year. In respect of its lottery funds this valuation is disclosed in its report and lottery accounts. The accounts for 2000–01 were laid before Parliament on 12 December 2001. In 2000–01 the net value of film rights is reported as £12,490,930 against awards made totalling £24,864,352. A detailed breakdown is contained within schedule 1 to the accounts. The valuation for grants made since 1 April 2001 will be undertaken after the end of the financial year as part of preparation of the 2001–02 accounts.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list grants made by the Film Council since 1 April 2000 stating for each the *(a)* amount of the grant, *(b)* date of the grant, *(c)* purpose of the grant, *(d)* company, person or organisation to whom the grant was made, *(e)* name of the film or project for which the grant was to be used and *(f)* fund from which the grant was made. [29431]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* I am arranging for copies of the information requested by the hon. Member to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many applications to each fund of the Film Council since 1 April 2000 have been successful. [29428]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 31 December 2001 the following applications to the Film Council have been successful:

Lottery Film Franchises—55
Premiere Fund—17 awards
Development Fund—75 (including 12 successful slate applications)
New Cinema Fund—33 (including 12 awards to run digital shorts programmes)
Training Fund—79 (including bursary awards to 61 individuals)
First Light—54.

These figures exclude awards which have lapsed, been withdrawn or have not been taken up. Some projects have applied for and received separate allocations of funding against specific elements of the same project.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the work of the Film Council. [29411]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Film Council started work in April 2000 with the long term objective of creating a sustainable UK film industry.

It has done this by supporting a range of film productions, and most importantly for the long term, helping the development of films and film-makers. The Film Council is developing close relationships with European colleagues; it has for the first time brought together film interests in each of the English regions; introduced programmes for young people and training for the industry; and it is working up policies on exhibition and distribution and to give practical help for exports.

The Film Council's annual report, which will be published shortly, will give more details of their achievements.

Free Television Licence (Wealden)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners in Wealden receive the free television licence for people over 75 years of age. [29713]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers for the BBC as licensing authority the free television licence scheme, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 9,000 people aged 75 or over in the Wealden constituency.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gurkhas (Commemoration)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will introduce plans to commemorate the military assistance given by Nepal to the United Kingdom in *(a)* the two World Wars and *(b)* other significant conflicts. [24748]

Mr. Bradshaw: We rightly commemorate the immense contribution that the Nepalese, through the Gurkhas, have made to the United Kingdom in the world wars and in other conflicts. The Gurkhas, as an integral part of the British Army, are commemorated at Remembrance

Day. The Nepalese Ambassador is the only non-Commonwealth foreign representative to attend the commemoration. The Gurkha Statue near the Ministry of Defence Main Building, unveiled by Her Majesty the Queen in December 1997, is another permanent reminder of the contribution of the Gurkhas, and the Gurkha Gardens in Winchester is no less important a memorial.

The Gurkhas are also commemorated in a more practical way through the work of the Gurkha Welfare Trust, an independent registered charity, which provides financial, medical and community aid to alleviate hardship and distress among Gurkha ex-servicemen of the British Army and their dependants after they have returned to their homeland of Nepal. The MOD recognises the valuable work that this trust does and makes a substantial annual grant towards its administrative costs.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27303]

Mr. Straw: The information is as follows:

Cost of fraud in Foreign and Commonwealth Office

£

	FCO (fraud)	*Recovered*	*Net loss*
May 1997 to March 1998	114,385	4,396	109,989
April 1998 to March 1999	102,202	6,705	95,497
April 1999 to March 2000	11,183	11,183	0
April 2000 to March 2001	16,326	15,553	773
April 2001 to December 2001	38,125	20,092	18,033

Total identified fraud for period 1 May 1997 to 31 December 2001 = 282,221
Total sums recovered to date = 57,929
Net loss = 224,292

Stolen/lost Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [27988]

Mr. MacShane: The following equipment, valued at over £50.00, has been reported stolen or lost from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK in the last four years:

		Value (£)
1998		
27 May	Video player	150
3 July	CD ROM player	150
4 August	Canon Colour printer	140
1999		
6 January	Socket mother board, Intel processor, hard disk, unclassified video card, internal modem card	300
13 May	Laptop	2,000
3 September	Laptop	2,000
4 October	Answerphone	100
2000		
10 January	Hard disks on 2 computer stations	400
21 January	Harddrives RAM and CPU processors on 2 computers	900
28 March	Computer components	500
15 April	Laptop	2,000
17 April	RAM and processors	300
26 April	RAM and processors	300
4 May	RAM and processors	300
4 December	Palm pilot computer	500
2001		
28 February	Computer and hardware, digital camera CDRW Drives, Firecrest PC, external CD ROM for laptop	1,200
27 February	Laptop Toshiba	2,000
Unknown	Scanner	300
16 March	Laptop	2,000
11 April	Minidisc player	200
10 April	Telephone	80
13 March	Shortwave Radio	200
22 May	Boxed PC inc, monitor/keyboard	1,200
17 August	Flat screen monitor	450
29 October	Laptop	2,000
2002		
10 January	7 X 17" monitors	1,400

Afghanistan

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has sought, and what communications he has received, from the United States Administration in respect of the circumstances surrounding the uprising and battle at the prison fort outside Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan; how many prisoners were killed; if United Kingdom citizens are known to have been killed or captured; and what role British military personnel played in the action. [28504]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not have details of the numbers killed or captured, and are not aware that any UK citizens were among those killed or captured.

My hon. Friend will understand that, for reasons of operational security, I cannot go into specific details about the involvement of British troops in this incident. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that, following an uprising by Taliban fighters being held at the fort, who overpowered their captors and seized the armoury, British troops went to the aid of their US colleagues. Under heavy fire they attempted to recover two US personnel apparently captured by the Taliban fighters.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates of foreign visits he has made since 11 September; which countries he visited; whom he met; what was discussed; what the size of his entourage was; which other Ministers accompanied him; and what the total cost was of each visit. [28789]

Mr. Straw: Since 11 September I have made the following overseas visits and met the following leaders:

12 September

Special GAC Brussels.

Belgium—Secretary General Solana, President Prodi, Vice-President Kinnock, Commissioner Lamy, Commissioner Patten.

21 September

Extraordinary European Council, Brussels.

24–27 September

Jordan—King Abdullah, Prime Minister al-Ragheb, Foreign Minister Khatib, President Arafat.

Iran—President Khatemi, Foreign Minister Dr. Kharrazi.

Israel—Prime Minister Sharon, Foreign Minister Peres.

Egypt—President Mubarak.

8 October

GAC Luxembourg.

17 October

GAC Luxembourg.

17–18 October

Turkey—President Sezer, Prime Minister Ecevit, Foreign Minister Cem.

23–25 October

USA—Vice-President Cheney, Secretary of State General Powell, Secretary of State for Defence Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defence Wolfowitz.

29 October

GAC Luxembourg.

30–31 October

Russia—Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov.

Poland—Prime Minister Miller, Foreign Minister Cimoszewicz.

9–14 November

USA—UNGA.

19 November

GAC Brussels.

19–20 November

Spain—Foreign Minister Pique.

21–23 November

Iran—Foreign Minister Dr. Kharrazi, Abdullah Abdullah (now Foreign Minister of the Interim Administration in Afghanistan).

Pakistan—President Musharraf, Foreign Minister Sattar.

Bahrain—Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al-Khalfia.

6–7 December

Belgium—NAC Meeting.

10 December

GAC Brussels.

13–15 December

Belgium—Laeken European Council.

21–23 January

Democratic Republic of Congo—President Kabila, Foreign Minister Ukitundu.

Rwanda—President Kagame, Foreign Minister Bumaya.

Burundi—President Buyoya, Vice-President Ndayizeye.

Uganda—President Museveni, Foreign Minister Wapakhabulo.

A range of issues was discussed during these visits, including the international coalition against terrorism, the middle east peace process, EU affairs, bilateral relations and regional issues.

The Prime Minister attended the Extraordinary European Council in Brussels on 21 September and the Laeken European Council in Brussels, 13–15 December. The Chancellor of the Exchequer attended the Laeken European Council. The Minister for Europe attended the GACs on 29 October, 10 November and 19 November and the Laeken European Council.

A detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers on overseas travel for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of this financial year.

Colombia

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to ensure that the Colombian Government conducts a full investigation into human rights violations in Colombian cities; and if he will make a statement. [29227]

Mr. MacShane: We are very concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Colombia. I had comprehensive discussions with the Colombian Government about human rights, including allegations of human rights violations in the town of Barrancabermeja, during my visit to Colombia last October. Last year, HM ambassador to Colombia and other embassy staff visited Medellin, Cali and other major cities and towns where they met and expressed support for peace activists and human rights NGOs, and raised our concerns with the Colombian authorities. We strongly support the work of the Colombian human rights ombudsman, who I met last October, who regularly publishes reports into human rights violations.

Visas

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for a visa to visit family members in the United Kingdom were refused in *(a)* November and *(b)* December 2001. [28787]

Mr. Bradshaw: Provisional figures, based on monthly statistical returns from the largest 110 entry clearance posts handling 98 per cent. of all visa applications are:

Refused November 2001: 3,846[1]

Refused December 2001: 2,164[2]

[1] Figures from six posts still awaited.

[2] Figures from 29 posts still awaited.

Terrorist Attacks (Middle East)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the number of terrorist attacks carried out by members of the Fatah from within the Palestinian Authority in the last 12 months; [28831]

(2) what assessment he has made of the organisations responsible for the terrorist attack on the Israeli town of Afula on 27 November 2001. [28832]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 919W.

World Conference Against Racism

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in negotiating and translating the final text for the Declaration and Programme of Action agreed at the UN World Conference Against Racism held in Durban from 31 August to 8 December 2001; what preparations he has made to publish and distribute English and other language versions of the final text in the UK; what preparations he has made to consult NGOs and minority ethnic organisations on the construction of a national plan of action based on these texts as required by the Durban agreement; and what his time scale is for consultation with *(a)* devolved Administrations and *(b)* dependent territories. [29246]

Peter Hain: The agreed Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) were published by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 2 January. English, French and Spanish versions are currently available on the website of the OHCHR www.ohchr.ch. The UN General Assembly Third Committee will reconvene in February to adopt the documents formally. Home Office officials will hold a preliminary consultation with NGOs and others involved in the preparations for WCAR on 4 February to discuss, inter alia, publication and further translation of the documents in the UK and the construction of a national plan of action. The devolved Administrations, who were also consulted before Durban, have been invited to the 4 February meeting. The Home Office will send copies of the documents to the dependent territories for consultation once they have been formally adopted by the UN.

Poland (EU Accession)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role Britain is playing in helping Poland to join the EU. [28916]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and I have regular contact with our Polish counterparts. We are heavily involved in the Commission's Twinning programme: since 1998, we have won involvement in 23 Polish projects, covering such areas as organised crime and implementation of the CAP. Our action plan with Poland covers a range of further bilateral assistance to their accession preparations. We are doing all we can to assist Poland with her accession negotiations, as we want to see Poland ready by the end of this year to join the EU.

Iraq

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has been given indicating whether the al-Qaeda network has a presence in Iraq. [28894]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have seen no evidence which demonstrates that an al-Qaeda network exists in Iraq.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Administration on extension of the war on terrorism to Iraq. [28895]

Mr. Bradshaw: We frequently discuss all aspects of Iraq policy with our US counterparts. We are not speculating about the prospects of military action beyond Afghanistan.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on sanctions on Iraq; and what plans there are to end them. [28892]

Mr. Bradshaw: UN controls on Iraq, imposed after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, have successfully contained Iraq's ability to attack its neighbours, use chemical weapons against the Iraqi people and develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—all of which are part of its quite recent history. UN resolution 1284, a UK initiative, continues to offer Iraq the route out of these controls, if it chooses to co-operate and meet its international obligations, particularly on the disposal of its WMD. All members of the Security Council believe that rigorous controls must however remain on the Iraqi regime while it refuses to co-operate. In the meantime, the UK continues to lead the way in refining these controls to improve the flow of goods to the Iraqi people, while maintaining control on the Iraqi regime's access to WMD/military-related items.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials from his Department have attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29007]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* No FCO officials have attended the course at the Civil Service College. We have developed our own suite of training courses covering environment, with the help of the University of Surrey Centre for Environmental Strategy. The courses provide guidance on how to integrate environment into foreign policy and FCO operations.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the last occasion was on which he requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29004]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* No such request has been made.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [29005]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Consultation with the relevant FCO department is required on all administrative and policy decisions with an environmental impact.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29006]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The FCO will submit a Sustainable Development Report to the Treasury as part of its Spending Review submission. The environmental implications of the submission will be considered in this report.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four. [29003]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* No such appraisals have been published.

International Terrorism

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to speak to the Indonesian authorities concerning al-Qaeda and the war on terrorism. [29292]

Mr. Straw: Regular discussions with the Indonesian authorities on a range of matters, including terrorism, continue.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Government regarding the extension of the campaign against international terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [27678]

Mr. Straw: We regularly discuss all aspects of the campaign against terrorism with the US Government. We share the concern of all responsible governments at the existence of international terrorist networks.

Ministerial Visit (Africa)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries he will be visiting during his forthcoming visit to Africa; and if the Prime Minister will be accompanying him. [29289]

Mr. Straw: I am paying a joint visit with French Foreign Minister Vedrine on 21–23 January 2002 to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. The Prime Minister will not be accompanying us.

Money Laundering (African Governments)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent investigations he has undertaken to check that senior members of the Governments of *(a)* Kenya, *(b)* Zambia and *(c)* Zimbabwe and their respective families have not laundered money through (i) the City of London and (ii) Switzerland. [29118]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The UK plays a leading role in international efforts to combat money laundering and corruption. The UK co-operates with a wide range of international partners to this end.

I am withholding further information under Exemption 4(b) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Turkey (EU Accession)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of Turkey's progress towards meeting the entry requirements for accession into the EU; and if he will make a statement. [27679]

Mr. Straw: We welcome Turkey's recent constitutional changes as progress towards meeting the Copenhagen criteria. As the Laeken European Council in December noted, Turkey's reforms have brought forward the prospect of the opening of EU accession negotiations for Turkey. Further reforms are needed before Turkey can start negotiations with the EU. We are therefore encouraging the Turkish Government to continue their programme of political and economic reform, in line with the Accession Partnership, notably with regard to human rights.

China

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Chinese authorities to ensure that there will be no human rights abuse in China during the preparations and hosting of the 2008 Olympics. [28716]

Mr. MacShane: We take every opportunity to press the Chinese authorities to improve their human rights record. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so with the Chinese Foreign Minister, Mr. Tang Jiaxuan, on 17 January.

Civil Defence Grant

Mr. Miller: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the level of civil defence grant will be for the next financial year. [30365]

Mr. Leslie: The Government have now completed their consideration of what is necessary and affordable for emergency planning by local authorities having regard to the demands that have been placed on emergency planners in recent times. We have decided, subject to the Civil Defence (Grant) Bill completing its passage through Parliament, to maintain the total grant level at around this year's level, currently estimated at some £18.6 million. The next stage is to decide how the grant will be distributed between the eligible authorities. Consideration is currently being given to the use of a formula and we will consult local authority representatives before finalising the grant allocation mechanism.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average time is that the Head of his Department has recommended since May 1997 between a special adviser leaving his Department and taking up outside employment; and if he will make a statement. [28910]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to him by the Prime Minister on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 594W.

Civil Servants

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many civil servants work for each Government Department; [28068]

(2) in each Government Department, what proportion of civil servants are *(a)* women and *(b)* from ethnic minorities. [28071]

Mr. Leslie: Figures for April 2001 were published on 8 November 2001 in a press notice, copies of which can be found in the Library of the House. This information can also be accessed on the world wide web at www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the salary is for each of the civil service grades. [28069]

Mr. Leslie: The latest information, broken down by salary and grade level, is published in "Civil Service Statistics 2000" and is based on 1 April 2000 data. Copies of the publication can be found in the Library of the House. Table H of that publication shows numbers of civil servants by salary band and responsibility level. Departments and agencies are responsible for their own grading structures, but these have been allocated to broad responsibility levels to give a common basis for tabulation.

For the senior civil service, new bands will be introduced from 1 April 2002. I refer my hon. Friend to the Prime Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) on 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 993W, and to the documents placed in the Library of the House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) her Department, (ii) her agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which she has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30075]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development owns no empty properties. There are no agencies or other public bodies for which we are responsible.

Afghanistan

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the frequency of the accidental triggering of land mines arising from the internal emigration of Afghans from the cities to the countryside following the start of the bombing of Afghan cities in October 2001. [28652]

Hilary Benn: Afghanistan has long been one of the countries most severely affected by land mine contamination, a problem which has existed for about 20 years.

The provision of precise information on mine/UXO victims since September 2001 is very limited. Reporting to hospitals by land mine/UXO victims has been disrupted by hostilities and by the restrictions on freedom of movement. The limited information that has been reported to the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA) indicates that land mines continue to claim lives throughout the country as people move in areas that are at risk. Unfortunately the problem is expected to worsen with the increasing repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Mine action operations will continue to be focused on supporting humanitarian aid movements through the clearance of communication routes, airports and high priority areas near to civilian populations, thereby reducing the risk for returnees. Coalition forces are sharing information with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

As part of our overall commitment of £60 million to support the UN led humanitarian and recovery effort, we have allocated £3 million through UNMAS for future humanitarian mine action interventions in Afghanistan. This will cover mine clearance operations in Afghanistan as described above.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* money and *(b)* logistical resources have been (i) donated to and (ii) committed to the reconstruction of the physical, environmental and institutional infrastructures of Afghanistan by the United Kingdom and other donor countries. [28521]

Hilary Benn: We have set aside £20 million in this financial year to support the Interim Administration and the United Nations-led transitional recovery and rehabilitation process, while continuing to respond to humanitarian needs. This includes a contribution of £2 million already provided to the UN Afghan Interim Authority Fund to provide salaries of key public servants, equipment and supplies. As well as financial assistance, we are providing technical personnel and logistical, material and other practical support.

At the international conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan held in Tokyo from 21–22 January 2002, I announced a significant contribution to be used for the long term rehabilitation of Afghanistan. The UK has committed £200 million over the next five financial years for both reconstruction and humanitarian activities. The majority of this pledge will be channelled through UN agencies and non-governmental organisations.

This pledge is in addition to the significant sums that the UK has contributed to the World bank, European Union and Asian Development bank, which will also direct further funds into Afghanistan in the coming years. The UK share of the European Union pledge alone with be 20 per cent.

More than 50 countries and international organisations are currently represented at the Tokyo conference and a consolidated total of pledges will be announced when the conference concludes. This will be reported on the website www.reliefweb.int.

Money Laundering (African Governments)

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what attempts she is making to monitor money sent overseas by President Mugabe; [28759]

(2) what attempts she is making to monitor money sent overseas by President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya; [28760]

(3) what discussions she has had with the Swiss authorities in order to freeze President Mugabe's overseas accounts. [28761]

Peter Hain: I have been asked to reply.

The UK plays a leading role in international efforts to combat money laundering and corruption. The UK co-operates with a wide range of international partners to this end.

I am withholding further information under Exemption 4(b) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Special Educational Needs

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will ensure that special schools continue to be part of the range of special needs provision. [27056]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government's policy on special schools is clear. We want to build on the wealth of expertise within the special school sector and ensure it is at the heart of inclusive education systems. Special schools have a continuing and vital role to play, and in future will need to be confident, outward looking centres of excellence working in partnership with mainstream schools. It is for local education authorities to determine the pattern of their provision in order to meet pupils' needs and take account of parents' wishes.

School Funding (London)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the total spending on schools in each London borough in each of the last 10 years. [28177]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is contained in the table. Expenditure in running these authorities was affected by schools becoming grant-maintained during the early part of this period, and by the return of grant-maintained schools to LEA-maintained status in 1999–2000.

Net institutional expenditure[1]

£ million

London authorities		*All sectors*									
LEA name	*LEA no.*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
City of London	201	0.457	0.616	0.711	0.733	0.761	0.808	0.830	0.797	0.855	0.949
Camden	202	45.457	52.452	53.300	51.394	50.328	53.280	56.664	57.310	58.500	72.210
Greenwich	203	78.867	78.255	85.843	83.782	87.994	90.972	93.758	87.796	96.735	109.433
Hackney	204	55.790	62.233	63.317	57.181	66.951	64.959	66.288	68.743	70.663	81.482
Hammersmith and Fulham	205	37.264	38.810	41.915	43.281	43.294	42.879	44.203	45.983	47.374	55.246
Islington	206	45.795	61.737	75.272	68.639	55.063	61.704	61.675	65.165	65.323	67.182
Kensington and Chelsea	207	23.424	27.869	25.236	25.239	24.699	27.099	26.479	27.881	28.807	34.967
Lambeth	208	57.424	65.382	68.624	69.624	63.629	60.189	56.362	64.542	63.565	92.356
Lewisham	209	65.517	68.233	65.033	72.597	74.904	80.350	80.578	90.030	93.794	107.164
Southwark	210	64.814	65.988	66.224	59.549	61.919	68.458	70.382	73.393	80.902	105.177
Tower Hamlets	211	69.583	79.720	84.052	96.829	95.239	99.152	104.346	102.995	110.154	125.519
Wandsworth	212	65.671	73.924	67.513	54.490	55.076	54.506	49.255	50.343	53.413	90.383
Westminster	213	34.185	52.072	44.889	45.636	45.608	46.574	49.295	49.686	53.011	54.171
Barking and Dagenham	301	42.632	45.810	50.196	51.444	55.179	58.364	61.674	62.652	69.252	74.408
Barnet	302	69.253	79.162	90.885	83.599	66.345	68.799	73.678	74.283	78.312	126.585
Bexley	303	51.545	56.351	57.978	59.756	56.434	58.330	61.781	64.175	70.925	86.209
Brent	304	59.098	64.424	67.128	51.972	45.151	45.152	47.351	51.575	55.738	105.460
Bromley	305	61.423	59.857	53.196	50.180	51.215	47.047	42.582	43.776	48.168	108.076
Croydon	306	69.349	78.298	83.105	78.762	68.111	76.522	79.009	79.640	84.937	118.172
Ealing	307	76.826	79.802	70.017	68.895	69.944	71.799	74.338	75.745	81.036	108.799
Enfield	308	66.894	78.218	83.569	79.795	74.649	77.335	84.951	87.727	94.540	119.979
Haringey	309	56.588	61.198	66.749	75.059	77.838	82.195	87.263	88.067	91.712	96.460
Harrow	310	47.399	52.058	58.719	57.319	62.193	64.302	67.205	66.538	69.757	75.762
Havering	311	56.957	62.829	69.007	61.451	64.297	65.078	66.123	67.812	70.998	86.336
Hillingdon	312	57.856	54.832	50.422	42.060	38.617	40.609	42.035	41.072	42.528	98.818
Hounslow	313	56.593	62.483	71.891	70.047	72.494	73.523	77.119	77.458	83.255	94.208
Kingston upon Thames	314	30.942	34.493	37.406	31.503	31.903	31.841	32.422	31.560	33.985	48.316
Merton	315	39.133	42.586	48.938	46.024	48.242	46.783	48.604	49.516	51.652	59.060
Newham	316	67.077	74.398	82.244	81.463	87.535	90.663	102.744	102.969	106.445	119.340
Redbridge	317	52.732	60.647	68.704	72.055	74.107	77.169	81.436	83.533	90.317	103.514
Richmond upon Thames	318	28.811	32.416	36.249	37.091	39.573	40.818	41.977	43.524	44.938	46.781
Sutton	319	37.152	38.980	36.405	32.337	36.787	37.090	39.089	40.433	44.144	67.998
Waltham Forest	320	65.673	67.816	67.467	68.529	65.281	74.027	73.812	76.509	80.809	97.962

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[1] Total funding on schools is given by Net Institutional Expenditure which covers all school-based recurrent spending, including teaching and non-teaching staff salaries, school premises costs, equipment and supplies, and unspent balances held by schools at the year end. It excludes spending on special schools, central administration and support services such as transport and school meals as well as capital expenditure.

NIE includes school balances for most years. However, balance information was not available for some previous years, and in some cases for special schools. Therefore, NIE figures across the series may not be strictly comparable.

Expenditure data for 1990–2001 to 1998–99 inclusive are taken from RO1 returns; data for 1999–2000 taken from local authorities' S52 outturn statements.

School Teachers' Review Body

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the report of the School Teachers' Review Body. [29889]

Estelle Morris: The 2002 report of the School Teachers' Review Body has been laid before Parliament and is available in the Vote Office. I am grateful to the Chair and members of the Review Body for sustaining their important work on the modernisation of the pay system for the teaching profession.

In making their recommendations, the Review Body were required to have regard to:

> the principles of good school leadership, incentives for excellence, a strong culture of professional development and better support for teachers to focus on teaching;
>
> the Government's priorities for delivering a higher quality education service;
>
> local government funding levels, from which all service improvements and pay settlements must be funded;
>
> the Government's inflation target, which required responsibility in all pay settlements;

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> the need for schools to recruit, retain and motivate sufficient teachers and members of the leadership group of the required quality to deal effectively with the challenges they face;
>
> any prospects there may be of making the pay structure simpler and more flexible; and
>
> the cost of registration with the General Teaching Councils for England and Wales.

I have considered the report carefully against these considerations and am satisfied that they are met. Accordingly I have decided to accept the Review Body's main statutory recommendations subject to consultation. They are in line with the Government's prudent and disciplined approach to public spending and their commitment to deliver high quality public services and low inflation.

My proposals, which will take effect from 1 September 2002 except where stated otherwise, are as follows:

General pay increase

> With effect from 1 April 2002, the values of the pay spine and scale points and allowances for qualified and unqualified classroom teachers, members of the leadership group and advanced skills teachers should be increased by 3.5 per cent.; London allowances other than the inner London Supplement should be increased by 3.5 per cent.; and a sum of £33 should be added to all spine and scale points for qualified teachers in recognition of the cost of General Teaching Council fees.

Main pay scale for classroom teachers

> The main pay scale for classroom teachers should be shortened from nine points to six, and the distinction between good honours graduates and others abolished so that all newly qualified entrants will be eligible to apply for the performance threshold after five years.

Upper pay scale

> The Review Body have asked that sufficient resources be made available to ensure that teachers who meet the performance criteria for progression on the upper pay scale can in fact progress. This is not a statutory recommendation, because funding is not part of teachers' statutory conditions of employment. I do not propose to increase special grant funding. The special grant is no more than a contribution to funds already available in school budgets, to encourage headteachers and governing bodies to award points as appropriate.
>
> Upper pay scale points should remain an entitlement when teachers transfer between schools and also that there should not be scope for voluntary forfeiture.

Leadership group pay

> Governing bodies should have the authority to change the headteacher's individual school ranges (ISR) at any time in order to attract or retain a headteacher. The existing provision for the governing body to set, in exceptional circumstances, an ISR to extend beyond the school group maximum should be available for retention as well as for recruitment purposes. The justification for such a decision should be required to be recorded in writing.
>
> Up to two performance points should be available to be awarded in any one year to members of the leadership group when the governing body considers such action to be justified.
>
> Where headteachers are given a temporary ISR in circumstances where they are seconded to turn around a failing school, and do not receive one or more performance points because they revert to their main posts, such points should be paid as a lump sum.
>
> Two extra points should be added on top of each school range, including the creation of extra spine points L42 and L43, to allow such an extension for group eight, in order to provide adequate scope for setting and reviewing ISRs.

The performance threshold

> Monitoring should continue in order to ensure any patterns of disadvantage among applicants for the performance threshold are quickly detected and their causes remedied.
>
> External assessors should visit schools and local authority services/units with applicants on a selective rather than universal basis.
>
> Teachers reaching the top of the main pay scale in September 2002 should be eligible to apply for threshold assessment in autumn 2002 as well as teachers reaching the top of the pay scale in September 2001.
>
> The Department should monitor the impact of guidance on threshold standards during the third round of threshold assessment and hold further discussions with the parties on the wording of the standards themselves if significant concerns remain.
>
> The Department should consult the interested parties on the issue of recognition of sixth form college professional standards and make a decision accordingly.
>
> The Department, in consultation with the parties, should ensure that effective feedback arrangements are implemented and efforts continue to improve and simplify the application process.
>
> The Department should ensure that the review process operates more quickly in future.
>
> The above proposals should take effect as soon as appropriate.

Advanced skills teachers (ASTs)

> The Department should pursue with the interested parties the issues it raised in evidence in relation to inreach and outreach duties, management roles and review of pay ranges. The requirement for new ASTs to have passed the performance threshold will be removed.

Other issues

> The fifth management allowance for classroom teachers should be retained.
>
> The Department should work together with the interested parties to establish more coherent and consistent procedures for payment for in-service training, initial teacher training activities and out-of-school learning activities.
>
> The Department should resolve the issue of recognition of relevant teaching and non-teaching experience through the award of experience points in consultation with the interested parties.
>
> The Department should again produce a statement on the pay structure, for issue to teachers in 2002.
>
> The Department will consider further with the interested parties whether it should undertake a study into the pay and conditions of headteachers in early years education in 2002.

The Department will consider further with the interested parties whether it should initiate a review of the pay and terms and conditions of unattached teachers.

The Department will report in its evidence in September 2002, for the main 2003–04 pay review, on progress in response to the following requests by the Review Body for reviews of:

- the scope and nature of the evidence, information and statistics it collects and provides on teacher recruitment, retention and labour market issues;
- how it monitors the use of pay flexibilities and advises on their application. Better monitoring and advice might obviate the need for prescriptive guidance and further the Department's aim of simpler pay arrangements;
- the nature of its advice and direction on the application of pay policies to borderline and atypical groups; and
- the scope for greater co-ordination of the current support network of assessors, advisers, local recruitment co-ordinators etc.

Finance

I have considered pressures on local government funding. The cost of the headline increase and shortening the main scale is estimated to be £560 million in 2002–03. This will be affordable within the resources available to local authorities. Education Standard Spending (ESS) will increase by 5.7 per cent. after adjustments.

Next steps

I am grateful to the Review Body for recommending a general increase at a level which is fair and which can be implemented without staging. I will now initiate consultation with the employer organisations, the teacher associations and other interested parties as required under section 2(1) of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991, before I make provision by order for teachers' pay and conditions in 2002–03.

Pupil Exclusions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were excluded in 2000–01 who had previously been excluded from maintained schools. [23419]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the Government's policy of excluding pupils from schools. [29259]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Government's current policy on exclusion from schools is set out in sections 64–68 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and in Circular 10/99, "Social Inclusions: Pupil Support". Head teachers, governors, LEAs and appeal panels should have regard to this guidance in discharging their functions in relation to pupil exclusion.

The Department will be issuing a consultation paper on a draft revision of the guidance this week. The revised draft guidance consolidates the earlier amendments but at the same time represents a thorough revision of the whole text. It supports the right of a head teacher to govern their school as they see fit, ensuring their schools are safe places to learn and teach in. It also puts into place clear guidance to ensure that the sanction of exclusion is not used inappropriately. The existing guidance remains in force until responses to the revised draft guidance are considered and a new version published in the summer.

Permanent exclusions fell to 8,300 in 1999–2000, a decrease of one fifth from 10,400 in 1998–99 and nearly a third less than the peak of 12,700 in 1996–97. The Government's target of an 8,400 reduction by 2002 has been met. The Government do not intend to set fresh targets for reducing permanent exclusions further. We can now move the agenda on to promoting the fundamentals of good behaviour, and focus on early intervention and the prevention of exclusion.

Departmental Funding Resources and Initiatives

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list all *(a)* funding resources and *(b)* initiatives sponsored by her Department for (i) the private sector, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) local authorities. [26847]

Estelle Morris: Most of my Department's expenditure is delivered through schools and local education authorities (LEAs), and partner organisations, including non-departmental public bodies, which in turn pass funding to providers and institutions in the private, voluntary and other sectors.

The bulk of funding for local authorities is made up of the Education Standard Spending Assessment, £22.5 billion in the current financial year, the Standards Fund, £2.5 billion, and credit approvals of £0.5 billion. The Department also makes some separate grants available to local authorities, for example for Education Maintenance Allowances.

The Department has allocated £450 million in private finance initiative credits to local authorities in 2001–02 to support public-private partnerships in schools.

Full details of the initiatives sponsored by my Department for the private sector, the voluntary sector and local authorities could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is currently contributing a comprehensive Home Office-led exercise, which is mapping involvement and funding in the voluntary and community sector. I expect my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to place this information in the Library when the exercise is completed.

School Funding

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for each of the years *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 the average level of funding for (i) each secondary pupil in England and (ii) pupils attending specialist schools. [28963]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The table provides the information requested at part (i):

Average funding per secondary pupil in England

£

Year	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total*
2000–01	3,180	230	3,410
2001–02	3,310	380	3,690

Notes:

1. Figures reflect Education SSA (secondary sub-block) plus an estimate of all school related revenue grants in DfES's DEL relevant to secondary pupils (aged 11–15).

2. Secondary school grant figures are estimated in cases where grants are allocated for more than one phase of education.

3. Secondary schools grant figures include the specialist school element of the Standards Fund.
4. Figures are in cash terms.
5. 2001–02 figures are provisional as some grant allocations have still to be finalised.
6. Figures rounded to nearest £10.

In response to part (ii) of the question, specialist schools receive additional annual funding calculated from pupil numbers taken from the annual school census returns each year. In 2000–01 schools received £122 per pupil for all pupils up to 1,000 and over 1,200 pupils. In 2001–02 schools will receive £123 per pupil for all pupils up to 1,000 and over 1,200 pupils.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advance notice is required by her Department for associated applications for specialist school status for the *(a)* March 2002 and *(b)* October 2002 bidding rounds; and if she will make a statement. [29195]

Mr. Timms: There is no specific notice requirement for associated applications for specialist school designation. However, as stated in the guidance documents setting out the assessment criteria for applicant schools, DfES is willing to consider outline proposals from schools interested in submitting associated applications in advance of the closing date of a specialist school competition. Associated application arrangements will typically involve a group of secondary schools as part of a strategic approach to specialist school provision in an area. In due course each application will be judged on its individual merits. To give schools interested in making associated applications an advance indication of the likely view to be taken on the proposals as a whole we would encourage them to show their outline proposals to DfES at least six months before the closing date in which the first associated application will be submitted.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the value of sponsorship by the private sector for specialist schools to date which has been available *(a)* in cash and *(b)* in kind; and if she will make a statement. [29196]

Mr. Timms: The aggregate contribution of private sector soonsorship to specialist schools to date is at least £58 million. Most applications will have elements of cash sponsorship and sponsorship in kind though the split varies greatly from school to school. The breakdown of cash and in kind sponsorship for each specialist school is on each school's file and not collated centrally. It is therefore not possible to give estimates of the cash and kind amounts except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applications for specialist school status have been rejected on the basis that the school in question has performance indicators which show a declining trend of performance; and if she will make a statement. [29202]

Mr. Timms: We do not maintain figures on the number of schools where a declining trend in performance has been a factor in a school's application being unsuccessful. GCSE performance is one of a range of factors taken into account as part of an applicant's specialist school development plan but has never been the sole factor in deciding not to approve an application for specialist school designation.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the level of investment in specialist schools for each year from May 1997 to 2005, broken down by *(a)* extra capital funding and *(b)* extra current expenditure; and if she will make a statement. [29204]

Mr. Timms: The level of investment in specialist schools broken down by *(a)* capital and *(b)* extra recurrent expenditure from 1996–97 to 2003–04 is provided in the table. Any future and additional funding will be considered as part of the 2002 Spending Review.

£ million

Financial year	*Capital*	*Recurrent*	*Total*
1996–97	7.0	16.0	23.0
1997–98	7.7	25.4	33.1
1998–99	8.0	32.8	40.8
1999–2000	4.5	42.9	47.4
2000–01	13.2	58.7	71.9
2001–02	15.4	78.6	94.0
2002–03	16.6	91.4	108.0
2003–04	16.8	110.2	127.0

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist schools have increased the curriculum hours devoted to their chosen specialism, following award of specialist status; and if she will make a statement. [29209]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the specialist schools in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Dorset, giving the specialism in each case. [29210]

Mr. Timms: A list of specialist schools by specialism in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Dorset is given below:

Specialist schools in Somerset

Bucklers Mead Community School—Technology

Court Fields Community School—Technology

Crispin School—Technology

Heathfield Community School—Arts

Kings of Wessex Community School (The)—Technology

Kingsmead Community School—Language

Ladymead Community School—Technology

Whitstone Community School—Technology

Specialist schools in Dorset

Lytchett Minister School—Arts

Highcliffe Comprehensive School—Language

Sir John Colfox School—Language

Shaftesbury School—Sports

Beaminster School—Technology

Budmouth Technology College—Technology

Twynham School—Technology

Westfield School—Technology.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures of deprivation are considered when considering applications for specialist school status; and if she will make a statement. [29211]

Mr. Timms: In accordance with the guidance documents which set out the criteria for the consideration of specialist school applications, some preference may be given to applications from areas of social deprivation as measured by pupils' known eligibility for free school meals.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the latest research showing the effects of specialist school status on school performance; and if she will make a statement. [29212]

Mr. Timms: The latest research commissioned by the Department was published in 2000. An analysis of the performance in 2001 of specialist schools operational from September 2000 or before will shortly be prepared by Professor David Jesson on behalf of the Technology Colleges Trust and I expect this analysis to be published in the spring.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the nature of the links which she requires between primary feeder schools and secondary schools which are successful in becoming specialist schools. [29214]

Mr. Timms: The requirements for specialist school community development plans are set out in the published guidance documents on each specialism. Applications for specialist school designation must include proposals to work with at least five named schools, which will typically include one or more of the applicant's feeder primary schools. Although there are no specific requirements covering the nature of work which specialist schools undertake with their primary partners we would normally expect such links to range from, for example, the provision of access to specialist resources and facilities to joint teaching and learning activities, including specialist subject INSET, or project work to help progression between Key Stages 2 and 3.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the criteria considered by her Department when assessing bids for specialist school status. [29215]

Mr. Timms: The criteria against which applications for specialist school designation are assessed are published in eight guidance documents each dealing with one of the eight categories of specialism. These set out the considerations taken into account when deciding to designate specialist schools and are based around the eligibility of sponsorship and the quality of the school and community development plans. Copies of guidance documents have been place in the Library.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the local education authorities which have 30 per cent. or more of their pupils in specialist schools; if she will make a statement on the reasons for which further schools in such LEAs will not be considered for specialist school bids; and if she will indicate for how long the ban on further bids in such areas will last. [29216]

Mr. Timms: The local authorities which have 30 per cent. of their secondary age pupils in specialist maintained secondary schools are listed in the table.

As at January 2001

LEA	*Pupils aged 11+ in specialist maintained secondary schools*	*Pupils aged 11+ in all maintained secondary schools*	*Percentage of pupils aged 11+ in specialist maintained secondary schools*
Wandsworth	6,395	9,944	64.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	10,138	16,318	62.1
West Berkshire	7,033	11,740	59.9
Gateshead	7,025	12,043	58.3
Hackney	4,411	7,921	55.7
York	4,929	9,972	49.4
Darlington	2,953	6,009	49.1
North Somerset	5,891	12,268	48.0
Cornwall	13,685	32,000	42.8
Bath and North East Somerset	5,218	12,270	42.5
Camden	4,544	10,868	41.8
Greenwich	5,767	13,834	41.7
Ealing	6,163	15,088	40.8
Durham	13,116	32,158	40.8
Stockton-on-Tees	5,070	12,792	39.6
Bournemouth	3,800	9,768	38.9
Newham	6,667	17,469	38.2
Milton Keynes	4,465	12,058	37.0
Wigan	7,716	20,854	37.0
Birmingham	25,401	69,037	36.8
Bradford	12,539	34,214	36.6
Hartlepool	2,409	6,679	36.1
Plymouth	6,786	18,823	36.1
Gloucestershire	13,718	38,146	36.0
Northumberland	8,075	22,855	35.3
Manchester	8,227	23,472	35.1
Rutland	789	2,254	35.0
Wiltshire	9,570	27,383	34.9
Cambridgeshire	10,625	30,916	34.4
St. Helens	4,167	12.159	34.3
Northamptonshire	14,932	44,161	33.8
Barking and Dagenham	3,709	11,079	33.5
Redbridge	6,301	18,868	33.4
Lambeth	2,398	7.208	33.3
East Riding of Yorkshire	7,333	22,627	32.4
Rochdale	4,583	14,153	32.4
Lincolnshire	14,210	44,166	32.2
Sheffield	9,596	29,861	32.1
Wakefield	6,758	21,279	31.8
Trafford	5,000	15,844	31.6
East Sussex	8,686	27,805	31.2
Knowlsey	3,160	10,240	30.9
Norfolk	13,712	44,896	30,5
Warrington	4,192	13,833	30.3
Leicester	5,436	18,031	30.1
Leicestershire	13,014	43,184	30.1

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

The restriction which applied to the application process for October 2000 and March 2001 specialist school competitions on allowing further applications from schools in local education authorities where there was already 30 per cent. of secondary aged pupils in mainstream specialist schools was lifted in July 2001.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what targets she has set for the number of successful bidders for specialist school status in the *(a)* March 2002 and *(b)* October 2002 bidding rounds in terms of (i) overall numbers, (ii) breakdown by specialisms, (iii) geographical spread, (iv) deprivation characteristics of the catchment areas and (v) joint bids; and if she will make a statement. [29217]

Mr. Timms: We have not set targets for the number of specialist schools beyond those already published—at least 830 by September 2002, at least 1,000 by September 2003 and at least 1,500 by September 2005. Apart from a target of 200 sports colleges by September 2004 in connection with the school sport co-ordinator programme, we have not set targets for the number of successful applications in relation to specialisms, geographic spread, deprivation characteristics of catchment areas or joint applications.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research her Department has carried out into the difficulties faced by schools in deprived areas in raising the private sector funds needed to apply for specialist status; what plans she has to reduce the £50,000 threshold; and if she will make a statement. [29220]

Mr. Timms: The Department has not carried out research on the ability of schools to raise sponsorship but we do keep specialist school sponsorship requirements under regular review. We have no plans to abolish the requirement for schools to raise sponsorship to support a specialist school application or to reduce the level of sponsorship required.

New Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the number of *(a)* beacon schools, *(b)* academy schools, *(c)* specialist schools and *(d)* new faith schools in each year from 1997 to 2007; and if she will make a statement. [29207]

Mr. Timms: The information is as follows:

Year	*Specialist schools*	*Beacon schools*
September 1997	258	0
September 1998	330	75
September 1999	403	200
September 2000	536	550
September 2001	685	1,000

Year	*Faith schools opened in each calendar year*
1997	5
1998	9
1999	6
2000	4
2001	5

Targets for increasing the number of specialist schools and beacon schools are as follows:

Year	*Specialist schools*	*Beacon schools*
2002	At least 830	1,150
2003	At least 1,000	1,350
2004	—	1,500
2005	At least 1,500	—

At present no city academies are open. The target is to expand the city academy programme year on year and for at least 20 academies to be open by 2005.

Secondary Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the number of secondary schools for the period 1997 to 2007. [29208]

Mr. Timms: The available information requested is shown in the table:

Number of secondary schools[1] *as at January each year 1997 to 2001*

January	*Number of schools*
1997	3,569
1998	3,567
1999	3,560
2000	3,550
2001	3,481

[1] Includes middle deemed schools.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census.

The Department does not produce forecasts for the number of new schools. Planning the provision of new schools is the responsibility of local education authorities.

Expenditure (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of her Department's budget has been spent in Scotland since the institution of her Department in its present form. [29518]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Most of the expenditure on education and skills in Scotland is devolved to the Scottish Executive.

My Department does, however, incur some expenditure in Scotland on Career Development Loans and Investors in People (£1.5 million and £0.1 million respectively in 2001–02). Expenditure in Scotland on those programmes makes up less than 0.01 per cent. of my Department's budget for 2001–02.

There is also some expenditure by the Student Loans Company (SLC) on student support for those studying in Scotland. Information on relevant student support is not held centrally but the SLC has agreed to write to the hon. Member further on this.

Parental Choice

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in respect of each local education authority and for England, how many pupils did not obtain admission to the secondary school of their first choice in the most recent year for which information is available, in *(a)* absolute terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the total number of pupils transferring to secondary schools. [29659]

Mr. Timms: This information is not held centrally. However, research undertaken by the Office for National Statistics, on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills, looked at parents' experiences of the process of choosing a secondary school. Findings from this nationally representative survey of parents of children starting secondary school in September 1999 and September 2000 found that 92 per cent. of parents received an offer of a place in the school listed as their first preference.

Sixth Form Funding

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities she estimates to be entitled to education budget transitional support grant on the basis of the transfer of post-16 support to learning and skills councils in 2002–03; and if she will estimate the size of the grant in each case. [29714]

Mr. Timms: The transfer of sixth form funding to the LSC from April 2002 will be cost neutral at LEA level—the adjustments to individual SSAs to take account of the transfer will match the payments that LEAs get back from the LSC. But we propose to pay a special grant to a minority of LEAs where the changes being made to the funding methodology would not fully eliminate the impact of the funding changes in 2002–03.

I expect details of the special grant to be released after consultation on the Local Government Finance Settlement has been completed at the end of the month.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the standard spending assessment per secondary pupil in each local education authority was for *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and if she will estimate this figure for each (i) local education authority and (ii) learning and skills council in 2003–04 in total and (A) for 11 to 16 and (B) post-16 years pupils. [29715]

Mr. Timms: The information requested from 1999–2000 to 2001–02 is in the table. Allocations for 2003–04 have not yet been made so figures for that year are not available.

We are currently working up a new funding system for introduction in 2003–04, and that will affect funding allocations from that year.

SSA per secondary pupil (aged 11–15) expressed in real terms

£

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
201 City of London	10,010	24,040	13,730
202 Camden	4,200	4,350	4,430
203 Greenwich	4,100	4,240	4,320
204 Hackney	4,800	4,920	5,000
205 Hammersmith and Fulham	4,340	4,450	4,510
206 Islington	4,500	4,650	4,780
207 Kensington and Chelsea	4,200	4,360	4,450
208 Lambeth	4,970	5,140	5,210
209 Lewisham	4,350	4,440	4,520
210 Southwark	4,450	4,570	4,660
211 Tower Hamlets	4,700	4,800	4,910
212 Wandsworth	4,020	4,100	4,150
213 Westminster	3,980	4,100	4,170
301 Barking and Dagenham	3,560	3,660	3,760
302 Barnet	3,280	3,370	3,470
303 Bexley	3,180	3,260	3,330
304 Brent	3,910	3,980	4,080
305 Bromley	3,120	3,180	3,260
306 Croydon	3,470	3,560	3,660
307 Ealing	3,680	3,790	3,900
308 Enfield	3,430	3,510	3,630
309 Haringey	4,050	4,160	4,270
310 Harrow	3,320	3,410	3,540
311 Havering	3,150	3,220	3,310
312 Hillingdon	3,290	3,370	3,460
313 Hounslow	3,470	3,560	3,680
314 Kingston upon Thames	3,120	3,190	3,290
315 Merton	3,370	3,450	3,560
316 Newham	4,010	4,110	4,230
317 Redbridge	3,340	3,430	3,540
318 Richmond upon Thames	3,040	3,120	3,220
319 Sutton	3,150	3,200	3,280
320 Waltham Forest	3,710	3,790	3,900
330 Birmingham	3,300	3,410	3,460
331 Coventry	3,100	3,190	3,220
332 Dudley	2,830	2,910	2,950
333 Sandwell	3,130	3,210	3,270
334 Solihull	2,810	2,870	2,900
335 Walsall	2,990	3,070	3,100
336 Wolverhampton	3,160	3,230	3,280
340 Knowsley	3,520	3,650	3,670
341 Liverpool	3,370	3,510	3,550
342 St. Helens	2,990	3,080	3,130
343 Sefton	2,950	3,060	3,070
344 Wirral	3,080	3,180	3,220
350 Bolton	2,970	3,050	3,080
351 Bury	2,850	2,940	2,990
352 Manchester	3,550	3,690	3,720
353 Oldham	3,040	3,140	3,190
354 Rochdale	3,100	3,200	3,240
355 Salford	3,150	3,240	3,290
356 Stockport	2,830	2,910	2,950
357 Tameside	2,930	3,030	3,080
358 Trafford	2,910	2,980	3,010
359 Wigan	2,850	2,930	2,970
370 Barnsley	2,990	3,080	3,140
371 Doncaster	3,100	3,180	3,200
372 Rotherham	2,940	3020	3,060
373 Sheffield	3,020	3,110	3,150
380 Bradford	3,170	3,270	3,320
381 Calderdale	2,980	3,070	3,120
382 Kirklees	3,010	3,100	3,510
383 Leeds	2,970	3,070	3,110
384 Wakefield	2,890	2,980	3,030
390 Gateshead	3,030	3,120	3,170
391 Newcastle upon Tyne	3,180	3,300	3,340
392 North Tyneside	2,960	3,050	3,090
393 South Tyneside	3,080	3,180	3,230
394 Sunderland	3,040	3,130	3,180
420 Isles of Scilly	5,370	5,590	5,530
800 Bath and North East Somerset	2,760	2,830	2,860
801 Bristol, City of	3,080	3,170	3,210
802 North Somerset	2,850	2,920	2,950
803 South Gloucestershire	2,770	2,840	2,870
805 Hartlepool	3,040	3,150	3,200
806 Middlesbrough	3,240	3,360	3,430
807 Redcar and Cleveland	3,040	3,120	3,170
808 Stockton-on-Tees	3,000	3,100	3,140
810 Kingston Upon Hull, City of	3,150	3,260	3,310
811 East Riding of Yorkshire	2,850	2,930	2,980
812 North East Lincolnshire	3,030	3,130	3,190
813 North Lincolnshire	2,980	3,070	3,120
815 North Yorkshire	2,890	2,980	3,020
816 York	2,860	2,940	2,970
820 Bedfordshire	2,980	3,080	3,160
821 Luton	3,270	3,360	3,440
825 Buckinghamshire	2,990	3,090	3,170
826 Milton Keynes	3,110	3,190	3,270
830 Derbyshire	2,840	2,920	2,970
831 Derby	3,030	3,140	3,180
835 Dorset	2,850	2,930	2,960
836 Poole	2,810	2,870	2,920
837 Bournemouth	2,930	3,010	3,050
840 Durham	2,990	3,090	3,140
841 Darlington	2,970	3,080	3,110
845 East Sussex	3,060	3,170	3,250
846 Brighton and Hove	3,160	3,260	3,340
850 Hampshire	2,920	3,010	3,090
851 Portsmouth	3,140	3,210	3,280
852 Southampton	3,190	3,300	3,380
855 Leicestershire	2,770	2,850	2,890
856 Leicester	3,220	3,330	3,380
857 Rutland	2,750	2,880	2,830
860 Staffordshire	2,810	2,880	2,930

SSA per secondary pupil (aged 11–15) expressed in real terms

£

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
861 Stoke-on-Trent	2,990	3,100	3,170
865 Wiltshire	2,900	2,970	3,000
866 Swindon	2,880	2,960	2,990
867 Bracknell Forest	3,070	3,160	3,240
868 Windsor and Maidenhead	3,010	3,110	3,190
869 West Berkshire	2,870	2,960	3,050
870 Reading	3,180	3,270	3,380
871 Slough	3,670	3,760	3,870
872 Wokingham	2,790	2,870	2,950
873 Cambridgeshire	2,890	2,960	3,000
874 Peterborough	3,070	3,170	3,220
875 Cheshire	2,820	2,900	2,930
876 Halton	3,120	3,220	3,280
877 Warrington	2,810	2,890	2,930
878 Devon	2,960	3,040	3,070
879 Plymouth	2,940	3,040	3,080
880 Torbay	2,980	3,080	3,110
881 Essex	3,050	3,150	3,230
882 Southend-on-Sea	3,100	3,200	3,280
883 Thurrock	3,250	3,350	3,420
884 Herefordshire	2,980	3,060	3,090
885 Worcestershire	2,820	2,900	2,940
886 Kent	3,050	3,150	3,230
887 Medway	3,020	3,120	3,200
888 Lancashire	2,950	3,040	3,090
889 Blackburn with Darwen	3,180	3,280	3,310
890 Blackpool	3,030	3,130	3,170
891 Nottinghamshire	2,870	2,960	3,000
892 Nottingham	3,320	3,410	3,460
893 Shropshire	2,890	2,960	3,010
894 Telford and Wrekin	2,990	3,090	3,130
908 Cornwall	2,990	3,060	3,110
909 Cumbria	2,940	3,030	3,080
916 Gloucestershire	2,870	2,940	2,970
919 Hertfordshire	3,080	3,170	3,250
921 Isle of Wight	3,130	3,260	3,360
925 Lincolnshire	2,960	3,040	3,080
926 Norfolk	2,960	3,050	3,100
928 Northamptonshire	2,900	2,970	3,010
929 Northumberland	2,930	3,010	3,060
931 Oxfordshire	2,970	3,070	3,160
933 Somerset	2,910	2,980	3,020
935 Suffolk	2,880	2,960	3,000
936 Surrey	3,040	3,130	3,220
937 Warwickshire	2,840	2,920	2,950
938 West Sussex	2,950	3,040	3,130

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to the nearest £10

2. Figures in 2000–01 prices using GDP Deflators published by Treasury on 20 December 2001

TREASURY

Children's Tax Credit

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the number and nature of representations received calling for an increase of the children's tax credit in order to meet the cost of nurseries and child minders. [28762]

Dawn Primarolo: We are not aware of any representations to increase the level of children's tax credit to help with the costs of nurseries and child minders.

Euro Bank Accounts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of euro accounts opened in the United Kingdom banks; and what percentage this is of the total. [29271]

Ruth Kelly: The latest quarterly review by the Association for Payment Clearing Systems (APACS) identified that there were about 135,000 euro bank accounts and approximately 6 per cent. of UK businesses have opened one.

Tobacco

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue lost due to excise evasion on *(a)* hand-rolling tobacco and *(b)* cigarettes since the abolition of European fiscal frontiers; and how much of this revenue has been recovered. [24801]

Mr. Boateng: Relevant information concerning estimates of fraud can be found in the Customs and Excise technical paper "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud", published on 27 November 2001, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Excise Movement and Control System

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress and expected time scale of measures to implement a computerised excise movement and control system throughout the EU. [26513]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The Commission published a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the European Council on computerising the movement and surveillance of excisable products on 19 November 2001. The proposal, if agreed, would establish the computerised system within five years.

VAT (Cancer Charities)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the revenue that would be forgone if charities which pay irrecoverable VAT on the cost of building and refurbishing cancer treatment facilities were to be allowed to recover VAT or to have such work zero-rated. [26534]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* No estimate is available of the cost to the Exchequer of allowing charities to recover VAT on the cost of building and refurbishing cancer treatment facilities or the cost of having such work zero-rated.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the definition is of a hospice for the purposes of VAT; [26535]

(2) what his policy is towards the liability of hospices for VAT; [26533]

(3) if he will make a statement on how EU law affects his powers to determine the liability of charities for VAT on the construction and refurbishment of facilities for cancer treatment. [26531]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answers 16 January 2002]:* EU VAT law provides no specific relief for charities constructing or refurbishing facilities for cancer treatment. Neither does it provide any definition of a hospice. In the UK, the construction of new residential hospices is zero-rated provided the organisation that commissioned the building work also occupies it. The construction of new non-residential treatment facilities and the repair or refurbishment of existing buildings is standard-rated. Long-standing agreements with our European partners allow us to retain our existing zero-rates but prevent us from introducing any new ones.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to allow Macmillan Cancer Relief to recover VAT on its building costs incurred in respect of buildings which are owned or managed by the national health service. [26532]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The Government looked very carefully at the issue of irrecoverable VAT as part of the 1999 Review of Charity Taxation, concluding that to allow refund would be prohibitively expensive and would breach fundamental principles of VAT law.

Customs are ready to provide help and advice to any charity experiencing VAT problems. They have recently written to the Chief Executive of Macmillan Cancer Relief and hope to meet the charity soon to discuss the VAT implications of their building programmes.

Intra-community Trade

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the intra-Community trade declared despatch arrival values for January to February 2001 as a percentage of the corresponding values for January to February 2000. [24549]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise collect statistics for intra-Community trade via the Intrastat system.

The declared intra-Community trade for arrivals and despatches for January and February 2001, expressed as percentages of the corresponding values for the same months of 2000 are as follows:

Arrivals

January 2001

Declarations as a percentage of value of January 2000 declarations—116 per cent.

February 2001

Declarations as a percentage of value of February 2000 declarations—106 per cent.

Despatches

January 2001

Declarations as a percentage of value of January 2000 declarations—117 per cent.

February 2001

Declarations as a percentage of value of February 2000 declarations—109 per cent.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the compliance rate of traders in statistical submissions for intra-Community transactions in January and February; and what percentage was received by the due date. [24550]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise collect statistics for intra-Community trade via the Intrastat Supplementary Declaration. Declarations can be submitted on paper or electronically.

During 2001, paper declarations were to be submitted to Customs by the tenth day following the end of the reference period to which the declaration referred. Electronic declarations were to be submitted by the last day of the month following the end of the reference period to which the declaration referred.

Partially compliant traders are those who submit some, but not all, of their declarations by due date.

The percentages of declarations for January and February 2001 received by the due date are as follows:

Declarations received by respective due date

	Percentage	
Date	*Paper*	*Electronic*
January 2001		
Arrivals		
Trade value received by due date	44	89
Traders fully compliant by due date	51	70
Traders partially compliant by due date	4	7
Dispatches		
Trade value received by due date	47	89
Traders fully compliant by due date	56	76
Traders partially compliant by due date	2	4
February 2001		
Arrivals		
Trade value received by due date	41	91
Traders fully compliant by due date	48	73
Traders partially compliant by due date	3	7
Dispatches		
Trade value received by due date	46	89
Traders fully compliant by due date	51	80
Traders partially compliant by due date	2	2

Single Market

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the changes in Customs and Excise duties arising from the operation of the European single market and cross-channel shopping; and what estimates were made before the single market came into force. [24803]

Mr. Boateng: No changes in Customs and Excise duties arose from the operation of the European single market and cross-channel shopping.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the changes in revenue to the Exchequer arising from the introduction of the European single market *(a)* through the increased allowances on importation of EC-produced cigarettes and tobacco products and *(b)* through increased smuggling of cigarettes and tobacco products. [24837]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise make no estimates about the effects of the European single market on the smuggling of cigarettes and tobacco products.

VAT

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much on average each VAT inspector raised an additional VAT liability in the last financial year; and what is the average annual cost of employing a VAT inspector. [24380]

Mr. Boateng: In 2000–01 each VAT inspector raised, on average, £446,000 in net additional liability. The average cost of employing a VAT inspector is around £40,000.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if a person registered for VAT can reclaim from the Customs and Excise the costs of building *(a)* a mausoleum for himself and *(b)* a home for himself. [28308]

Mr. Boateng: Anyone building a home for themself, whether or not they are VAT registered, is able to claim the VAT paid on goods and materials under the DIY builders refund scheme, details of which are available from the Customs and Excise National Advice Service on 0845 010 9000. The scheme applies only to dwellings, not to mausoleums.

Departmental Overspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Departments overspent their allocated budget in 2000–01; and by how much in each case. [27927]

Mr. Andrew Smith: As set out in "Public Expenditure 2000–2001 Provisional Outturn" Cm 5243, one Department overspent its departmental expenditure limit in 2000–01—the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by £4,932,000.

International Aid

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he estimates the Government will reach the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of GNI for international aid. [27863]

Mr. Boateng: The Government remain fully committed to the UN 0.7 per cent. oda/GNP target. We have set out our plans for the next three years to 2003–04 and, as these show, development assistance as a proportion of GNP will rise to 0.33 per cent. in 2003–04, up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997. In his speech in New York and in his pre-Budget report speech, the Chancellor emphasised his commitment to ensuring further substantial increases in development assistance. The forthcoming Spending Review is an opportunity to consider plans for development spending beyond 2003–04, alongside other priorities and pressures.

Aid effectiveness is also important as well as aid volumes. The Government are committed to redirecting their development assistance budget to the poorest countries, particularly those with effective Governments pursuing high growth and pro-poor economic and social policies. In addition the Government have untied all their aid as from 1 April last year.

Enron

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will suspend Arthur Andersen accountants from Government contracts until the US Senate Committee investigation into Enron is completed. [28518]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I am aware of no evidence to suggest any involvement by UK members of Arthur Andersen and so there are no grounds to consider suspending the firm from Government contracts.

Oil and Gas Industry (National Insurance)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans HM Treasury has to amend the liability for and collection method of NIC contributions from those individuals employed offshore in the UK continental shelf area by non-UK companies; and if he will make a statement. [29479]

Dawn Primarolo: We have no plans to amend the liability for or collection method of national insurance contributions from these individuals.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of the aggregates levy on the Scottish economy in terms of *(a)* employment and *(b)* output. [29362]

Mr. Boateng: A Regulatory Impact Assessment for the aggregates levy was published at the time of the Budget 2000. It is available from the Customs and Excise website.

Terrorism (Spending)

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the expected cost to Her Majesty's Government over the current financial year of the measures to combat terrorism announced by the Home Secretary on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 923–25. [10008]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

£8.5 million of additional funding has been allocated for a range of anti-terrorism measures in the current year. In addition to this, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his Statement on the pre-Budget report, announced on 27 November that a further £30 million had been made available to the Metropolitan police and other police forces to fund the need for additional policing since 11 September, during the current financial year.

National Minimum Wage (Wealden)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Wealden received the recent increase in the national minimum wage. [29712]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Charles Hendry, dated 23 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of people in Wealden who have received the increase in the national minimum wage (NMW). (29712)

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies are not available.

Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions are posted on the National Statistics website at: www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/themes/labour_market/nmw_lowpay_tables.asp

DEFENCE

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest figures are for deaths to Gulf veterans; and what the figures are among the control group. [30323]

Dr. Moonie: Peer reviewed scientific data comparing the mortality rates of UK Gulf veterans to an era group of service personnel who did not deploy to the Gulf were published for the first time in the Lancet on 1 July 2000. Updates to these figures were provided by the Ministry of Defence to the House on 20 July 2000, 22 January 2001 and 18 July 2001. The MOD has undertaken to continue to monitor the mortality of both Gulf veterans and the era group and will publish updated figures on a regular basis. The figures as at 31 December 2001 are shown in the table.

Overall, in the period 1 April 1991 to 31 December 2001, the mortality of UK Gulf veterans was no different than that of the control group. Slightly fewer Gulf veterans have died from disease-related causes than have those in the control group, whereas the number of Gulf veterans dying of external causes is a little higher than for the control group. These differences are similar to those shown by the figures published in July 2001.

Deaths to UK Gulf veterans[1] 1 April 1991 to 31 December 2001 Causes (coded to ICD-9)[2]

ICD Chapter	*Cause of death*	*Gulf*	*Era*	*Mortality rate ratio[3]*
	All deaths	524	520	1.00
	All cause coded deaths	514	510	1.00
I-XVI	*Disease-related causes*	198	240	0.82
I	Infectious and parasitic diseases	3	2	1.49
II	Cancers	84	94	0.89
III	Endocrine and immune disorders	1	4	0.25
V	Mental disorders	11	12	0.91
VI	Diseases of the nervous system and sense organs	7	6	1.16
VII	Diseases of the circulatory system	68	90	0.75
VII	Diseases of the respiratory system	10	5	1.99
IX	Diseases of the digestive system	11	16	0.68
IV, X-XVI	All other disease-related causes	3	11	0.27
EXVII	*External causes of injury and poisoning*	316	270	1.17
	Railway accidents	4	1	3.98
	Motor vehicle accidents	110	92	1.19
	Water transport accidents	4	1	3.98
	Air and space accidents	25	17	1.46
	Other vehicles accidents	0	1	0.00
	Accidental poisoning	10	14	0.71
	Accidental falls	8	6	1.33
	Accidents due to fire/flames	0	2	0.00
	Accidents due to natural environmental factors	2	2	1.00
	Accidents due to submersion/suffocation/foreign bodies	17	7	2.42
	Other accidents	31	27	1.14
	Late effects of accident/injury	0	2	0.00
	Suicide and injury undetermined whether accidental	97	90	1.07
	Homicide	5	4	1.24
	Injury resulting from the operations of war	3	4	0.75
	Other deaths for which coded cause data are not yet available	7	7	—
	Overseas deaths for which cause data are not available	3	3	—

[1] Service and ex-Service personnel only.

[2] World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases 9th revision 1997.

[3] Mortality rate ratios differ marginally from the crude deaths ratio owing to some small differences between the Gulf and Era cohorts.

Computer Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of computer *(a)* hacking, *(b)* fraud and *(c)* theft his Department recorded in 2000 and 2001; and on how many occasions in 2000 and 2001 computer systems in his Department have been illegally accessed by computer hackers within and outside his Department. [10975]

Dr. Moonie: The number of incidents affecting computer systems for the years 2000 and 2001 are summarised in the table:

Incident type	*2000*	*2001[1]*
Computer hacking total of which there were:	9	12
website defacements	3	2
internal incursions	6	10
Computer fraud	4	4
Computer theft[2]	267	312

[1] Reports thus far.

[2] Computer theft figures include desktops, laptops and items of computer peripheral equipment.

None of the instances of hacking had any operational impact, and despite widespread and frequent probes of the Ministry of Defence firewalls connected to the internet, there is no evidence of any successful incursion from an external source to any departmental computer system. While website defacement may constitute an offence under The Computer Misuse Act 1990, none of the instances recorded provided clear grounds for prosecution.

In the case of computer fraud, all instances are cases where MOD computers have been used in support of fraudulent activities, rather than specific fraud of a computer based system.

Cadets

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much grant was given to fund *(a)* army cadet forces and *(b)* Harrow School cadet force in each of the last three years. [22163]

Dr. Moonie: The amount of grant given to fund army cadet forces and Harrow School cadet force in each of the last three years is set out in the table:

£ million

Financial year	*Army cadet forces*	*Harrow school cadet force*
1998–99	3.558	0.008
1999–2000	3.606	0.008
2000–01	3.402	0.009

Notes:

1. Grants are allocated to cadet forces on a "per person" basis.
2. Harrow School Cadet Force is a Combined Cadet Force with some 450 members.
3. Grants are not the only funds provided to the Cadet Force; they are also allocated funds from the usual Ministry of Defence budgetary chain.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the army cadet force per annum since 1997. [20978]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The amount spent on the army cadet force per annum since 1997 is shown in the table:

£ million

Financial year	*Expenditure on the army cadet force*
1997–98	27.1
1998–99	27.5
1999–2000	31.7
2000–01	32.0

Note:

This expenditure includes funding made available from the usual Ministry of Defence budgetary chain and Cadet Force grants.

RAF Aircraft

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the difference in planned expenditure between the 25th *(a)* A400M aircraft for the RAF and *(b)* C130J aircraft over the lifetime of the programme; and what the in-service date would be of the last aircraft. [28366]

Dr. Moonie: Any cost comparisons between these two aircraft are misleading because they provide different capabilities and their in-service dates are 10 years apart. For example, we expect that the A400M will have a 50 per cent. greater payload capacity and provide the RAF with a new capability to carry outsize loads too. We estimate that the acquisition costs of the A400M are approximately £1.6 billion (40 per cent.) greater (on an outturn basis) than those of the C130J. However, the difference at current prices is approximately £0.5 billion (12 per cent.).

The final C130J was accepted into service in June 2001 and we expect the 25th A400M to be delivered in 2014.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were employed in his Department in each of the last four years. [23797]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie) gave to the hon. Gentleman on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [27992]

Dr. Moonie: Reported cases of stolen equipment are held centrally on a summary basis and relate only to suspected theft by Crown personnel and contractors of stores and equipment, usually recorded as multiples or combinations of small value items such as tools, items of clothing, foodstuffs etc. Full details of items of equipment valued at more than £50 which have been proven to have been stolen or recorded as lost could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, a list of separately identified discrete items suspected of being stolen in each of the last four financial years and with an estimated individual or collective loss value of £1,000.00 or more is given as follows:

Equipment	*£*
1997–98	
Laptop computers (18)	38,010
Night vision goggles	1,600
Camcorder	1,200
Dental gold	12,015
Propeller blades	32,000
Notebook computer	1,000
VHS recorders (2)	1,000
Engines (2)	4,162
Weapon sight	1,389
Outboard motor	1,101
Thinkpad computer	2,000
Land Rover tyres (15)	1,537
Weapon sight	1,736
Binoculars (3)	1,190
Land Rover and tools	32,011
1998–99	
Laptop computers (2)	3,400
Laptop computer/CD Rom/printer	3,485
Industrial cleaner	1,551
Spare wheels (10)	6,419
Land Rover FFR	30,000
Personal computer	1,512
Computer/mouse/keyboard	1,400
Night vision scope	2,674
Common weapon sight	1,424
Land Rover spare wheels (10)	1,049
Litepro projector	4,445
Litepro projector and computer	6,445
Laptop computer and printer	1,449
LCD projector	4,274

Equipment	£
1999–2000	
Operational ration packs (4,000)	2,755
Night goggles (2)	22,768
2000–01	
Laptop computers (4)	7,748
Trailer	3,698
Computer/printer/fax/TV/VCR	1,750
Mobile phones (4)/laptop computer	2,000
Camouflage poles	3,500
Personal computer/printer/power unit	3,000
Diesel stove	2,918
Mobile phone 'top-up' cards (400)	13,300
Landrover	23,800
Vauxhall Astra	1,206
Motorcycle	1,915

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28087]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Secretary's travel arrangements are made in accordance with the guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document Travel by Ministers. The most efficient and cost effective mode of transport is used, bearing in mind security considerations. Travel by rail is used when most appropriate.

The Secretary of State for Defence last used a train on official duties on 5 September 2001, travelling to Luton Parkway station. He also regularly travels by rail between the Ministry of Defence and his constituency, most recently on 21 January.

Afghanistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 392W, on Afghanistan, if he will place copies of his guidance on the handling of prisoners in Afghanistan in the Library; and under which paragraph of Exemption 1 he withheld details of the dates of issue. [29405]

Mr. Hoon: I am withholding copies in accordance with section (a) of Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. This section of Exemption 1 also applied to my hon. Friend's previous question on dates.

Former WEU Agencies

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the *(a)* European Union Satellite Centre and *(b)* European Union Institute for Security Studies are operational as agencies of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [29638]

Mr. Hoon: The former Western European Union bodies, the Satellite Centre and Institute for Security Studies, transferred to the European Union and began operation as agencies in support of the Common Foreign and Security Policy with effect from 1 January 2002.

Departmental Staff

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate total annual staff costs for his Department and its agencies by nation and region of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [6829]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what requests she has received from Northumberland county council for her Department to provide evidence to Professor Dower inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak; what response she has made; and if she will make a statement. [28187]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Northumberland county council notified me of the inquiry they had established and their invitation for written comments. In reply we forwarded comments on a series of topics which were likely to be of interest to the inquiry. Subsequently we have received some specific questions from Professor Dower and the inquiry team and a reply has been sent to meet their deadline.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 164W, on the costs of the foot and mouth outbreak, what the present estimate is of the total cost to public funds of the foot and mouth outbreak. [28243]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The latest estimate of the cost of the foot and mouth disease outbreak stands at £2,059 million.

This includes a provisional forecast of £19 million for costs to MOD and other Government Departments. We are still awaiting costs from five other Government Departments but these amounts are expected to be very small.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what efforts she made to ensure value for money from contractors employed to assist with culling and farm clean-up work during the foot and mouth outbreak. [28184]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* We have made extensive use of professional project managers, quantity surveyors and forensic accountants to ensure value for money is attained on contracts placed during the foot and mouth crisis.

These have been supported as necessary by legal and procurement experts.

HFCs

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of plant and equipment installed in her Department's offices in the last 12 months contains HFCs. [15519]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* No central record is kept of plant and equipment installed in the Department. The Department is, though, well aware that in October 2000 regulations came into force which confirmed the total ban on the use of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) and introduced a ban on HCFCs (hydrochlorofluorocarbons) in new equipment from 1 January 2001. Substitute refrigerants have therefore been introduced whose benefits include reduced ozone depletion potential, toxicity, flammability and global warming potential. These substitute refrigerants include approved HFCs. The Department therefore endorses the use of the Office of Government Commerce Buying Solutions since they supply HFC based equipment. Our facilities managers and design consults are well aware of the regulations and specify new equipment accordingly.

BSE

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) on what date her Department became aware that meat from the offspring of a cow with BSE had entered the human food chain; [28688]

(2) on what date her Department informed the Food Standards Agency that meat from the offspring of a cow with BSE had entered the human food chain. [28687]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The Animal Health Office discovered that an offspring had been moved while under restrictions on 3 January. After further investigation, a detailed written report outlining the circumstances of the case was received in London on 8 January. The Food Standards Agency was informed on 10 January.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she made of using postal services to obtain the passports of the offspring of cattle with BSE during the foot and mouth epidemic. [28690]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* There was no practical alternative to using postal services in circumstances where it was desirable to minimise visits both on to and off farms.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many cases comprise the backlog in the seizure of animal passports in relation to BSE controls; and if she will make a statement; [28684]

(2) what response she has made to the Food Standards Agency's request for her Department to clear the backlog in the seizure of animal passports in relation to BSE controls. [28685]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* Animal Health Offices have been asked to seize all outstanding passports for offspring animals under BSE restrictions and to report on progress early in the week beginning 21 January. Animal Health Offices have also been instructed to prioritise offspring cull work.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by what means her Department became aware that meat from the offspring of a cow with BSE had entered the human food chain. [28686]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The Animal Health Office contacted the offspring's owner in order to arrange for it to be slaughtered. The farmer informed the Animal Health Office that the animal had been moved. Further investigation revealed that the animal had been slaughtered for human consumption.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to confiscate animal passports of cattle which are the offspring of animals with BSE and are awaiting slaughter. [28185]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* There are no changes to our policy that the passports of all offspring born after 1 August 1996 to suspected BSE cases should be removed. Checks are being made to ensure that this has happened in all cases. This does not alter the owner's responsibility to comply with restriction notices served on them.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many offspring of BSE-infected cattle were awaiting slaughter in January 2001; and what is the present number. [28186]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* 134 offspring of BSE-infected cattle were awaiting slaughter in Great Britain on 14 January 2001. As at 14 January 2002, there were 478 offspring awaiting slaughter.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to extend the loan action scheme to England. [29375]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* I assume the hon. Gentleman is referring to the loan action scheme to improve energy efficiency in small and medium enterprises run by the Energy Saving Trust in Scotland, or the similar scheme which the Trust operates in Northern Ireland. The introduction of a similar scheme in England would be a matter for consideration by the Energy Saving Trust and the recently formed Carbon Trust, in the preparation of their business plans.

Flood Defences (Lewes)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the implications for flood defence provision in Lewes resulting from the decision on the contribution of East Sussex County Council to the flood levy for 2002–03. [27539]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* I understand that the Sussex Local Flood Defence Committee is meeting again on 25 January to discuss the 2002–03 levy and its implications for the Environment Agency's plans for flood management. I await the agency's assessment of any implications for flood defence provision in Lewes.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to seek changes to EU legislation in respect of the mandatory testing of chemicals on animals. [28633]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* In line with Government policy on experiments on live animals, the policy of the Department is to seek reduction in such experimentation wherever possible, consistent with the protection of human health and the environment. We take the view that, while a complete ban is not yet achievable, much more should be done to reduce the numbers of animals used in determining the environmental fate and effects of chemicals.

We are aware of the concern that has been raised that the EU Review of Chemicals legislation might lead to a large increase in the number of animals used in tests. We sympathise with these concerns, and have made it clear to the Commission of the European Communities and to other member states that a key objective of this review must be to keep the need for animal experimentation to an absolute minimum. This should include:

requiring companies to share information about chemicals

prioritising chemicals for testing

finding and validating test methods which do not require the use of animals.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [27998]

Mr. Morley: The Department records show that the following items have been stolen or lost in the last four years. Data from 8 June 2001 relate to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs while previous information covers Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Date	*Items lost*	*Cost* £
1998		
12 January	2 PCs	6,000
26 January	1 Special telephone handset	80
2 February	1 Video recorder	190
10 June	1 Answering machine	80
21 June	1 Laptop	2,500
5 September	1 Laptop	3,110
21 September	2 Laptops	6,000
1999		
1 February	1 Laptop plus zip plus mouse	2,300
23 February	2 Central processing units	2,250
26 March	2 PCs plus 8 copies of software plus 2 ethernet cards	[illegible],250
14 April	1 Laptop	2,000
19 April	1 Psion Organiser	350
27 April	4 power adapters with accessories	400
23 July	1 Field equipment and mobile phone	70
18 August	1 Laptop and accessories	1,570
6 September	1 Mobile phone and accessories	100
20 September	1 Laptop	2,300
27 September	3 Software CDs	400
1 October	Cash from purse	100
28 October	1 PC plus printer	2,000
15 November	1 Laptop	1,950
22 November	1 Laptop	1,580
20 December	1 Laptop	1,320
2000		
28 January	1 Laptop	1,000
13 February	1 PC plus printer	3,192
27 February	1 Laptop plus floppy disk drive	2,765
21 March	1 Psion Organiser	380
28 March	1 Psion 5 MX	383
5 April	1 Laptop plus mobile printer	1,000
26 April	1 Raincoat	150
16 May	29 Processors plus 1 laptop	5,478
24 May 2000	1 Laptop	2,000
26 May 2000	1 Laptop, printer and accessories	1,244
10 June	Cash	100
10 June	1 Mobile phone	120
7 July	2 PCs plus 1 Laptop	5,000
19 July	4 Compaq processors	4,000
20 July	1 Laptop plus Modem card	1,100
2 August	1 Laptop plus 1 printer plus 1 printer lead	1,820
7 August	3 PCs	3,250
17 August	1 Processor	500
11 September	1 Laptop, mouse and connections	1,500
12 October	1 Modem	100
30 October	1 Laptop	2,585
20 November	1 Laptop plus 1 floppy disc and CD drive	2,660
29 November	3 Processors	675
2001		
1 February	1 Laptop	2,998
6 February	2 Laptops	3,500
8 February	1 Laptop	2,000
12 February	2 Laptops	4,000
12 March	1 PC plus printer	2,500
21 March	1 Laptop	1,500
2 April	1 Laptop	2,000
9 May	2 DIM cards	146
20 May	1 Keyboard	96
2 July	1 PC	700
2 August	1 Pentium	1,000
16 August	1 Laptop plus 1 modem and carry case	2,000
14 September	1 Laptop	1,500
28 September	1 Laptop	1,500
1 October	1 Laptop	1,579
5 October	1 Laptop	1,579
21 November	1 Laptop plus projector	1,879
19 December	2 Printers	300

Air Pollution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much funding has been made available by her Department to tackle air pollution in Buckinghamshire in each year since 1997. [27791]

Mr. Meacher: Resources to allow local authorities in Buckinghamshire and elsewhere to carry out their local air quality management duties have been provided every year since 1997 through the annual Local Government Finance Settlement. A total of a little over £2 million is included for these purposes in the annual settlement. Resources for individual local authority duties are not ring-fenced, however, and decisions on the allocation of resources are a matter for local authorities themselves. In addition to this, supplementary credit approvals are made available each year to local authorities to help with the purchase of air quality monitoring and modelling equipment. Since 1997, we have awarded a little over £420,000 (Table 1) to support local authority capital expenditure in Buckinghamshire on air quality equipment.

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Table 1. Value of supplementary credit approvals to local authorities in Buckinghamshire, 1997 to 2002

Year	*Value (£)*
1997–98	76,808
1998–99	36,000
1999–2000	175,000
2000–01	50,456
2001–02	82,000

Refrigerators

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made to help small businesses continue to sell secondhand refrigerators, previously collected from the large retail outlets. [29524]

Mr. Meacher: The majority of old refrigerators are now being collected by local authorities. We would encourage small businesses to work with local authorities to identify those units suitable for re-use. Such arrangements are likely to be welcomed by local authorities as a means of reducing their costs.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the money to help local authorities with the extra costs of storing refrigerators announced on 4 December 2001 has been made available to Blackpool borough council. [28824]

Mr. Meacher: £6 million has been added to the provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–03 for the costs of implementing the ozone depleting substances regulation relating to the period 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2002. This will be distributed to local authorities using Standard Spending Assessments (SSA). The extra money has been added to the upper tier sub-block of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services SSA.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from local authorities with regard to the allocation of Government resources available in order to meet the cost of implementing the refrigerator disposal regulations. [29111]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has received a number of representations from local authorities concerning the allocation of funding for the implementation of EC Regulation 2037/2000. We have received representations through letters, e-mail and telephone calls. Officials are maintaining a close dialogue with local authority representatives with a view to obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the additional costs which local authorities face.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Environment Agency concerning the arrangements for the storage and disposal of refrigerators in advance of the development of purpose-built infrastructure in the UK. [29096]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has worked very closely with the Environment Agency on the development of guidance on the storage and disposal of fridges. There continues to be close co-operation on the finalisation of technical standards and new fridges recycling facilities and, more generally on the implementation and enforcement of the European Ozone Depleting Substances Regulation.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by her Department since August 2001; and if she will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in good policy making. [28401]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what equipment has been stolen from her Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26823]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Department's records show that the following items have been stolen since 1 May 1997. Data from 8 June 2001 relate to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs while previous information covers Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Date	*Number*	*Items stolen*	*Cost (£)*
1997			
2 May	1	Laboratory equipment	250
3 May	20	PC	39,500
6 May	1	PC	673
9 June	1	Laptop	4,000
11 June	1	Calculator	10
17 July	1	Camcorder and accessories	1,300
1 August	2	PC	4,700
11 August	1	Laptop	900
9 September	1	Kitchen equipment	475
9 September	1	PC	1,787
24 September	1	Mobile phone charger	10
30 September	1	PC	1,990
2 October	1	Laptop	2,000
13 October	1	Mobile phone	125
1998			
12 January	2	Laptops	6,000
26 January	1	Special telephone handset	80
2 February	1	Video recorder	190
10 June	1	Answering machine	80
21 June	1	Laptop	2,500
5 September	1	Laptop	3,110
21 September	2	Laptops	6,000
16 November	1	Answering machine	50
Thefts in 1999			
1 February	1	Laptop plus zip plus mouse	2,300
16 February	1	Dictaphone	50
23 February	2	Central processing units	2,250
26 March	2	PC plus 8 copies of software plus 2 ethernet cards	2,250
14 April	1	Laptop	2,000
19 April	1	Psion Organiser	350
27 April	4	Power adapters with accessories	400
23 July	1	Field equipment and mobile phone	70
18 August	1	Laptop	1,570
6 September	1	Mobile phone and accessories	100
20 September	1	Laptop	2,300

Date	*Number*	*Items stolen*	*Cost (£)*
27 September	3	Software CDs	400
28 October	1	PC plus printer	2,000
15 November	1	Laptop	1,950
22 November	1	Laptop	1,580
20 December	1	Laptop	1,320
2000			
28 January	1	Laptop	1,000
13 February	1	PC plus printer	3,192
27 February	1	Laptop plus floppy disk	2,765
21 March	1	Psion Organiser	380
28 March	1	Psion 5 MX	383
5 April	1	Laptop plus mobile printer	1,000
16 May	29	Processors plus 1 Toshiba laptop	5,478
24 May	1	Laptop	2,000
26 May	1	Laptop, printer and accessories	1,244
16 June	1	Mobile phone	120
7 July	3	2 PCs and 1 laptop	5,000
19 July	4	Compaq processors	4,000
20 July	1	PC plus modem card	1,100
2 August	1	Laptop plus 1 printer plus 1 printer lead	1,820
7 August	3	PCs	3,250
17 August	1	Processor	500
11 September	1	Laptop, mouse and connections	1,500
12 October	1	Modem card	100
30 October	1	Laptop	2,585
20 November	1	Laptop plus 1 floppy disc and CD drive	2,660
29 November	3	Compaq processors	675
2001			
1 February	1	Laptop	2,998
6 February	2	Laptops	3,500
8 February	1	Laptop	2,000
12 February	2	Laptops	4,000
12 March	2	PC plus printer	2,500
21 March	1	Laptop	1,500
2 April	1	Laptop	2,000
9 May	2	DIM chips	146
20 May	1	Keyboard	96
2 July	1	PC	700
2 August	1	Chips	1,000
16 August	1	Laptop plus 1 modem and carry case	2,000
14 September	1	Laptop	1,500
28 September	1	Laptop	1,500
1 October	1	Laptop	1,579
5 October	1	Laptop	1,579
21 November	1	Laptop plus one projector	1,879
19 December	2	Printers	300
2002			
8 January	12	PCs	6,000

Home Energy Conservation

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of local authorities *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Scotland are on course to achieve a 30 per cent. improvement in home energy conservation by 2010. [25893]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* As domestic energy efficiency is a devolved matter, it is the responsibility of the respective Parliament and Assemblies to comment on the situation in their countries.

Statutory guidance issued on the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) in England makes it clear that local authorities are expected to identify measures that will lead to "substantial progress" towards 30 per cent. improvement in energy efficiency in all residential accommodation within 10 years of April 1996, but that some authorities may feel it more appropriate to develop a strategy which covers a different time scale.

In the four years to 31 March 2000, authorities have reported that overall their HECA strategies have achieved energy efficiency improvements of 6 per cent. Of the 354 local authorities in England with HECA responsibilities, almost 50 per cent. are reporting 6 per cent. or more improvement. Details of percentage improvement to March 2001 are not yet available but we expect to publish these shortly.

If we assume a similar rate of progress over the next six years, ECAs might on average be expected to achieve a 15 per cent. improvement in domestic energy efficiency. However, we would expect that schemes such as Warm Front and the Energy Efficiency Commitment 2002–05 (EEC) would lead to greater improvements.

In order to help local authorities achieve greater energy savings in the future, we are looking at the working of HECA as part of our current review of local authority energy efficiency activity.

The Home Energy Conservation Bill 2001 would require local authorities to implement their energy conservation reports, something missing from the current legislation.

Correspondence

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael), will reply to the letter of 18 November 2001, from Ms Anne Parker concerning the implementation of the recommendations of Task Force for the Hills; [28286]

(2) when the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), will reply to the letter of 18 November 2001 from Ms Anne Parker concerning the implementation of the recommendations of Task Force for the Hills; [28284]

(3) when the Under-Secretary, Lord Whitty, will reply to the letter of 18 November 2001 from Ms Anne Parker concerning the implementation of the recommendations of Task Force for the Hills. [28285]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* We have no record of having received the letters referred to by the hon. Member.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 15 January, ref. 26357, if she will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in responding to the letter to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford sent to him via the Foreign Office on 12 June 2001 re Dr. Reza Hussain. [28876]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002; pursuant to his reply, 22 January 2001 column 779W]:* the answer I gave the hon. Member on 22 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 779W, I said that a response to the hon. Member's constituent's letter of 12 June for West Chelmsford was sent on 18 January 2002. This was incorrect. The letter was sent out on 21 January 2002.

Livestock Markets

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she intends to issue to auctioneers concerning the reopening of livestock markets. [29180]

Mr. Morley: Detailed guidance for auctioneers covering biosecurity and other conditions relevant to the reopening of livestock markets is currently being drawn up. It will be disseminated shortly to the Livestock Auctioneers' Association and it will also be placed on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk.

Agricultural Shows

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she intends to issue to agricultural societies concerning the resumption of local agricultural shows. [29179]

Mr. Morley: Detailed guidance for agricultural societies, covering biosecurity and other conditions relevant to the resumption of livestock shows, is currently being drawn up. It will be issued as soon as possible to the Association of Agricultural Shows and other interested organisations. It will also be placed on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk.

End of Life Products

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the likely cost implications of Directive 200/53/EC and Regulation 2037/2700 on *(a)* county councils, *(b)* London boroughs and *(c)* district councils. [28546]

Mr. Meacher: The End of Life Vehicles Directive 2000/53/EC has far reaching consequences for a number of different economic operators. However, it is not intended that local authorities will have any direct responsibility for implementing this directive.

The directive requires producers to be responsible for all or a significant part of the costs of take back and treatment of end of life vehicles from 2007. These arrangements should help to ease the situation for local authorities in dealing with abandoned vehicles. It has not yet been decided how take back and treatment of end of life vehicles between 2002 and 2007 will be funded.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on substances that deplete the ozone layer was undertaken in December 1998. The RIA did not estimate compliance costs for the extraction of ozone-depleting substances from the insulating foam in domestic refrigeration equipment as the draft proposal did not make it mandatory. It was not until June 2001 that the European Commission gave EU member states its final interpretation of EC Regulation 2037/2700 that it did require the recovery of controlled substances in the insulating foam of domestic fridges and freezers.

The Department recently announced a payment of £6 million to English local authorities to cover their costs of handling fridges and freezers until March 2002. We are urgently assessing the impacts of the regulation, including the costs, and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

Agricultural Waste

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to help farmers to dispose of *(a)* plastic and *(b)* redundant wire. [29470]

Mr. Meacher: We will be addressing the question of how to deal with farm plastics and other waste materials in the forthcoming consultation document on agricultural waste.

Fox Hunts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reassess the case for independent regulation and inspections of fox hunts; and if she will make a statement. [29352]

Alun Michael: Consideration is being given to the best way of dealing with the issue of hunting.

GMOs

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the terms of the agreement with SCIMAC setting up farm-scale evaluations of GMOs that *(a)* plants that have been harvested should be removed from the trial sites and *(b)* the sites should be subsequently ploughed, destroying any remaining roots, have been complied with. [15282]

Mr. Meacher: The agreement on the Farm Scale Evaluations requires that produce from the trials should not enter the food or feed chain. It does not specify how this requirement is to be met. The specific rules that apply on crop disposal and post-harvest management are those set out in the statutory release consent (in the case of the beet and oilseed rape) and the relevant part of the SCIMAC code of practice on GM herbicide-tolerant crops. These provisions have been complied with, although there is a case currently under review to determine whether a breach of consent has occurred.

Egg Imports

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* egg products and *(b)* shell eggs were imported; and how many egg products were imported from the USA in each of the last three years. [28188]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Overseas trade statistics show that the UK imports of *(a)* egg products and *(b)* shell eggs over the past three years were as follows:

Thousand cases

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
(a) Egg products[1]	1,468.8	1,601.8	1,470.5
(b) Shell eggs	610.1	707.9	1,652.2

[1] Converted to shell egg equivalent

Of the *(a)* egg products shown in the previous table, the following were imported from the USA during the same period.

	Thousand cases		
	1998	*1999*	*2000*
(a) Egg products from USA[1]	36.3	30.2	63.7

[1] Converted to shell egg equivalent

Source:

HM Customs and Excise

Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to help local authorities to control illegal meat imports at airports *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* at Heathrow airport. [28532]

Mr. Morley: Under the relevant UK legislation which implements European rules, local authorities are responsible for checks on imports of animal products. DEFRA already provides detailed guidance and advice to them on discharging their functions at Borders Inspection Posts. We have taken steps to improve co-ordination and ensure that enforcement authorities obtain information to help target resources effectively. We have also improved publicity to bring to the attention of travellers the rules on what can be legally imported. We are examining the enforcement powers available to local authorities to ensure that they are adequate.

We maintain close liaison with local authorities, including at Heathrow, and will continue to keep all measures under review.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of changes in employment in the CHP sector in the UK in 2001. [22594]

Mr. Meacher: We have no reliable estimates of reductions of employment in the CHP sector in the UK in 2001.

Social Exclusion

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will place in the Library a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22413]

(2) how many competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22437]

(3) if she will list the competitive grant schemes, administered by the Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisation; [22424]

(4) if she will provide a list of the grants made under the competitive grant schemes administered by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22420]

(5) what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to *(a)* the state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by her Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22380]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The information is not available in the form requested, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, having regard in particular to the recent creation of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. However, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 482W. The website http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/cmhansrd/pa/cm200102/ cm011219/text/11219w47.htm#11219w47.htm_spnew5 contains references to the available information on Government grants to voluntary organisations.

North Sea Conference

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the dates are for the forthcoming second North Sea Conference; where the conference will be held; what intergovernmental preparatory meetings have been held; what non-governmental organisations have been consulted in preparation; and if she will place in the Library copies of papers and documents that *(a)* will be submitted to the North Sea Ministerial Conference, and *(b)* constitute background material for the conference. [28494]

Mr. Meacher: The fifth conference of Ministers responsible for the protection of the environment of the North sea will be held in Bergen, Norway on 20 and 21 March. The Committee of North Sea Senior Officials has met a number of times to prepare for the conference, most recently in September 2001 and January 2002. A further meeting will be held next month. The meetings are attended by Government representatives, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations with observer status.

22 NGOs have observer status: the Baltic and Maritime Council, Birdlife International, Committee of Agricultural Organisations in the EU, European Anglers Alliance, European Bureau of Conservation and Development, European Chemical Industries Council, European Community Sea Ports Organisation, European Waste Water Group, European Water Association, Europeche, Greenpeace International, High North Alliance, International Association of Oil and Gas Producers, International Chamber of Shipping, International Fishmeal and Oil Manufacturers Association, International Transport Workers' Federation, Local Authorities International

Environmental Organisation, Nordic Fishermen's Council, Seas at Risk, Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, World Nuclear Association, and World Wide Fund for Nature.

The substantive background document which will be presented to the conference is a comprehensive progress report, reviewing action taken and progress achieved since the last conference. This is currently being finalised by the Secretariat in Oslo. I will place copies in the Library when it is published. The conference is likely to adopt a declaration, defining action for the future. I will place a copy in the Library.

Organophosphate Pesticides

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of 27 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 30W, on organophosphate pesticides, what report has been received on the research study by CBD Porton Down into the dose effect profiles for OP sheep dips on brain electrical activity and sensitive behaviour indices in non-human primates; and if she will make a statement on her Department's response to that study. [29063]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The project was delayed in starting and as a result the completion was rescheduled for late summer 2002.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of reduced Countryside Stewardship scheme payment levels on the take-up of the scheme by farmers and landowners; and *(a)* how many participants there are and *(b)* what are the payments made by her Department in each of the years in which the Countryside Stewardship Scheme has been in operation. [29083]

Mr. Morley: Changes to Countryside Stewardship scheme payment rates were last implemented in 2001. Following a payment review, only five payments were reduced while the remaining 134 were either maintained or slightly increased. Overall, the net effect was estimated to be an increase of about 2 per cent. in total payments.

The continuing demand for the scheme, with nearly 3,000 applications last year, indicates that the current level of payment is generally acceptable.

By the end of the 2001–02 scheme year, there will be around 14,000 Stewardship agreement holders and we are looking for a further 3,000 applications for the 2002–03 scheme year.

The total payments made to farmers in each of years since 1991, when the scheme was introduced by the then Countryside Commission, are as follows:

£ million

	Annual expenditure
1992–93	5.3
1993–94	8.5
1994–95	10.5
1995–96	11.6
1996–97	10.9
1997–98	15.7
1998–99	19.9
1999–2000	23.4
2000–01	28.9
2001–02	47.3
Total expenditure 1992–2002	182.0

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the operation of the Countryside Stewardship scheme; and whether it is her Department's policy to reduce Countryside Stewardship scheme payment levels directly in line with declining farm incomes. [29082]

Mr. Morley: Countryside Stewardship payment rates are reviewed regularly. In line with EU rules, the rates take account of any income lost in undertaking Stewardship options, together with any additional costs incurred, such as specialised management or extra capital works and, where necessary, a small incentive element of up to 20 per cent.

When we carried out our latest review of payment rates we found that, because of the severe decline in farm incomes since the previous review, a few of the current rates exceeded the actual loss of income involved in participating in the scheme. Although a small number of rates were adjusted downwards to reflect this, the great majority of payment rates were either maintained or increased and overall the net effect was estimated to be an increase of about 2 per cent. in total payments. This shows the efforts that we have made to protect payment rates from external economic circumstances.

Nitrate Pollution

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on *(a)* the environmental harm caused by nitrate levels in the land phase of the hydrological cycle and *(b)* the source of the research upon which the theory is based. [29091]

Mr. Meacher: Nitrates in soil can leach into water. High nitrate levels in water contribute to eutrophication and reduce biodiversity. A risk assessment of such environmental harm is contained in a Regulatory Impact Assessment annexed to the Department's current consultation document "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?" published on 20 December 2001.

A report by WRc to DETR in 1999 entitled "Diffuse pollution: sources of N and P" explains the scientific processes and extent of environmental harm and contains an extensive reference list. Copies of this report are available from the Foundation for Water Research.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of research evidence showing that *(a)* the process of denitrification includes the addition of phosphate and *(b)* phosphate is the cause of eutrophication in saline water. [29085]

Mr. Meacher: The research evidence suggests phosphate is not a significant influence on denitrification, though there are circumstances where phosphate limited plant growth can influence the capacity for denitrification to occur or where the anaerobic conditions required for denitrification also lead to the mobilisation of phosphorus from sediments.

The research evidence shows that for marine waters generally the growth of algae is limited by the amount of nitrogen available (rather than the amount of phosphorus), so eutrophication can result if there is an increase in nitrogen. The position in estuaries or transitional waters may be more complex, and in a few places the availability of phosphorus may be the limiting factor.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes to policy have resulted from Lord Birt's work on crime. [29192]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 17 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 469W.

Private Prisons

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason private prisons are not required to submit *(a)* sickness and *(b)* minority ethnic staff data. [28637]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Her Majesty's Prison Service collects data on sickness levels and ethnic identity on its own employees. These details are not collected in respect of staff employed at private sector prisons as a matter of course because personnel issues are the concern of the contractors and such information is therefore not contractually required. The information is however, made available on request.

MI5 Records

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the request by the Advisory Council on Public Records to be allowed to consider the conditions under which MI5 records are released was refused; and if he will make a statement. [28630]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* In July 1998, my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary, invited the Advisory Council on Public records to review the criteria employed by the Security Service to select files for permanent preservation on grounds of historical interest. During the course of the review the chairman of the Council, Lord Justice Woolf, wrote to the Home Secretary to ask whether he wished to extend the terms of reference to encompass issues relating to access to Security Service records.

The intelligence services and the Interception Commissioners and Investigatory Powers Tribunal have full access to all service records necessary for their functions and therefore the Home Secretary replied that he was not contemplating changing the arrangements to widen access beyond this "need to know" approach. This was recognised in Lord Justice Woolf's report. However, the Home Secretary did agree that officials of the Public Records Office, with the necessary security clearance, should be invited by the Security Service to examine files earmarked for destruction after review by the service. This now happens.

The Advisory Council reported in December 1998 and the report was placed in Library on 3 February 1999. At the same time the then Home Secretary announced that he was accepting in full the recommendations of the committee. All of these have now been implemented.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what costs have been incurred by his Department to date in connection with the Saville inquiry; and what his estimate is of the final cost to his Department. [29068]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Home Office has responsibility for the protective security arrangements for public figures, for which some costs have been incurred in relation to this inquiry. It is not our policy to comment on the details of protection arrangements for individuals, as to do so could compromise their security.

The Home Office has no other direct involvement in the Bloody Sunday inquiry and does not employ staff full-time on inquiry related work. Some small administrative costs have been incurred.

Market and Opinion Research

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what record his Department keeps of the expenditure of his Department on *(a)* polling exercises and *(b)* focus groups. [29516]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Department conducts or commissions market or opinion research only when it is justified by the specific needs of a particular policy or programme, and when this is the most economical, efficient and effective way to achieve the purpose.

Detailed breakdowns of costs and analysis by types of research, such as polling exercises and focus groups, are not held centrally or captured by the Department's accounting systems. Data are recorded under broad expenditure headings, further disaggregation would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

Magistrates Court

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made towards the provision of a witness service in every magistrates court by March. [29369]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Magistrates Court Witness Service is being established and run by the organisation Victim Support, with funding from the Home Office. As at 14 January 2002, witness services had been established in 220 (58 per cent.) of the 382 magistrates courts in England

and Wales. Victim Support advise that the process of recruiting staff and volunteers for the remaining 162 courts is in progress, and that they are hopeful of meeting the target of establishing witness support services in all magistrates courts by 31 March 2002.

Victims of Crime

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the operation of the duty on the Probation Service to keep victims of serious violent and sexual crimes informed of the offender's release. [29367]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Under the new statutory duty, local Probation Boards are required to consult and notify victims about release arrangements of offenders serving a sentence of 12 months or more for a sexual or violent offence. We expect approximately 3,500 more victims of serious crimes each year will be informed of an offender's release under these arrangements. There are currently no figures collected centrally on the actual numbers of victims notified of offenders' release arrangements since the legislation came into force on 1 April 2001.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what percentage of prosecutions the victim chose to make a personal statement to the court in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [29368]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* I understand from the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service that information of this nature is not collated.

Asylum Support

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers received advice or assistance from each of the reception assistance agencies in relation to their application to the National Asylum Support Service in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* the current financial year to date. [28891]

Angela Eagle: Voluntary sector agencies are grant funded by the Home Office to assist asylum seekers who need to make an application for support. The number of asylum seekers assisted by reception assistants from individual agencies is as follows:

	3 April 2000 to 31 March 2001[1]	*1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001*[2]
Refugee Council	17,373	19,391
Migrant Helpline	12,894	8,845
Refugee Arrivals Project	5,554	4,337
Refugee Action	2,717	2,456
Scottish Refugee Council	504	425
Welsh Refugee Council	150	164
Total	39,192	35,618

[1] based on information provided by the voluntary sector agencies

[2] provisional

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the amount of grant made to each of the reception assistance agencies by the National Asylum Support Service under section 111 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* the current financial year to date. [28780]

Angela Eagle: The level of grant paid by the Home Office to the voluntary sector organisations is as follows:

£

	2000–01[1,3]	*2001–02*[2,3]
Refugee Council	7,934,000	10,038,000
Refugee Action	2,290,000	3,246,000
Migrant Helpline	2,094,000	2,587,000
Refugee Arrivals Project	1,913,000	1,971,000
Scottish Refugee Council	595,000	743,000
Welsh Refugee Council	343,000	200,000

[1] Information based on outturn figure.

[2] Information based on estimate of outturn figure.

[3] Excludes payments for provision of emergency accommodation.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost was of providing *(a)* accommodation and *(b)* emergency accommodation under the National Asylum Support Service-run asylum support system in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) in the current financial year to date. [28781]

Angela Eagle: The total cost of *(a)* accommodation paid for directly under contract by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for (i) 2000–01 was £54.1 million and for (ii) current year to 30 November £150.1 million, and *(b)* emergency accommodation for (i) 2000–01 was £27.5 million and for (ii) current year to 30 November £38.2 million.

These figures reflect the increased activity undertaken by the NASS since it began operation on the 3 April 2000.

Costs in 2000–01 are cash based and for current year resource based. All figures are rounded to nearest £0.1 million.

Republic of Ireland

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* contacts and *(b)* exchanges have been organised with relevant authorities in the Republic of Ireland at which issues of *(a)* racism and racist attacks, *(b)* immigration and *(c)* asylum seekers have been discussed; and what agreement was reached on further co-operation. [29250]

Angela Eagle: On the issues of racism and racist attacks, the Government have frequent informal contacts with European Union (EU) representatives, including the Republic of Ireland, at international fora such as the recent World Conference Against Racism. Information on racist incidents is one of the issues discussed at the European Union Terrorism working Group, which normally meets six times a year.

The Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate hold biennial bilateral meetings with the relevant authorities in the Republic of Ireland (Asylum, Immigration and Citizenship Division, Asylum Policy Division, Immigration Policy Division, Reception and Integration Agency) on issues of concern to both countries in relation to immigration and asylum. These are held for the purpose of exchanging experience and providing an update regarding recent and prospective developments.

The United Kingdom immigration service holds regular operational meetings with the Republic of Ireland's Department of Justice and Garda Siochana (Irish police) in order to develop closer co-operation on asylum and immigration matters, including Common Travel area issues. The primary aims of the operational group are to enhance operational co-operations, improve the exchange of information on asylum seekers to prevent abuse, to deal more effectively with human smuggling and trafficking and to explore the scope for additional co-operation on the removal of failed asylum seekers to third countries via the United Kingdom.

In addition, the Irish Government have appointed a Garda liaison officer to the Irish Embassy in London who is tasked with taking forward cross border and intelligence liaison between the two countries in order to counter immigration trafficking.

Su Jin Park

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate the handling by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at Croydon of mail sent by recorded delivery on 26 November by Su Jin Park. [29266]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Su Jin Park's application was posted to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) Public Enquiry Office in Birmingham. They forwarded it to IND in Croydon on 28 November 2001. Of late, it has been taking up to eight weeks to consider new applications. The reasons for this are (i) the exceptionally high number of applications received in 2001; and (ii) process changes that are being introduced. I regret that it was not possible to decide Miss Park's application before her planned departure from the United Kingdom but am pleased that she was able to travel as a result of obtaining an emergency travel document from the Korean Embassy. Her passport will now be returned to the Embassy.

Sentenced Persons Transfer Convention

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the targets are for the efficient and effective operation of the Convention for the Transfer of Sentenced Persons; how these performance indicators were constructed; and how far the operation of procedures has matched these targets in each year since its coming into force. [29249]

Beverley Hughes: The Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons sets no targets for the consideration of applications for repatriation. Since January 2001, Her Majesty's Prison Service has set and applied the following targets to those parts of the process that lie within its control. These targets were constructed to take account of the need to obtain information from agencies outside the Prison Service in support of individual applications.

Applications from foreign nationals imprisoned in England and Wales:

(a) From receipt of the prisoner's application to referral to the receiving jurisdiction: 12 weeks.

During this period the caseworker will obtain and collate the documentation necessary to consider the application, including court documentation, police or customs reports, information on previous convictions, and prison reports. Any translations needed for non-English speaking countries will be done at this stage.

(b) From the receipt of the response from the receiving jurisdiction to the final determination of the request by the Prison Service: 12 weeks.

During this period the information provided by the receiving jurisdiction is assessed, in particular on the enforcement of the sentence to determine if repatriation can proceed. If both jurisdictions are content to proceed the consent of the prisoner must be obtained to the terms and conditions of the transfer.

Applications from British nationals imprisoned overseas:

(c) Consideration of applications submitted by another jurisdiction: 12 weeks.

During this period checks are made with the Metropolitan police to determine whether the prisoner has any outstanding charges in the United Kingdom; with the Home Office to check that the offence committed by the prisoner is an offence under UK law and that the sentence does not exceed the maximum available under British law for the same offence; and with the United Kingdom Passport Office to determine whether the prisoner concerned is a British national.

Once this information has been received a response is prepared and sent to the sentencing jurisdiction. This includes detailed information about the administration of sentence following repatriation, and other information required by the convention.

(d) Collection of the prisoner from overseas following receipt of written consent from the sentencing jurisdiction and the prisoner: four weeks.

During the period 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001, the following targets were met: Applications from foreign nationals imprisoned in England and Wales, target *(a)* 58 per cent. and target *(b)* 91 per cent. Applications from British nationals imprisoned overseas, target *(c)* 67 per cent. and target *(d)* 100 per cent.

At-risk Prisoners

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what special arrangements the Prison service makes over the Christmas and new year period to *(a)* prevent suicides, *(b)* prevent self-harm and *(c)* increase observation of at-risk prisoners. [29525]

Beverley Hughes: The last two weeks of any year is a difficult time for most prisoners and particularly harrowing for those with suicidal thoughts. Staff are reminded of the enhanced dangers and to ensure that anti-suicide policies and procedures are firmly adhered to. There were four self-inflicted deaths in late 2001 but the overall total for the year was reduced by 11 per cent. for the second year running and the rate per 100,000 of average daily population was the lowest since 1993.

Prisons go to great lengths at Christmas and the new year to make establishments as pleasant and relaxed as possible in the prison environment. Specific arrangements will vary between prisons depending on local circumstances and available staffing levels, for example, allowing all prisoners one call on Christmas day to contact their family.

Lost/stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [27991]

Angela Eagle: A list of items stolen or lost from the Home Department in the last four years and approximate value of each item stolen is provided in the following tables.

Analysis of the items of reported theft 1997–98

Description	*Value (£)*
Laptop computer	6,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	3,000
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	2,000
Laptop computer	1,500
Laptop computer	1,500
Personal computer	1,550
Personal computer	1,005
Personal computer	434
Computer printer	1,593
Computer printer	329
Computer monitor	500
Computer mother board	150
Fax modem	130
Mobile phone	118
Video camera	1,500
Video camera	800
Video	300
Tools	500
Tools	131
Field gates	240
Pressure washer	3,317
Armoured cable	200
Total value of 26 cases of theft	37,797

Analysis of cases of reported theft 1998–99

Description	*Value (£)*
VCR taken from classroom—HMP	98
Missing video recorded and four blank videos HMP	106
Theft of laptop containing inmate records during course—HMP	69
Loss of computer discs and equipment—HMP	800
Loss of computer discs from Education Department—HMP	992
Break-in at FSS outstation	3,150
Missing IT equipment—HMP	33,773
Theft of various computer items after break-in at Salford—DPAS	Not known
Handheld computer stolen from car—HMP	400
Theft of laptops from storeroom—HMP	20,421
Theft of hired video recorder—HMP	80
Theft of Camcorder—HMP	399
Total value of 12 Cases of theft	60,288

Analysis of cases of reported theft 1999–2000

Description	*Value (£)*
Computer keyboard stolen from office in QAG	80
Theft of computer equipment from Grenadier House	16,500
Quest House—theft of 25 PCs, servers and equipment	110,000
Quest House—theft of components from Sun Server	74,000
Total value of four cases of theft	200,580

Analysis of 25 cases of reported theft 2000–01

Description	*Value (£)*
Theft of seven laptops	31,000
Theft of IT equipment	100
Theft of two Home Office computers from ICL premises	6,000
Theft of computer parts	4,000
Laptop and projector stolen on Away Day	8,000
Video player stolen from locked room	100
Theft of modem linking franking machine to supplier	180
Eternet card discovered to be missing from laptop PC	80
Laptop stolen in house burglary	1,200
HMPS—Laptop computer unlocatable	1,000
HMPS—Laptop computer taken from locked cabinet	229
HMPS—Theft of pressure washer	125
HMPS—Dictation machine gone missing	377
HMPS—Theft of laptop computer (mugging)	2,000
HMPS—Bicycle stolen from outside prisoner's place of work	89
HMPS—A Hewlett-Packard Laser Jet printer stolen	1,085
HMPS—Theft of laptop, printer and mobile phone	73
HMPS—Theft of two Video Cassettes	128
HMPS—Theft of Industrial Hoover	200
HMPS—Prison Service employee house burgled—Computer and printer stolen	2,650
HMPS—Prison Service issue laptop stolen from boot of car	1,000
HMPS—Training and Development Unit burgled	5,000
HMPS—Theft of portable generator	340
HMFSI—Disappearance of four laptops from locked room	9,000
Total value of 24 cases of theft	73,956

Family Visitor Appeals

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the net income was from fees for family visitor appeals during the first year of operation of the charging policy. [27870]

Angela Eagle: The net income from fees for family visitor appeals in the first year of the scheme was £104,000.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of collecting and refunding fees for family visitor appeals was during the first year of operation of the charging policy. [27871]

Angela Eagle: Most of the costs of collecting and refunding the fees are staff costs. Many individuals are involved, including those at diplomatic posts overseas, but there are few who spend a significant proportion of their time on these tasks. Consequently, it is not possible to provide the information requested by the my hon. Friend except at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners (Drugs)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prison inmates have been charged with possession of illegal drugs in each of the last three years. [28078]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the number of prisoners charged is not collated centrally. Numbers of prisoners found guilty at adjudication of possessing a controlled drug are given in the table.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Males	2,551	2,185	1,781
Females	51	106	52
Total	2,602	2,291	1,833

Child Asylum Seekers

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent measures have been taken to deal with unaccompanied children seeking asylum. [28511]

Angela Eagle: We are committed to offering protection and appropriate levels of care to unaccompanied minors who claim asylum in the United Kingdom. To achieve this we work closely with the Department of Health, local authorities and non-governmental organisations.

With regard to recent measures I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend, the Member for Wigan, (Mr. Turner) on 8 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 386W.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied children have sought asylum in each year since 1996. [28510]

Angela Eagle: The information requested has been provided in the table.

Unaccompanied[1,2,3] children, aged 17 or under, applying for asylum to the United Kingdom, 1996 to 2000

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[4]
Total applications	631	1,102	3,037	3,349	2,733

[1] Unaccompanied at the point of their arrival, and not known to be joining a close relative in the United Kingdom.

[2] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January 1999 and March 2000

[3] Figures exclude disputed age cases.

[4] Provisional figures.

Information on unaccompanied minors is published annually in the statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library; and from the Research, Development and Statistics (RDS) website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Terrorism-related Allegations

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with foreign Governments over the activities of Bachir Aouni; and if he will make a statement. [25179]

Mr. Blunkett: None. Mr. Aouni is held in custody pursuant to a request from Italy for his extradition.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will investigate the links between Alam Moussa (aka Louis Szondy) and Sakina Security Services; and if he will make a statement; [25182]

(2) if he will investigate the links between Bachir Aouni, currently serving a prison sentence in respect of fraud, and a north London mosque; and if he will make a statement; [25183]

(3) if he will investigate the links between Bachir Aouni and GIA; and if he will make a statement. [25181]

Mr. Blunkett: The police continue a range of investigations into terrorist-related allegations, and I discuss their action with them on a regular basis. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual cases, and anyone who has information they believe to be relevant should pass it on to the police.

Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to implement the special measures for vulnerable or intimidated witnesses recommended in the "Speaking up for Justice" report. [30364]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The "Speaking up for Justice" report on vulnerable or intimidated witnesses in the criminal justice system published in 1998 proposed a range of special measures available for use at the trial including:

video-recorded statements to replace the evidence-in-chief

video-recorded pre-trial cross-examination

live TV links

screens around the witnesses box so that the witness does not need to face the defendant in court

removal of wigs and gowns

assistance with communication if necessary, including the use of an intermediary; and

power for the judge to clear the public gallery in cases involving sexual offences or intimidation so the witness can give evidence in private.

The measures requiring legislation were included in Part II of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

Implementation of the special measures will be phased as we have an opportunity to see how they are working.

The implementation in the Crown court will take place six months from today to allow a lead-in for the agencies to conduct training and preparation. All the special measures will be implemented for vulnerable witnesses, with the exception of intermediaries and pre-trial cross-examination which will be subject to pilot projects. The same measures, with the added exception of video-recorded statements, will be implemented at the same time for intimidated witnesses.

All other measures will be introduced in 2003–04 for all qualifying witnesses.

In magistrates courts implementation of special measures in July 2002 will be restricted to TV links and video recorded evidence for child witnesses in cases involving sexual offences, violence (including threats) and cruelty. This would provide protection for children in cases involving assaults, muggings and domestic violence. It would also bring the adult magistrates courts into line with the current provision in the Youth court.

Most of the measures will be extended to magistrates courts by 2003–04 (after their evaluation in the Crown court) to bring them in line with the Crown court.

A whole range of guidance and training materials for the criminal justice agencies are being published tomorrow including:

Recognising Capability—a training programme for those in the criminal justice system working with vulnerable or intimidated witnesses

Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on vulnerable or intimidated witnesses including children

Vulnerable Witnesses: A Police Service Guide

Adult pre-trial therapy

Early Special Measures Meeting between the Police and Crown Prosecution Service and Meetings between the Crown Prosecution Service and Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses: Practice.

Copies of these publications will be placed in the Library.

Over the next couple of years we will also be starting pilot projects on video-recorded pre-trial cross-examination and the use of intermediaries.

Council Tax (Police Costs)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost per head of the police element of the council tax. [28666]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

In England, the average police authority council tax for 2001–02 is approximately £26 per head of population. This includes council tax that is met by council tax benefit. This excludes the City of London, for which the council tax for police services cannot be separately identified.

HEALTH

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many operations were postponed in each of the last five years by hospital authorities; and if he will make a statement; [11476]

(2) if he will rank each hospital in England by the number of postponed operations as a proportion of total operations, giving the relevant number for each hospital. [11477]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to achieving the NHS Plan targets for improving performance on cancelled operations.

From April 2002, when a patient's operation is cancelled by the hospital on the day of surgery for non-clinical reasons, the hospital will have to offer another binding date within a maximum of the next 28 days or fund the patient's treatment at the time and hospital of the patient's choice.

To ensure that this target is achieved, we have established a Theatre project, to develop good practice in operating theatres and ensure that this is spread throughout the national health service. This will improve the patient and carer experience; improve employee satisfaction and morale; optimise theatre utilisation, planning and scheduling; and reduce cancelled operations.

In addition, as part of the Government's £100 million strategy to reduce long waits in accident and emergency a 100 million programme of investment was announced. This will contribute to a drive to reduce hospital bed occupancy rates by purchasing additional operations in the private sector. This, alongside continued growth in general and acute hospital beds, will free up capacity in the NHS for emergency patients, help to eliminate long trolley waits and dramatically reduce—by up to 75 per cent.—the number of planned operations cancelled at the last minute.

The number of operations cancelled by hospitals, for non-clinical reasons in England, from 1996–97 to 2000–01 are given in the table.

Year	*Number of cancelled operations in year*
1996–97	52,047
1997–98	50,505
1998–99	56,150
1999–2000	60,242
2000–01	77,818

Note:

Information collected by the Department of Health are numbers of operations cancelled for non-clinical reasons on the day of admission, or on the day of the operation.

Source:

Department of Health Patients Charter returns

The number and proportion of operations cancelled for non clinical reasons on the day of admission, or on the day of operation are given in the table.

The data supplied are for the latest available full year at health authority level. Trust level data have only been collected on a shadow basis since Quarter 1, 2001–02 and it is unclear how robust this is at this level at present. Also, when measuring relative performance, it is better to measure over a whole year, rather than a single quarter.

Cancelled operations for non clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2000–01

Region	*Health authority*	*Number of operations cancelled*	*Number of elective FFCEs*
England		77,818	5,294,362
South East	Oxfordshire HA	2,221	46,605
London	Camden and Islington HA	1,612	34,281
London	Barking and Havering HA	1,984	45,169
North West	Manchester Health	2,330	53,983
London	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	1,349	33,477
South East	Buckinghamshire HA	2,082	53,557
South East	Isle of Wight health authority	412	10,940
South West	Avon Health	3,544	109,329
London	East London and The City HA	1,787	55,481
South East	West Surrey Health Commission	1,705	58,500
North West	Morecambe Bay HA	803	27,893
West Midlands	Coventry Health	759	27,051
West Midlands	Birmingham HA	2,633	95,257
Northern and Yorks	Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	1,661	62,256
South East	Berkshire HA	1,840	70,902

Cancelled operations for non clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2000–01

Region	*Health authority*	*Number of operations cancelled*	*Number of elective FFCEs*
London	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	1,466	57,234
London	Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	1,038	41,173
Trent	Sheffield Health	1,398	63,312
Northern and Yorks	Wakefield HA	966	44,929
Northern and Yorks	North Cumbria HA	767	36,658
Eastern	South Essex HA	1,299	62,700
London	Brent and Harrow HA	924	45,050
Eastern	Cambridgeshire HA	1,467	71,878
South East	Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	1,154	56,744
West Midlands	Herefordshire HA	356	17,874
South East	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	1,426	74,472
North West	St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	808	42,287
London	Bromley Health	615	32,294
London	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	1,339	72,930
North West	South Cheshire HA	1,165	65,410
London	Hillingdon HA	390	22,314
Eastern	North Essex HA	1,246	73,330
South West	South and West Devon HA	1,199	75,509
North West	Wigan and Bolton HA	1,032	65,140
London	Croydon HA	430	29,115
London	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	953	65,954
Eastern	Bedfordshire HA	694	48,050
West Midlands	North Staffordshire HA	766	53,096
South West	Wiltshire HA	790	56,159
Northern and Yorks	Tees HA	998	71,489
North West	Sefton HA	479	35,247
Eastern	Suffolk Health	955	70,600
London	Barnet HA	380	28,289
London	Enfield and Haringey HA	592	44,446
North West	North Cheshire	464	36,014
North West	Stockport HA	404	31,938
South East	East Kent HA	785	62,601
South East	West Kent HA	1,027	82,201
South East	East Surrey HA	436	36,748
West Midlands	Dudley HA	360	31,192
North West	South Lancashire HA	426	37,544
North West	West Pennine HA	609	54,518
South East	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	599	54,445
Northern and Yorks	Calderdale and Kirklees HA	744	68,558
South West	North and East Devon HA	728	68,201
South East	West Sussex HA	777	73,713
South West	Gloucestershire Health	669	63,844
Trent	Leicester HA	987	98,558
North West	Liverpool HA	571	57,304
Eastern	East and North Hertfordshire HA	490	50,395
North West	Salford and Trafford HA	507	52,744
London	Kingston and Richmond HA	277	29,046
Northern and Yorks	North Yorkshire HA	791	85,967
Eastern	Norfolk HA	824	91,868
North West	East Lancashire HA	579	64,553
South East	Northamptonshire HA	489	56,267
Eastern	West Hertfordshire HA	425	49,189
North West	North West Lancashire HA	492	56,948
Trent	North Nottinghamshire Health	360	42,899
South West	Somerset HA	510	61,908
Trent	North Derbyshire Health	339	41,266
South West	Dorset HA	877	107,048
West Midlands	South Staffordshire HA	516	63,007
Trent	Doncaster HA	344	42,050
South East	North and Mid Hampshire HA	422	51,813
Northern and Yorks	Leeds HA	602	76,594
London	Bexley and Greenwich HA	320	41,486
Trent	Nottingham HA	501	65,289
South West	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	464	66,340
Trent	Lincolnshire Health	508	73,846
Trent	South Humber	292	42,831
West Midlands	Worcestershire HA	337	51,010
Northern and Yorks	Bradford HA	451	68,547
North West	Wirral Health	223	33,958
West Midlands	Shropshire HA	285	44,946
West Midlands	Walsall HA	149	25,046
Trent	Rotherham HA	159	27,569

Cancelled operations for non clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2000–01

Region	*Health authority*	*Number of operations cancelled*	*Number of elective FFCEs*
Northern and Yorks	Sunderland HA	206	35,723
West Midlands	Sandwell HA	181	34,708
West Midlands	Warwickshire HA	278	55,312
Northern and Yorks	East Riding HA	323	66,467
Northern and Yorks	Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	200	50,945
Northern and Yorks	County Durham HA	265	72,516
West Midlands	Wolverhampton HA	85	24,085
Trent	Southern Derbyshire Health	231	72,049
Trent	Barnsley HA	37	31,364
Northern and Yorks	Northumberland HA	48	53,177
North West	Bury and Rochdale HA	31	48,197
West Midlands	[1]Solihull HA	0	19,676

[1] Solihull does not have any acute trusts.

Notes:

1. Information collected by the Department of Health are numbers of operations cancelled for non-clinical reasons on the day of admission, or on the day of the operation.

2. Activity figures are elective first finished consultant episodes (FFCEs).

3. Figures are trust level aggregated to host health authority.

Sources:

Department of Health Patients Charter returns

Department of Health Hospital Episode Statistics

Child Illnesses

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school-age children suffered from *(a)* chronic illness, *(b)* asthma and *(c)* cancer in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [22490]

Yvette Cooper: Data on the number of chronically ill children are not collected, but it is estimated that approximately one in three of the population suffers from one or more of a wide range of chronic conditions including arthritis, diabetes, epilepsy and asthma.

There are no comprehensive data on the number of people with asthma but it is estimated to affect 4 to 6 per cent. of children sufficiently severely to require medical supervision. The table shows hospital admissions for patients aged five to 14 years. The table does not show actual incidence of asthma—some patients may be admitted more than once and many sufferers may never need hospital admission.

Admissions for patients aged five to 14 years in national health service hospitals, England—completed episodes with primary diagnosis asthma J45-J46 (ICD10)

Year	*Number*
2000–01	11,147
1999–2000	11,703
1998–99	11,896
1997–98	12,885
1996–97	12,471

Notes:

1. Ordinary admissions and day cases combined.

2. Figures for 1996–97 to 1997–98 have been grossed for coverage and for unknown or invalid clinical data; figures for 1998–99 onwards have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics, Department of Health

The table shows numbers of cancer cases registered by age and year of diagnosis.

Cancer diagnosed in children aged five to 14 years in England, 1995–99

Year	*Total*
1995	717
1996	629
1997	648
1998	605
1999	621

Source:

National Registry of Childhood Tumours, University of Oxford Department of Paediatrics

Baby Food

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend the protection of the EU directive on pesticide residue levels in baby food. [20570]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* Legislation implementing the European Union directive and setting tough low maximum limits for pesticides in infant formula and processed baby foods comes into force in July 2002. Where food is made for babies in the home, pesticide residues in the ingredients are subject to rigorous controls on pesticide use which take into account the sensitivity of all age groups.

NHS Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the level of NHS spending as a share of gross domestic product for each year from 1990–91 to 2003–04; what comparable figures he has for the average of European Union countries; and if he will make a statement. [22272]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The United Kingdom gross cash national health service expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) is set out in the table. The figures for 2001–02 onwards are for planned expenditure.

NHS Expenditure as a percentage of GDP

	UK
1990–91	5.2
1991–92	5.6
1992–93	5.9
1993–94	5.8
1994–95	5.9
1995–96	5.8
1996–97	5.7
1997–98	5.6
1998–99	5.6
1999–2000	5.8
2000–01	6.1
2001–02	6.3
2002–03	6.5
2003–04	6.6

The only source of comparable data is published by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development. These data exist only for calendar years, and the latest complete set of data is for 1998. The average public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product for all European Union countries is as follows:

Public expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP

	EU average public expenditure
1990	[1]5.8
1991	[1]6.0
1992	[1]6.1
1993	[1]6.2
1994	[1]6.1
1995	6.1
1996	6.1
1997	6.0
1998	5.9

[1] There are no data for Belgium in these years

Source:

OECD Health Data 2001

Assuming private spending remains at its current level of around 1 per cent. of GDP, total United Kingdom health care expenditure will reach around 7.6 per cent. by 2003–04. This will be a significant step towards reaching the European Union average, which (again, including private spending—around 2 per cent. on average in the EU) has remained around 7.9 to 8 per cent. in recent years.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the percentage of the GNP of the UK that has been spent on the NHS in each of the last five years. [28079]

Mr. Hutton: The amount of health care expenditure by the national health service is calculated as a percentage of gross domestic product. The gross NHS expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product is given for financial years in the table.

United Kingdom NHS spend

	Percentage of gross domestic product
1996–97	5.7
1997–98	5.6
1998–99	5.6
1999–2000	5.8
2000–01	6.1

Free Nursing Care (Battersea)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners and disabled people requiring long-term care in Battersea who will receive free nursing care next April. [22945]

Jacqui Smith: Just over 80 people in Battersea are receiving free nursing care from 1 October 2001 and a similar number will receive this from April 2002. This is the number of people assessed as eligible for free nursing care currently resident in nursing homes in Battersea. Many other local residents already receive assistance with the costs of their care by a registered nurse through the local authority or receive it free from the national health service in residential accommodation or at home.

Autism (Wandsworth)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the help available for autistic children and adults and their families in Wandsworth. [22944]

Jacqui Smith The learning disability White Paper "Valuing People—A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21 Century" issued in March 2001 sets out the Government's proposals for maximising opportunities for all disabled children and supporting young people's transition into adult life. It focuses in particular on the needs of learning disabled children and their families, but does so within a framework which applies equally to all disabled children, including those on the autistic spectrum.

Children with autism will benefit from a range of initiatives we are taking to improve services for disabled children. As part of the Quality Protects programme we set new national objectives for children's services which for the first time set out clear outcomes for children, and in some instances give precise targets which local authorities are expected to achieve. These were updated in "Valuing People".

Disabled children have been made a priority area in Quality Protects. The last spending review made substantial additional funding available for the Children's Services grant which now totals £180 million in 2001–02, £220 million in 2002–03 and £290 million in 2003–04. Of this, £60 million has been earmarked for services for disabled children and their families—£15 million in 2001–02 and 2002–03 and £30 million in 2003–04.

We have also announced that services for disabled children will be a key area to be addressed by the national service framework for children. We want to make autism an exemplar under the children's national service framework, so that when the framework is concluded people will be able to see how services should be provided.

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice 2001 which came into effect from 1 January 2002 provides strengthened and more focused advice on identifying, assessing and providing for children's special educational needs. The Department for Education and Skills will also be publishing good practice guidance on aspects of provision for children with autism, mainly aimed at schools and local education authorities.

The White Paper, "Valuing People", published in March 2001, covers all adults with autism who also have a learning disability. White Paper implementation guidance issued in August last year states that

> "Adults with Asperger's Syndrome or higher functioning autism are not precluded from using learning disability services, where appropriate, and may require an assessment of their social functioning and communication skills in order to establish their level of need."

By bringing together health, social care and educational agencies, "Valuing People" gives us the scope to improve opportunities and services for people across the autistic spectrum.

It is for local statutory bodies, Wandsworth in this instance, to determine the services they provide in the light of their knowledge of local needs and priorities.

Ambulance Paramedics

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* ambulances and *(b)* paramedics there were per 1000 population in (i) Staffordshire, (ii) other similar authorities and (iii) England, in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [24074]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of ambulance vehicles in each ambulance service, health authority and nationally is not collected. Information on the number of paramedics per 1,000 per population is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): ambulance paramedics per 1,000 population by organisation in England as at 30 September each year

	1998		*1999*		*2000*	
	[1]*wte*	[2]*hc*	[1]*wte*	[2]*hc*	[1]*wte*	[2]*hc*
All England	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.14
Staffordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.12	0.12	0.13
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance and Paramedic NHS Trust	0.19	0.19	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.17
Royal Berkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.18	0.18	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.16
Two Shires—Northampton and Bucks Ambulance NHS Trust	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07
Kent Ambulance NHS Trust	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.11
Surrey Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.14	0.15	0.13	0.13	0.15	0.15
Sussex Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.14	0.14	0.15	0.16	0.15	0.15
Essex Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.17	0.18	0.15	0.17	0.15	0.16
Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13
East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust	0.14	0.14	0.16	0.16	0.18	0.18
Oxfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12
East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.11	0.11
South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance and Paramedic NHS Trust	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
Greater Manchester Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.11
Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.10	0.10
Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.11
Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust	0.30	0.31	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Wiltshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.18
Avon Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.17	0.18
North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.11	0.11	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.14
Lincolnshire Ambulance and Health Transport Service NHS Trust	0.18	0.18	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20
Cumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.54	0.54	0.54	0.54	0.61	0.62
Tees East and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.06	0.06	0.14	0.14	0.16	0.16
West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.11	0.11
Westcountry Ambulance Services NHS Trust and South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	0.20	0.20	0.19	0.19	0.20	0.20
Gloucestershire Ambulance Services NHS Trust	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.17
West Midlands Metropolitan Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.12	0.12	0.14	0.14	0.15	0.15
Warwickshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.09
Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14
Dorset Ambulance NHS Trust	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.22	0.22
London Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11

[1] wte = whole-time equivalents

[2] hc = headcount

[3] = not available

Note:

Figures are rounded to two decimal places

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

General Practitioners

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to SIs No 3740 and 3742, if it is Government policy to provide for *(a)* the automatic removal of a general practitioner from a health authority's list after a sentence of imprisonment of more than six months and *(b)* the absence of any opportunity for the doctor to make a case against removal; and whether it is his intention to impose a ban on such a general practitioner's right to practise without regard to the reasons for that imprisonment. [23822]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* The regulations provide that the removal of a doctor from, or the refusal to admit a doctor to, a medical or supplementary list after a criminal conviction and a sentence of more than six months imprisonment will be automatic. These regulations were introduced after consultation with the British Medical Association.

Our legal system provides that the most serious criminal offences are to be dealt with by a Crown court and those less serious offences by a magistrates' court. The threshold laid down in these regulations reflects the respective responsibilities of these courts, in that only a Crown court may impose a custodial sentence of more than six months following a conviction. Given that a magistrates court may not impose such a sentence, our view is that anyone who receives such a sentence, in relation to obviously serious offences, is unsuitable to work in the national health service as a general medical practitioner.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason general practitioners who are on contracts do not receive a *(a)* full golden hello and *(b)* sum proportional to their contract or hours worked. [24599]

Mr. Hutton: Golden hello payments are intended to encourage doctors to become and remain national health service general practitioners. New GPs who work exclusively as locums, hold fixed term contracts of two years or less or who have a commitment of less than 25 per cent. do not therefore qualify for a payment until they take on a substantive post with at least 25 per cent. time commitment and a longer contract.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time to see a GP in Greater London; and what the equivalent figure was in 1997. [24645]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* From September 2001 data are being collected quarterly on the lead time for the first available appointment with each general practitioner practice. From the September 2001 survey, results showed that within the London region, 72 per cent. of practices, with appointment systems in place, could offer a patient an appointment with a GP within two working days. 90 per cent. of practices had an appointment system in place to see a GP.

NHS (Directors' Secondments)

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many executive directors of NHS trusts and health authorities were on secondment to other organisations as at 1 December 2001. [26597]

Mr. Hutton: The number of executive directors of national health service trusts and health authorities on secondment to other organisations as at 1 December 2001 was as follows:

Region	*Chief Executives*	*Executive Directors*	*Total*
West Midlands	1	7	8
Trent	3	7	10
South West	2	7	9
Northern and Yorks	1	5	6
South East	6	1	7
North West	2	10	12
Eastern	4	6	10
London	2	10	12
TOTAL	21	53	74

Flu Immunisation (Jarrow)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were immunised against flu in Jarrow during this year's immunisation campaign. [26041]

Jacqui Smith: Information regarding the numbers of children immunised against flu is not routinely collected. The Department collects information on influenza uptake only for people aged 65 and over. As at 31 December 2001, Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority have achieved an uptake of 69.9 per cent. in this age group.

Dioxins

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the recommendations of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment on acceptable limits of dioxins in food. [26714]

Yvette Cooper: I am informed by the Food Standards Agency that the recommendation of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) is for a tolerable daily intake (TDI) for dioxins and dioxin-like polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) of two picogrammes TEQ/kilogramme bodyweight per day (pg TEQ/kg). This is a fifth of the level previously set. A TDI is the amount of a chemical that can be consumed every day without causing harm.

The Food Standards Agency's extensive programme of research and surveys for these contaminants has shown that the average dietary exposure in the United Kingdom is already below the new TDI. However, in common with the United States of America and the European Union, about one-third of the UK population may exceed the TDI from their daily diet. Almost all of these will be below 3.5 pg TEQ/kg, which represents a small erosion of the safety margin that is inherent in the TDI.

The most effective way to reduce exposure to these chemicals through the food supply is to continue to decrease emissions to the environment, from both industrial and non-industrial sources. Measures already taken have resulted in a 70 per cent. decrease in emissions over the last nine years and the agency will continue to work closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency to ensure that emissions are reduced still further.

Respiratory and Circulatory Disease (Easington)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Easington Primary Care Group area suffer from respiratory and circulatory illnesses as a percentage of *(a)* the local population and *(b)* the population covered by the Durham health authority. [26770]

Jacqui Smith: Between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2001, approximately 5,700 patients from Easington were admitted to hospital with respiratory or circulatory diseases, representing 5.8 per cent. of the local population and 0.9 per cent. of the population covered by County Durham and Darlington health authority.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients suffer from diabetes in the Easington Primary Care Group area as a percentage of *(a)* the local population and *(b)* the population covered by the Durham health authority. [26771]

Jacqui Smith: Local registers indicate that 2,630 patients from Easington currently suffer from diabetes, representing 2.7 per cent. of the local population and 0.4 per cent. of the population covered by County Durham and Darlington health authority.

Care Home Beds (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available in Buckinghamshire in the care home sector between 1997 and 2001. [27119]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the number of places in residential care homes and registered beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics in the Buckinghamshire area between 1997 and 2001.

Residential places[1] and registered nursing beds in the Buckinghamshire area[2] in 1997 and 2001

Number

At 31 March	*Places in residential care homes*	*Registered nursing beds in nursing homes[3,4]*
1997	2,438	1,735
1998	3,253	2,054
1999	3,383	1,966
2000	3,399	1,896
2001	3,426	1,951

[1] Excludes places in children's homes.

[2] Information is presented for the area represented by the county of Buckinghamshire prior to local government re-organisation on 1 April 1998. Figures for 31 March 1999 onwards relate to the unitary authority of Milton Keynes and the reduced shire county area of Buckinghamshire.

[3] Registered beds in general and mental nursing homes, hospitals and clinics. Information is presented on nursing beds for the Buckinghamshire health authority (which equates to the former county of Buckinghamshire prior to local government re-organisation).

[4] Information for registered nursing beds in 1997 relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

Migraine

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include migraine in the new NHS framework for long-term neurological conditions. [26953]

Jacqui Smith: Detailed decisions about the scope and content of the national service framework for long-term conditions have not yet been made, other than outlining that it will draw out some of the common issues faced by people with a long-term condition, and also pay particular attention to specific neurological diseases.

We held a scoping workshop on the 12 November 2001 attended by patients and service users, national health service professionals, NHS managers, social care professionals, and representatives from voluntary organisations and other Government Departments.

Tees Health Authority

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting *(a)* more than six months and *(b)* more than 12 months for in-patient treatment in the Tees health authority area in (i) December 1996 and (ii) December 2001. [26738]

Jacqui Smith: Information relating to in-patient waiting times in Tees health authority is shown in the table. Data relating to December 2001 are not yet available so the most recent published data has been given.

	Number of patients waiting:	
	over 6 months	*over 12 months*
As at December 1996	2,712	10
As at November 2001	2,408	66

Mental Health (Children)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school-age children from ethnic minority communities suffer from mental health problems; and if he will make a statement. [26737]

Jacqui Smith: A survey of the mental health of children and adolescents in Great Britain was carried out in 1999 by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Department of Health, the Scottish Health Executive and the National Assembly for Wales.

Nearly 10 per cent. of white children and 12 per cent. of black children were assessed as having a mental health problem whereas the prevalence rates among Asian children were 8 per cent. of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi children and 4 per cent. of the Indian children.

Despite the large number of interviews achieved in this survey, ethnic differences are difficult to interpret because of the small numbers in the sample who regarded themselves as belonging to particular ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Indian children, particularly girls, seem to have far lower rates of mental disorder than both white or black children.

Mental health services for children will be part of the Children's National Service Framework. Part of the remit of the framework will be to tackle problems surrounding access and inequality, which can particularly affect people from ethnic minorities.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision exists for school-age children who suffer from mental health problems *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in the Teesside area; and if he will make a statement. [26739]

Jacqui Smith: The responsibility for the provision of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in England lies with health authorities and local authorities. They are required to have joint development strategies which will ensure that a comprehensive range of services are available for children and young people.

We have an ongoing commitment to the improvement of CAMHS and it will be an important part of the Children's National Service Framework. We shall be working closely with the Department for Education and Skills when developing the CAMHS module of the

National Service Framework. This is a major development and will safeguard the quality of child mental health services.

The Department for Education and Skills is developing a number of initiatives designed to help schools and teachers work with children with a range of emotional and behavioural needs. In June 2001 they issued their guidance "Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings". This covers not only mental health problems faced by children but the approaches schools can take to promote children's mental health.

The framework for comprehensive service provision contained in "Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings" sets out four service levels. Tier 1: a primary level provided by non-specialists, tier 2: a level provided by uni-professional groups, tier 3: a specialist service for more severe, complex and persistent disorders, and tier 4; tertiary services such as day units and in-patient units for older children and adolescents who are severely mentally ill or at suicide risk.

In Teesside, services for children with mental health problems requiring input at tiers 1 and 2 are provided through educational psychology service links with schools and school nurses. This ensures that the identified teachers link with locality CAMHS groups to ensure continuity.

At tier 3 psychiatrists, Grade A and B clinical psychologists and community psychiatric nurses from Tees and North East Yorkshire national health service trust's Roseberry Centre at Middlesbrough provide out-patient outreach services along with primary care link workers.

At tier 4, for children up to the age of 12 requiring in-patient care, the health authority utilises the Fleming Nuffield Unit at Newcastle. Children in the age group over 12 to 18 years have in-patient provision through the Roseberry Centre. If it is identified by clinicians that an adolescent requires a more secure environment because of behavioural presentation or offending behaviour, the adolescent forensic service at Newcastle is utilised.

Hospital Doctors (Criminal Convictions)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require hospital doctors registered as practitioners in England and Wales to disclose any criminal convictions they have in any jurisdiction. [26743]

Mr. Hutton: Department of Health circular Health Service Circular 2001–019 (Appointment Procedures for Hospital and Community Medical and Dental Staff) requires applicants for hospital and community medical and dental posts in the national health service in England to declare if they have ever been convicted of any criminal offence, bound over or cautioned in the United Kingdom or any other country. Employees already in post have a contractual duty to inform their employer if they are charged with a criminal offence.

Practitioners in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

MRI Scanners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* new and *(b)* replacement MRI scanners have been provided through exclusively central funding since January 2000. [27245]

Yvette Cooper: Since January 2000, 34 additional MRI scanners, 18 replacement MRI scanners and upgrades to two existing MRI scanners have been allocated from central funding. Of these, 13 additional and 10 replacement MRI scanners had been delivered by 14 January 2002.

A further 50 additional MRI scanners will be provided from central funding by 2004, as outlined in the NHS plan and NHS cancer plan.

Linear Accelerators

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* new and *(b)* replacement linear accelerators have been provided through exclusively central funding since January 2000. [27246]

Yvette Cooper: Since January 2000, 15 additional linear accelerators and 42 replacement linear accelerators have been allocated from central funding. Of these, eight additional and 22 replacement linear accelerators had been delivered by 14 January 2002.

A further 25 additional and 20 replacement linear accelerators will be provided from central funding by 2004, as outlined in the NHS Plan and NHS Cancer Plan.

CT Scanners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* new and *(b)* replacement CT scanners have been provided through central funding since January 2000. [27247]

Yvette Cooper: Since January 2000, 21 additional CT scanners and 113 replacement CT scanners have been allocated from central funding. Of these, two additional and 60 replacement CT scanners had been delivered by 14 January 2002.

A further 50 additional CT scanners will be provided from central funding by 2004, as outlined in the NHS Plan and NHS Cancer Plan.

Tuberculosis

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of TB were reported between 1980 and 2000 in the UK. [27594]

Yvette Cooper: The number of reported tuberculosis cases in the United Kingdom from 1980 to 2000 are shown in the table.

	TB notifications			
Year	*England & Wales*	*Scotland*	*N. Ireland*	*Total UK*
1980	9,142	1,138	205	10,485
1981	8,128	972	190	9,290
1982	7,406	902	140	8,448
1983	6,800	829	163	7,792
1984	6,141	741	161	7,043
1985	5,857	707	83	6,647
1986	5,992	756	108	6,856

	TB notifications			
Year	*England & Wales*	*Scotland*	*N. Ireland*	*Total UK*
1987	5,085	560	99	5,744
1988	5,161	534	86	5,781
1989	5,432	533	94	6,059
1990	5,204	563	131	5,898
1991	5,436	546	96	6,078
1992	5,798	559	84	6,441
1993	5,920	554	90	6,564
1994	5,590	546	93	6,229
1995	5,606	478	90	6,174
1996	5,654	509	75	6,238
1997	5,859	433	75	6,367
1998	6,087	464	61	6,612
1999	6,143	497	61	6,701
2000	[1]6,231	[1]406	58	6,695

[1] provisional

Healthy Living Centre Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications for funding from the healthy living centre initiative have been received from projects based in Buckinghamshire; and what the outcome was in each case. [27782]

Ms Blears: Six applications have been received. Five have been rejected and one is still under consideration.

Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed by Two Shires Ambulance NHS trust in each year since 1997; and what the average sickness absence rate for staff was *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Two Shires Ambulance NHS trust in each year. [27784]

Ms Blears: The total number of (whole-time equivalent) staff employed at the Two Shires Ambulance national health service trust for the years 1997–2000 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997	450
1998	510
1999	550
2000	580

The collection of NHS trust sickness absence rates commenced in 1998 and the Two Shires Ambulance trust returned their first in 1999. The results of the sickness absence survey for 2000 are not yet finalised and the collection for 2001 has not yet taken place.

In 1999 the sickness absence rate for the Two Shires Ambulance NHS trust was 5.5 per cent.

Cancer Survival Rates

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to bring survival rates of British cancer patients into line with other European countries. [27826]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan, which was published in September 2000, sets out a programme of action to tackle the disease. The strategy will speed up access to high quality services across the country to bring cancer services in line with the rest of Europe.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27979]

Mr. Hutton: The figures requested are in the table.

Year	*£*
(a) Department	
1997–98	61,415.25
1998–99	66,897.29
1999–2000	48,148.81
2000–01	56,831.99
(b) Agencies	
1997–98	1,461
1998–99	Nil
1999–2000	3,493
2000–01	Nil
(c) Non-departmental public bodies	
1997–98	10,458
1998–99	6,903
1999–2000	2,739
2000–01	6,582

The Department now has a Directorate of Counter Fraud Services staffed by professionally trained and accredited counter fraud specialists.

Doctors (Qualification Checks)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what checks are carried out by NHS trusts to verify the qualifications of doctors before they are offered employment; and if he will make a statement. [28040]

Mr. Hutton: All national health service employers have a duty to check that the doctors they employ are suitably qualified and experienced. This includes checks on General Medical Council registration, qualifications (original certificates), criminal records and health. Employers also take up personal and professional references for potential employees.

In the case of general practitioners, the health authority will make such checks before allowing principals and non-principal general practitioners to be entered on their lists of approved practitioners.

Where doctors are employed in a locum capacity employers will either make the checks themselves or require the supplying agency to do so. This principle is enshrined in the national contract for the supply of locum doctors and the locum code of practice.

Primary Care Collaboratives

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend the primary care collaborative which was launched in 2000 by the National Primary Care Development Team; and if he will make a statement. [28223]

Mr. Hutton: The National Primary Care Development Team of the Modernisation Agency has demonstrated that it is possible to balance demand with capacity to ensure patients are looked after by the clinician best placed to meet their needs and that staff are less likely to feel overwhelmed by demand. They are actively disseminating the "advanced access" model developed by the collaborative across the country, which covers nearly 1,000 practices who provide care for seven million patients.

In December 2001, we announced the introduction of 11 new national primary care development centres across England. These new centres are being developed to roll out the benefits of the collaborative to every primary care organisation across the country.

We have provided an earmarked increase of £83.5 million to the primary care trust primary care access fund in 2002–03 to help primary care trusts work with their practices to improve primary care access.

Hampshire Ambulance Service

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is *(a)* Hampshire Ambulance NHS trust's target time for responding to emergency calls in (i) Ringwood, (ii) Fordingbridge and (iii) the Avon Valley and *(b)* the actual time taken in the last two years in good road conditions by the emergency ambulance provided at Totton; and if he will make a statement; [28222]

(2) what proportion of emergency calls in the last two years from *(a)* Ringwood, *(b)* Fordingbridge and *(c)* the Avon Valley received a response from the ambulance service provision at Totton within the target time; and if he will make a statement. [28215]

Ms Blears: Our target response times require that ambulance services prioritise emergency calls. Immediate life threatening calls are classified as category A, and other emergency calls are classified as category B/C. Ambulance services are required to respond to 75 per cent. of category A calls within eight minutes and 95 per cent. of category B/C calls within 19 minutes.

Information relating to response times in the geographical areas mentioned is not collected separately. The information available about responses to emergency calls is available only at ambulance trust level. Information about the number of emergency calls and the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response time for Hampshire Ambulance national health service trust and all other ambulance trusts in England are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Emergency Contraception

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice the Government received in March 2000 from the Committee on Safety of Medicines on the need for medical supervision of the supply of the morning-after pill to girls under 16; whether that advice has been superseded; and what action is taken to ensure that its supply complies with that advice; [28207]

(2) what clinical trials were conducted on the morning-after pill's use by girls under 16; and what considerations underlay the decision to license it without age limit; [28205]

(3) what steps are recommended to ensure that *(a)* the morning-after pill and *(b)* paracetamol, when supplied to girls under 16 (i) in family planning clinics, (ii) by general practitioners, (iii) by hospital accident and emergency departments, (iv) by school nurses and (v) direct by pharmacists, does not react with other medication. [28212]

Yvette Cooper: In March 2000, the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) was sought on an application by Medimpex (in conjunction with Schering Health Care) to reclassify levonorgestrel (the morning after pill) 0.75 mg from prescription only to pharmacy availability for emergency hormonal contraception in women aged 16 and over. The CSM considered, on the evidence before it, that the criteria for prescription only status no longer applied to levonorgestrel 0.75 mg for this indication in this age group, and therefore advised that levonorgestrel 0.75 mg should only be supplied to those aged 16 and over without medical supervision. In giving its advice, CSM recognised that, although the efficacy and safety profile of levonorgestrel 0.75 mg for emergency hormonal contraception may not be expected to be different in the under 16s, provision to this age group posed special risk management issues. The CSM therefore advised that emergency contraception should only be supplied to those under 16 under medical supervision. That advice has not been superseded. The minutes of the CSM meeting of 23 March 2000 are available on their website www.mca.gov.uk/aboutagency/regframework/csm/csmhome.htm.

Medical supervision includes the supply by other health professionals (such as nurses and pharmacists) working to a patient group direction. Supply of the prescription product complies with the usual requirements for prescription only medicines.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain has set professional standards and developed comprehensive guidance for pharmacists on the retail supply of emergency hormonal contraception (EHC). The guidance says that

> "pharmacists should make every reasonable effort to satisfy themselves that clients are aged 16 or over. Pharmacists should ensure that, where they believe a client to be under 16, the request is dealt with sympathetically and the client is offered appropriate help and support to enable her to obtain EHC by another route."

No clinical trials of levonorgestrel use specific to girls under 16 have been conducted in the United Kingdom. The marketing authorisation granted in 1999 for levonorgestrel 0.75 mg tablets as a prescription only medicine was supported by evidence from two large randomised controlled studies, one conducted by the World Health Organisation, and published data from uncontrolled studies. Most women in the clinical trials were aged between 16 and 48, but a few girls aged 14 and 15 were included. There were no data available for girls between ages 11 and 14 years. Age analysis of efficacy and safety in randomised studies did not identify any population that responded differently to treatment.

General practitioners and other health professionals who supply levonorgestrel and paracetamol to girls under 16 are all professionally trained to provide advice and to follow procedures designed to ensure that these products are used safely. Health professionals operating under a patient group direction have to follow formal protocols which include measures to avoid unwanted interactions with other medicines. As an added safeguard, under European legislation, the patient information leaflet approved for all medicines must contain information about interactions with other medicines and measures that should be taken to avoid them.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions the morning-after pill was prescribed *(a)* in total and *(b)* to girls under 16 (i) in family planning clinics, (ii) by general practitioners, (iii) by hospital accident and emergency departments, (iv) by school nurses and (v) direct by pharmacists in each year since 1998; and what percentage (b) was of (a). [28206]

Yvette Cooper: Not all of the data requested are collected centrally. Information on emergency hormonal contraception supplied under a patient group direction, by school nurses and pharmacists is not available and only family planning clinics report data by age.

The tables show prescriptions for emergency hormonal contraception dispensed in family planning clinics and prescriptions dispensed in the community by community pharmacists and dispensing doctors in England.

Family planning clinics[1]
Total post-coital contraceptives prescribed

000s

Financial year	*All ages*	*Under 16s*	*Percentage of prescriptions to under 16s*
1998–99	209.9	21.5	10.24
1999–2000	233.0	23.1	9.91
2000–01	228.8	25.2	11.01

[1] Post-coital hormonal contraceptives which excludes IUDs

Prescriptions dispensed in the community[1]

000s

Calendar year	*Number of prescription items*
1998	559.8
1999	536.8
2000	554.8

[1] This includes community pharmacists, appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors. A breakdown of age is not separately identifiable.

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the provision of the morning after pill for 13 to 16-year-old girls. [29462]

Yvette Cooper: According to recent research, around a quarter of young people have sex before their sixteenth birthday. Under 16s are also less likely than older women to use contraception consistently. Our teenage pregnancy strategy recognises the importance of helping young people resist peer pressure to have early sex while seeking to ensure that those who are sexually active have easy access to high quality contraceptive advice. Emergency contraception is a safe and effective method of preventing unplanned pregnancy. It also brings young people into contact with a health professional where they can discuss their relationship, any on-going contraception needs and the importance of using condoms to protect against sexually transmitted infections.

Emergency contraception is considered to have a similar safety profile for under 16s as for older women and is supplied to under 16s under medical supervision, within the legal framework established in 1986.

Drug Safety (Roaccutane and Antidepressants

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments she has made of the adequacy of the warning of the side effects of *(a)* roaccutane and *(b)* antidepressants; and what is his estimate of the effects of both. [28118]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 17 January 2002]*:The safety of all medicines on the United Kingdom market is continuously monitored by the Medicines Control Agency and the independent advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM). The product information includes the Summary of Product Characteristics for Prescribers and the Patient Information leaflet included in each pack of the medicine. These are also kept under continuous review to make sure that they provide the most up to date and relevant information to healthcare professionals and the public regarding the safe use of the medicine.

Roaccutane (isotretinoin) is licensed only for the treatment of very severe and disfiguring forms of acne. Roaccutane is a prescription only medicine and the terms of the marketing authorisation specify that it must be prescribed by, or under the supervision of, a consultant dermatologist. In addition, the supply of Roaccutane is restricted to hospitals or specified retail pharmacies.

The product information for Roaccutane was last updated in June 2001 with regard to warnings and possible side effects. One of the key previous amendments to the product information was the strengthening of the warning relating to depression and other psychiatric reactions including suicide, which was approved in March 1998.

Two major classes of antidepressant are the Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) and the Tricyclic Antidepressants. The safety profiles of SSRIs and TCAs are well-established and are reflected in the product information for prescribers and patients. MCA/CSM carried out a major review of the safety profile of SSRIs, which was completed in 2000 and resulted in product information being updated and an article being published in the drug safety bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance".

Respiratory Consultants

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the projected increase of 150 additional respiratory consultants by 2004 includes persons already in the process of specialising. [28809]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Current supply projections show that there will be an increase of around 150 trained specialists in respiratory medicine available to take up consultant posts in the specialty by 2004. The projections include specialist registrars currently in training in the specialty of respiratory medicine and take account of the long term effect of measures to increase consultant recruitment and deliver the NHS Plan target of 7,500 more consultants by 2004.

Worcestershire Community and Mental Health NHS Trust

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the deficit of the Worcestershire Community and Mental Health NHS trust; and what steps will be taken to address it. [28248]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Worcestershire Community and Mental Health national health service trust is projecting a £300,000 deficit against its turnover of £87 million (0.35 per cent.). I am advised that the underlying causes of the deficit are expenditure on bank and agency nursing staff, prescribed drugs and locum medical staff.

The trust has taken action to contain expenditure across the organisation, including reducing spending on locum medical staff by securing appointments to a number of consultant post vacancies.

Worcestershire health authority, Wyre Forest Primary Care Trust and prospective PCTs are currently in discussion with the trust in relation to the service and financial framework for 2002–03. I would expect the outcome of these discussions to secure a settlement which will fund the existing range of mental health services as well as developments in line with the NHS plan and National Service Framework for Mental Health and Older Adults.

Complementary Medicine

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that student doctors and nurses familiarise themselves with complementary medicine. [29434]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* It is not for the Department to determine the content of education and training for health professionals.

Individual medical schools determine their own undergraduate medical curriculum in the light of recommendations from the General Medical Council's Education Committee, which has the statutory responsibility to determine the extent of knowledge and skill required for the granting of primary medical qualifications in the United Kingdom. The Education Committee's recommendations on undergraduate medical education are currently under review.

For nursing, midwifery and health visiting, the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting determines the standard, kind and content of education leading to registration.

The Foundation for Integrated Medicine, with which the Department works closely, held a symposium on familiarisation in complementary and alternative medicine for medical undergraduates on 23 November 2001. This was aimed at curriculum co-ordinators and teachers of CAM in all medical schools and was well attended.

Learning Disabilities

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health.

(1) if he will meet representatives from Mencap to discuss care problems for children and adults with severe learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement; [29074]

(2) what steps he is taking to improve domiciliary care support for families caring for children and adults with profound and multiple learning difficulties; [29073]

(3) what steps he is taking to improve services for children and adults with profound and multiple learning difficulties following the publication of the White Paper, Valuing People. [29075]

Jacqui Smith: Our strategy for improving services for people with learning disability is set out in the White Paper, "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century", published in March 2001. It is the first White Paper on the subject for 30 years and takes a cradle to grave, cross-Government look at services. It is based on four key principles—rights, independence, choice, and inclusion. The proposals in "Valuing People" are for all children, young people, adults and older people with learning disabilities, and their families. They cover people with severe and profound learning disabilities through to people with mild or moderate learning disabilities and people with learning disabilities from across the autistic spectrum.

Learning disability partnership boards in each local authority area are responsible for overseeing implementation of the "Valuing People" proposals at local level. Boards consist of representatives of a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector interests, including social services, health, education, employment, and housing, as well as people with learning disabilities and carers. We will be looking to boards to ensure that the strategies they develop adequately reflect the needs of all learning disabled adults in their area. We will be looking closely at the joint investment plan boards have to produce by the end of this month to ensure that this happens.

Action to implement the proposals in "Valuing People" for improving the lives of children and young people with learning disabilities is being taken forward through the Quality Protects programme. Disabled children are now a priority area in this programme to transform children's social services. From 2001–02 to 2003–04 £60 million has been earmarked for services for disabled children and their families—£15 million this year and 2002–03 and £30 million in 2003–04.

We are also improving support for profound and multiple learning disabled children as part of other programmes to improve service for all disabled children:

The implementation of the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 from 1 April 2001 is allowing direct payments to be made to parents of disabled children, giving greater choice and flexibility in how they receive services.

From June 2001, we have funded the charity Contact a Family by £500,000 per annum to run a new National Information Centre for families with disabled children. This includes a national telephone help and advice line.

We have increased its funding to the Family Fund Trust which provides grants to help reduce the stress on families with severely disabled children. In 2000–01, the Government contributed funding of £25.4 million. This funding has increased by £1 million this year and will increase by £2 million in 2002–03 and £3 million in 2003–04.

We have recently announced the development of a National Service Framework (NSF) for children. This will set out to tackle inequalities, raise standards, and reduce unacceptable variations in NHS and social services. Services for disabled children will be a key part of the NSF.

Mencap contributed to the development of "Valuing People" through membership of two of the working groups which took forward the early work. It continues to be involved in the implementation of some of its proposals and its chief executive is a member of the Learning Disability Task Force which has been set up to oversee implementation at national level. Ministers and departmental officials regularly meet representatives of Mencap and discuss aspects of "Valuing People"; I hope to meet Mencap representatives again on 5 March.

Patient Journey Times

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people live more than half an hour's journey from *(a)* a malignant haematology and bone marrow transplant, *(b)* a chemotherapy out-patient, *(c)* a specialist endocrinology, *(d)* a neurology, *(e)* a renal, *(f)* a plastic surgery, *(g)* a genetics, *(h)* a paediatric cardiology and *(i)* a paediatric surgery unit (i) in each health authority (ii) in England and (iii) on the Isle of Wight; and what proportion these figures are of the population of each. [29664]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available as information collected by the Department identifies the national health service trust concerned but not the exact site or unit locations at which different specific services are provided.

Funeral Arrangements

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the number of NHS patients buried by NHS trusts in unmarked graves; [27353]

(2) if he will make a statement on the provision of minimum funeral standards in NHS hospitals. [27352]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally by the Department.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Asylum Appeals

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average delay between hearing an asylum appeal and the appellant receiving a determination was in the last quarter for which figures are available. [28903]

Ms Rosie Winterton: For asylum appeals heard between 1 October 2001 and 31 December 2001, the average time taken from hearing an asylum appeal to promulgation of the appeal is:

3.60 weeks at Adjudicator tier.

4.80 weeks at Tribunal tier.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeal determinations have been passed on to the Home Office to deliver since 7 January. [28901]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Between 7 January and 21 January the IAA have passed the Home Office 494 determinations for delivery.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals against refusal of asylum were completed between 1 April and 30 November 2001. [28902]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Between 1 April and 30 November 2001, 29,455 asylum appeals were completed at the Adjudicator stage; 9,435 leave to appeal to the Immigration Appellate Tribunal applications were dealt with; and 2,362 substantive hearings took place at the Tribunal.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of people have unsuccessfully appealed against refusal of asylum then sought to appeal against that decision in the last quarter for which figures are available. [28904]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Of asylum appeals received between 1 April 2001 and 30 June 2001, where the Adjudicator has made a decision: 80 per cent. were unsuccessful in their appeal against refusal of asylum. Of the 80 per cent. that were unsuccessful at Adjudicator appeal, 38 per cent. went on to appeal to the IAT.

Immigration Appellate Authority

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average time taken by the Immigration Appellate Authority is to process from receipt to determination *(a)* oral family visitor appeals, *(b)* paper-only family visitor appeals, *(c)* asylum appeals and *(d)* other immigration appeals. [28785]

Ms Rosie Winterton: For cases promulgated by the IAA between 1 April 2001 and 31 December 2001, the current average time to process cases from receipt to determination is:

6.95 weeks for oral family visitor appeals

2.68 weeks for paper-only family visitor appeals

19.80 weeks for asylum appeals

17.96 weeks for other immigration appeals.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* oral and *(b)* paper-only family visitor appeals were received by the Immigration Appellate Authority in December 2001. [28786]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In December 2001, the Immigration Appellate Authority received 97 cases for oral hearing and 129 cases for paper-only hearing.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the development of the information technology project for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service; whether guidance in the report Successful IT-Modernising Government in Action has been followed in relation to the project; whether the IT project is subject to any oversight by an IT project board; whether the IT system is able to record details of children who are the subject of court reports; whether the system fulfils obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998; and what was the *(a)* start date, *(b)* original planned completion date, *(c)* latest expected completion date, *(d)* original planned cost and *(e)* latest expected cost of the project. [28526]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Establishment of CAFCASS as a new, unified service provides an opportunity for improved communication and case management across the service. CAFCASS's IT project has been taken forward in two phases: Phase 1 installation of a national (England and Wales) infrastructure to support the service from launch; Phase 2 development of an integrated system to replace and extend Phase 1 systems and provide improved management information and interfaces with other organisations. The guidance in the report "Successful IT—Modernising Government in Action" has been followed. A Project Board was constituted under Prince 2 project management methodology.

In addition to the Phase 1 infrastructure, CAFCASS inherited systems holding case data from its predecessor services; almost all of which continue to provide operational service. This includes the recording of details of children who are the subject of court reports in the same way they did before CAFCASS's launch. CAFCASS is Data Protection Act registered. Future changes to systems will ensure CAFCASS's continued compliance.

(a) A Support Infrastructure Project was established, under Prince 2 methodology, in June 2000 with the Project Initiation Document issued at end September 2000.

(b) The planned completion date for Phase 1 was 1 April 2001. This was found to be unrealistic before rollout, and revised to 31 May 2001. The planned completion date for Phase 2 was 31 March 2002.

(c) Phase 1 was completed on time in May 2001. A statement of requirements for Phase 2 was completed for April 2001. CAFCASS is currently reviewing its IT strategy to assess immediate and longer term needs in the light of the operating experience it now has. This will include a decision on whether Phase 2 is the best option for CAFCASS's future operation.

(d) Phase 1 was planned at £5.2 million. Early estimates for Phase 2 were approximately £5–6 million. Firm costs have not been established as the project has not proceeded to procurement.

(e) Phase 1 was completed at £5.9 million due to more fit out work being needed than had been expected at many sites. CAFCASS is reviewing the IT strategy on which the future cost of Phase 2 will depend.

Market and Opinion Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what expenditure has been incurred by her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if she will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27945]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies conduct a range of exercises to measure public satisfaction with services and future needs. Many of these are carried out at a local level so that services can be provided to match the needs of local communities. The cost of collating and detailing all this activity would be disproportionate.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27966]

Mr. Wills: The amount spent by the Lord Chancellor's Department on refurbishment of buildings in the last four financial years is shown in the table.

£

Financial year	*Cost of refurbishment*
1997–98	23,517,936.20
1998–99	22,006,208.75
1999–2000	22,915,180.32
2000–01	26,497,353.26

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many publications were issued by her Department in each of the last four years. [11824]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is presented in the table.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
LCDHQ	37	38	42	41
Court Service	19	35	8	2
Land Registry	0	1	6	8
Public Record Office	8	9	13	7
Public Guardianship Office	2	2	4	14
Northern Ireland Court Service	3	3	7	10
Total	69	88	80	82

Golden Jubilee

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) when an announcement will be made as to which applicant towns have been granted city status to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty's Accession to the Throne; [28752]

(2) if she will arrange for more than one English town to be granted city status to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty's Accession to the Throne. [28753]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Decisions on the grant of city status are made by the Queen, under the Royal Prerogative, on the advice of Ministers. Her Majesty the Queen has not expressed a wish to grant city status to more than one town in England to mark Her Golden Jubilee, and my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor expects to advise Her on that basis. He will announce the results of the competition as soon as possible.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the applicants for the grant of a Lord Mayoralty or Lord Provostship to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [10823]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[pursuant to the reply, 25 October 2001, c. 400W]:* Applications for the grant of a Lord Mayoralty have been received from the following cities:

Bath
Cambridge
Carlisle
Chichester
Derby
Exeter
Gloucester
Lancaster
Lincoln
St. Albans
St. David's
Salford
Southampton
Sunderland
Truro
Wolverhampton
Worcester.

All the applications for the grant of Lord Mayoralty and for the grants of city status in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee are receiving consideration. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor will announce the results as soon as possible.

Terrorist Finance

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent discussions he has had with the Isle of Man Government over terrorist finance; and if he will make a statement. [28922]

Mr. Wills: I have not had personal discussions with the Isle of Man Government on this issue, but there have been a number of contacts between the United Kingdom and Isle of Man Governments at official level. The Isle of Man already has strong anti-money laundering legislation. The Isle of Man Government have committed themselves to implementing the Financial Action Task Force Special Recommendations on Terrorist Financing. The Isle of Man Government are moreover, introducing further anti-terrorism legislation, which includes new provisions to counteract terrorist financing. It will enable the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism to be extended to the Isle of Man.

Magistrates Courts (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of fines levied by magistrates courts in Worcestershire were collected in the latest 12 month period for which figures are available. [28900]

Mr. Wills: Magistrates Courts Committees have responsibility for the collection of a range of debts imposed through the courts, including not only fines but also fees, compensation, confiscation orders, legal aid contributions and some maintenance orders. It is not possible to separate out just the fines from the total.

It is not possible to provide the information requested in respect of Worcestershire only, as magistrates courts in Worcestershire are administered by West Mercia Magistrates Court Committee, which also covers Herefordshire and Shropshire and the information from these areas cannot be identified separately.

In addition to impositions by magistrates in West Mercia Magistrates Courts during the period October 2000 to September 2001, further amounts were imposed by other agencies, including the Crown court and magistrates in other areas. Some amounts imposed in West Mercia were transferred to other areas for collection.

The total amount of money collected by the courts in West Mercia included some amounts imposed in earlier periods, such as those being paid by instalment, and some amounts imposed in other areas, and therefore does not relate directly to an amount imposed in West Mercia.

The proportion of money collected by West Mercia Magistrates Courts Committee during the period October 2000 to September 2001 as a percentage of new impositions was 67 per cent.

Jurors (Allowances)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent assessment he has made of the extent to which payments to jurors meet the financial consequences of their appointment. [28820]

Mr. Wills: No assessment is made of the extent to which payments to jurors meet the financial consequences of their appointment. However, a potential juror can apply to a Crown court judge for excusal if they feel that they will suffer any financial loss through completing jury service. The maximum allowances payable to jurors are reviewed each year and are, as a general rule, increased in line with inflation. Lord Justice Auld has recommended a full review of the allowances payable to jurors. The Government are considering this as part of the package of recommendations.

Lay Magistrates

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* lay magistrates and *(b)* vacancies for lay magistrates there are, broken down by county. [29711]

Mr. Wills: The total number of lay magistrates in England and Wales is published in the "Judicial Appointments Annual Report". The table taken from the 2000–01 edition shows the total number of lay magistrates, broken down by commission area. Figures are not kept broken down by county.

The numbers of magistrates required on each Bench is determined each year by the Lord Chancellor's local Advisory Committee. It is determined after consultation with the Bench chairman and magistrates courts committee with the aim of achieving average sittings for each magistrate within the range 35 to 45 half-days a year.

The number depends on such factors as work load and the number of expected retirements and resignations, and the capacity of the Bench to cope with new appointments. Each Advisory Committee has a different recruitment cycle so the total number of vacancies is constantly changing. However, in the year ending 31 March 2001 the Lord Chancellor appointed 1,366 new magistrates against 1,667 vacancies that Advisory Committees hoped to fill (81.9 per cent.) The target is that by 2003 at least 95 per cent. of vacancies are filled every year.

Lay magistrates (excluding Duchy of Lancaster)—1 April 2001

		Age				Gender	
Commission area	*Total*	*Under 40*	*40–49*	*50–59*	*60–69*	*Male*	*Female*
Avon and Somerset	908	37	181	413	277	448	460
Bedfordshire	291	12	50	139	90	148	143
Cambridgeshire	345	12	73	162	98	169	176
Cheshire	495	33	98	216	148	247	248
City of London	120	7	33	52	28	55	65
Cleveland	428	20	93	192	123	236	192
Cumbria	306	12	45	153	96	157	149
Derbyshire	438	16	68	212	142	230	208
Devon and Cornwall	736	24	105	355	252	374	362
Dorset	352	7	64	165	116	182	170
Durham	308	14	63	143	88	172	136
Dyfed	240	3	49	116	72	146	94
East Sussex	405	8	66	182	149	191	214
Essex	647	14	116	342	175	329	318
Gloucestershire	294	6	47	143	98	159	135
Gwent	302	12	37	145	108	159	143
Hampshire	787	46	141	379	221	393	394
Hereford and Worcester	408	8	75	193	132	218	190
Hertfordshire	454	28	100	185	141	213	241
Humberside	450	13	81	231	125	218	232
Inner London	789	33	140	342	274	323	466
Isle of Wight	63	1	14	26	22	35	28
Kent	795	21	147	389	238	430	365
Leicestershire	522	19	98	234	171	272	250
Lincolnshire	397	20	66	196	115	187	210
Middlesex	950	40	172	430	308	444	506
Norfolk	441	12	64	220	145	214	227
North East London	546	38	117	240	151	299	247
North Yorkshire	375	8	77	177	113	187	188
Northamptonshire	339	10	55	152	122	175	164
Northumberland	189	7	34	70	78	91	98
North Wales	402	5	43	202	152	231	171
Nottinghamshire	681	31	114	277	259	340	341
Powys	86	4	16	40	26	46	40
Shropshire	271	5	52	124	90	147	124
South East London	409	21	94	173	121	212	197
South Wales	551	18	91	256	186	287	264
South West London	374	13	68	180	113	173	201
South Yorkshire	740	46	125	320	249	394	346
Staffordshire	572	23	122	249	178	298	274
Suffolk	352	11	56	194	91	185	167
Surrey	387	16	74	165	132	179	208
Thames Valley	937	29	145	488	275	439	498
Tyne and Wear	762	34	152	351	225	413	349
Warwickshire	204	4	34	104	62	106	98
West Glamorgan	275	7	32	117	119	148	127
West Midlands	1,684	88	345	720	531	885	799
West Sussex	349	16	65	161	107	177	172
West Yorkshire	1,329	76	283	600	370	674	655
Wiltshire	286	7	50	145	84	140	146
Total	24,771	995	4,530	11,460	7,786	12,575	12,196
Percentage of total	100	4	18.3	46.3	31.4	50.8	49.2

	Political affiliation					Ethnic background				
Commission area	*Conservative*	*Labour*	*Liberal Democrat*	*Plaid Cymru*	*Other and uncommitted*	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Other*	*Not known*
Avon and Somerset	294	191	149	0	274	840	16	9	4	39
Bedfordshire	111	54	39	0	87	258	4	15	5	9
Cambridgeshire	132	84	40	0	89	325	1	4	0	15
Cheshire	178	137	52	1	127	484	2	5	2	2
City of London	42	21	14	0	43	88	12	2	3	15
Cleveland	161	137	41	0	89	372	0	8	3	45

	Political affiliation					Ethnic background				
Commission area	*Conservative*	*Labour*	*Liberal Democrat*	*Plaid Cymru*	*Other and uncommitted*	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Other*	*Not known*
Cumbria	107	66	21	0	112	302	0	1	1	2
Derbyshire	169	116	56	0	97	422	4	8	1	3
Devon and Cornwall	290	111	137	0	198	700	0	2	5	29
Dorset	155	42	73	0	82	334	2	3	0	13
Durham	68	118	19	0	103	301	2	4	0	1
Dyfed	59	60	36	35	50	232	0	0	0	8
East Sussex	159	79	49	0	118	381	1	5	3	15
Essex	262	125	105	0	155	597	6	2	1	41
Gloucestershire	145	39	48	0	62	244	4	5	1	40
Gwent	75	87	21	4	115	285	1	5	0	11
Hampshire	270	147	130	0	240	747	4	9	11	16
Hereford and Worcester	195	95	54	0	64	366	1	4	3	34
Hertfordshire	154	118	64	0	118	413	7	7	2	25
Humberside	188	121	49	0	92	443	0	5	2	0
Inner London	313	252	96	0	128	596	75	15	16	87
Isle of Wight	25	8	10	0	20	58	2	0	0	3
Kent	334	150	131	0	180	664	7	18	7	99
Leicestershire	187	121	69	0	145	476	13	22	7	4
Lincolnshire	172	70	58	2	95	351	0	5	2	39
Middlesex	357	292	94	0	207	729	71	71	23	56
Norfolk	162	102	69	0	108	384	1	3	4	49
North East London	182	194	64	0	106	394	42	33	10	67
North Yorkshire	151	69	58	0	97	353	0	2	4	16
Northamptonshire	173	78	54	0	34	321	7	11	0	0
Northumberland	66	40	26	1	56	189	0	0	0	0
North Wales	139	103	74	50	36	393	1	2	1	5
Nottinghamshire	252	189	78	0	162	632	17	15	5	12
Powys	25	10	20	3	28	84	0	0	0	2
Shropshire	105	64	58	0	44	262	1	2	2	4
South East London	147	95	65	1	101	345	19	14	9	22
South Wales	134	163	76	16	162	519	4	8	6	14
South West London	168	73	78	0	55	237	10	5	6	116
South Yorkshire	214	258	103	0	165	700	10	17	6	7
Staffordshire	210	181	53	0	128	546	1	18	1	6
Suffolk	107	68	52	1	124	344	1	3	4	0
Surrey	162	62	43	0	120	370	1	3	6	7
Thames Valley	359	175	137	0	266	859	23	22	8	25
Tyne and Wear	214	264	102	0	182	697	4	9	7	45
Warwickshire	79	50	42	0	33	191	2	9	1	1
West Glamorgan	83	106	37	10	39	271	0	3	1	0
West Midlands	584	558	195	0	347	1,434	72	103	12	63
West Sussex	126	75	74	0	94	334	3	4	2	6
West Yorkshire	411	440	173	0	305	1,089	33	74	10	123
Wiltshire	119	48	47	0	72	272	3	4	0	7
Total	8,974	6,306	3,413	124	5,954	22,228	490	598	207	1,248
Percentage of total	36.2	25.5	13.8	0.5	24	89.7	2	2.4	0.8	5

Lay magistrates (Duchy of Lancaster)—1 April 2001

			Age			Gender	
Commission area	*Total*	*Under 40*	*40–49*	*50–59*	*60–69*	*Male*	*Female*
Greater Manchester	1,931	78	368	898	587	901	940
Lancashire	1,041	21	164	499	357	560	481
Merseyside	992	43	179	424	346	513	479

	Political affiliation					Ethnic background				
Commission area	*Conservative*	*Labour*	*Liberal Democrat*	*Plaid Cymru*	*Other and uncommitted*	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Other*	*Not known*
Greater Manchester	577	624	237	0	493	1,789	41	80	18	3
Lancashire	283	246	69	0	443	995	3	34	9	0
Merseyside	278	249	161	0	304	964	8	14	6	0

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 24 January 2002

TREASURY

Housing Market

14. **Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total equity in domestic homes in aggregate market values *(a)* now, *(b)* five years ago and *(c)* ten years ago. [27564]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The market value of households' total equity in domestic homes has risen by over 75 per cent. in the past five years. It was:

(a) £1,535 billion in 2001—Q3;

(b) £860 billion in 1996—Q3;

(c) £935 billion in 1991—Q3.

Climate Change Levy

15. **Mr. Challen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the climate change levy. [27565]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have received representations from a variety of businesses, trade bodies, environmental organisations and other interested parties. They are being considered as part of the Budget process.

Business Regulation

16. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from business leaders about the administrative burden on businesses. [27566]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor receives many representations from businesses and others on a range of issues, including administrative burdens. He receives a number of representations leading up to each Budget and in response to consultation documents and draft legislation that we publish to ensure that all those affected can have their say. Business leaders are represented on a number of consultative committees that discuss the implementation of new policies.

The Government welcome these representations and value their contribution to policy development.

Customs and Excise

17. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the seizure of motor vehicles by Customs and Excise in the last three years. [27567]

Mr. Boateng: Vehicle seizure is proving an effective weapon in tackling smuggling as evidenced by real reductions in levels of cross-channel passenger smuggling and its use has been recommended by two major, independent evaluations in the last three years. Customs have, in response to these recommendations, put in place a robust vehicle seizure policy which hits the smugglers hard. They have gone to great lengths to publicise their policy and ensure that people are aware of the penalties smugglers face.

Child Poverty

19. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he will introduce to reduce child poverty in the next four years. [27570]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government are committed to abolishing child poverty within a generation and halving it by 2010. As part of this commitment, we recently published a strategy document entitled "Tackling child poverty: giving every child the best possible start in life", which will inform the Budget and Spending Review 2002. As a result of tax and benefit changes announced in the last Parliament, there are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there would otherwise have been.

During this Parliament, the Government will continue to make progress towards their goals with the introduction of two new tax credits—the child tax credit and the working tax credit. The Government are also making substantial new investments in services for children. Over the four years to 2004, average real-terms annual growth in spending on education and training in England will be over $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. In addition, extra funds have been made available for SureStart, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Children's Fund.

Self-employment

20. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with organisations representing the self-employed on levels of their taxation. [27571]

Mr. Boateng: The Government meet a number of organisations throughout the year to discuss taxation issues.

Inner Cities

21. **John Robertson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he has taken to tackle poverty in inner city areas. [27572]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to tackling poverty and ensuring a just society with opportunity for all.

As a result of personal tax and benefit measures this Government have introduced since 1997, there are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there otherwise would have been, while the poorest third of all pensioners will receive an extra £2.5 billion this year.

The working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit, along with the first ever national minimum wage, are helping to make work pay, while prudent management of the economy is helping to achieve high levels of employment.

To increase investment in deprived areas, an exemption from stamp duty for all property transfers up to £150,000 became available in the UK's most deprived areas from 30 November 2001.

To further stimulate business investment in England the Government have committed £20 million in match funding to a £40 million Community Development Venture Fund. This fund will provide finance for firms operating in disadvantaged areas and the Government hope to see it up and running by the end of this financial year.

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, meanwhile, sets out how the Government will go about narrowing the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest. Key to the strategy is harnessing the mainstream resources of Government Departments, but a £900 million Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is also in place to kick start the renewal process in the 88 most deprived local authority areas.

The National Strategy and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund are specific to England.

Interest Rates

22. **Mr. Edward Davey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee's interest rate decision of 10 January on manufacturing industry. [27573]

Ruth Kelly: Decisions on interest rates are a matter for the Monetary Policy Committee. When forming its judgment, the MPC takes into account sectoral and regional information, as required by the Bank of England Act.

Euro

23. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent analysis he has conducted into the economic implications of euro membership for the United Kingdom. [27575]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

24. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanisms he has put in place to monitor the impact of the euro-zone economies on the UK economy. [27576]

Ruth Kelly: The impact of the euro-zone economies on the UK economy is monitored as part of the Treasury's regular forecast rounds. Further information can be found in the Treasury's pre-Budget and Budget reports.

31. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last discussed convergence criteria with the Governor of the Bank of England. [27583]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor meets regularly with the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss a range of issues.

33. **Adam Price:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take action to ensure a downward revision of the exchange rate of sterling against the euro. [27585]

Ruth Kelly: While the Government do not have an exchange rate target, a stable and competitive pound is sought over the medium-term. The key to a stable and competitive pound is low and stable inflation, backed up by sound public finances.

37. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on his five economic tests for joining the euro. [27590]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor has discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a regular basis, and on a wide range of issues.

Mike Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of euro notes and coins on the British economy. [27568]

Ruth Kelly: UK businesses that have trading links with the euro area, not just those who export or import, will be affected. The Government are therefore committed to working with business to secure the right level of euro preparations in the UK for working with the euro now.

International Development

25. **Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the Government will reach the UN 0.7 per cent. of gross national product target for international aid. [27577]

Mr. Boateng: The Government remain fully committed to the UN 0.7 per cent. ODA/GNP target. We have set out our plans for the next three years to 2003–04 and, as these show, development assistance as a proportion of GNP will rise to 0.33 per cent. in 2003–04, up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997. In his speech in New York and in his pre-Budget report speech, the chancellor emphasised his commitment to ensuring further substantial increases in development assistance. The forthcoming Spending Review is an opportunity to consider plans for development spending beyond 2003–04, alongside other priorities and pressures.

Aid effectiveness is also important as well as aid volumes. The Government are committed to redirecting their development assistance budget to the poorest countries, particularly those with effective Governments pursuing high growth and pro-poor economic and social policies. In addition, the Government have untied all their aid as from 1 April last year.

Taxation

26. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proportion of revenue raised by *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect means. [27578]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No such estimates are available, however a detailed breakdown of current receipts is published in Table B11 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

30. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to relieve the burden of taxation on the poorest families. [27582]

Dawn Primarolo: As a result of personal tax and benefit measures introduced since 1997, families with children in the poorest fifth of the population are on average £1,700 a year better off. The new working tax credit and child tax credit, the rates and thresholds of which will be announced in the Budget, will do more to help families on low incomes.

Low-income Families

27. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to support families on low income. [27579]

Dawn Primarolo: Over the course of the last Parliament, the Government introduced a number of changes to help provide decent family incomes, including:

increasing child benefit;

introducing the children's tax credit;

introducing the working families' tax credit; and

increasing the children's allowances in income support.

WFTC now benefits nearly 1.3 million families and on average these families are receiving £35 a week more than they did under family credit.

Building on success of WFTC, the Government will be introducing from 2003 a new credit for families with children, the child tax credit. We will provide a seamless stream of support for families, paid direct to the main carer, building on the foundations of universal child benefit. The child tax credit will be complemented by the working tax credit, which aims to improve work incentives and make work pay.

Deprived Areas

28. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to increase the levels of public expenditure on public services in areas of deprivation. [27580]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government are committed to narrowing the gap in outcomes between the most deprived parts of the country and the rest. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, published last year, sets out the Government's approach to renewing poor neighbourhoods.

Central to that approach is the harnessing of mainstream spending by Government Departments, to ensure improved basic standards of service provision in all areas of the country. Supporting this mainstream spending are a number of additional programmes, targeted toward helping the poorest off.

Aggregates Levy

32. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the aggregates producers and construction industries in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the UK on the implementation of the aggregates levy. [27584]

Mr. Boateng: A number of discussions have recently been held at both ministerial and official level with representatives of the aggregates industries throughout the UK, including Scotland, about the implementation of the aggregates levy.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of *(a)* the benefit of the proposed reduction in national insurance contributions as a result of the introduction of the aggregates levy in Scotland and *(b)* the yield of the levy. [29361]

Mr. Boateng: The reduction in employers' national insurance contributions associated with the introduction of the aggregates levy, along with the new sustainability fund, is designed to ensure that the aggregates levy does not result in an increased burden to business as a whole. The expected yield from the aggregates levy was published in November 2001 in the pre-Budget report.

Heavily Indebted Countries

34. **Roger Casale:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further steps he is taking to reduce the foreign debt of the world's poorest countries and to eliminate global poverty. [27586]

Mr. Boateng: The UK continues to work hard to ensure that the Heavily Indebted Country (HIPC) initiative delivers a sustainable relief from debt for eligible countries. We also call on other countries to follow our leads on bilateral policies, such as 100 per cent. relief at Decision Point, and in holding payments in trust for those countries yet to receive debt relief. Already 24 countries have qualified for debt relief, and they will benefit from over $56 billion in debt reduction, which will bring their debts to below the average of developing countries.

The objective of the UK's development assistance programme is to help reduce global poverty. We recognise the need to increase the overall level of finance for development in order to achieve this and have been active in mobilising increased international resources. In his speech to the Federal Reserve bank on 16 November, the Chancellor proposed the creation of an international development trust fund and called upon donor nations to substantially increase their development assistance budgets.

Tourism

35. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the level of value added tax applied to tourism services; and if he will make a statement. [27587]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have received various representations about the level and impact of VAT on the tourism industry, generally from businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. The Government are aware of the serious financial difficulties some of these businesses are facing and have put in place a package of measures specifically aimed at helping them. This includes flexible VAT payment arrangements for all those experiencing genuine difficulties and a joint helpline, set up by Customs and the Inland Revenue, to help resolve tax matters.

Budget

36. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with business leaders in advance of his forthcoming Budget. [27588]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor and his Ministers have numerous meetings with business leaders on a wide range of issues.

Internet Use

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the information in the National Statistics Omnibus for *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 on internet use, broken down by (i) age and (ii) gender, in each region and nation of the United Kingdom. [29695]

Ruth Kelly: The information falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 24 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question regarding data from the National Statistics Omnibus on internet use, for 2000 and 2001, broken down by (i) age and (ii) gender in each region and nation of the United Kingdom. (29695)

Since July 2000, the National Statistics Omnibus Survey has provided information on internet use for individuals in Great Britain based on a month's data gathered four times a year. These data are published along with household level data from the Expenditure and Food Survey, each quarter in the National Statistics First Release on Internet Access. These releases include background information on the National Statistics Omnibus Survey and the Expenditure and Food Survey.

The internet access first releases presenting the latest figures on internet access are available in the House of Commons Library. The release dated December 2001 presented data from the Expenditure and Food Survey for households with home access to the internet broken down by region.

Currently regional breakdowns of the individual level data from the Omnibus Survey are not published by age and gender in the internet access first releases as they are not reliable at that level of detail due to small sample sizes. We are currently investigating combining the four months of data to produce annual estimates which will increase the sample size and reliability of the information. If the results are then sufficiently robust we will publish this information and make it available in the House of Commons Library. We will inform you of the outcome.

Private Sector Capital

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the private sector net capital flow to and from the United Kingdom in each of last five years, indicating flows to *(a)* the USA, *(b)* South and Central America, *(c)* sub-Saharan Africa and *(d)* India and Pakistan. [29700]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 24 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on private sector net capital flows between the United Kingdom and (a) the USA, (b) South and Central America, (c) sub-Saharan Africa and (d) India and Pakistan. (29700)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not compile a full geographical breakdown of the United Kingdom's financial account (previously known as the capital account) flows, although some information is available for the direct investment component. A limited geographical breakdown of UK foreign direct investment, both abroad and in the UK is published annually in the Foreign Direct Investment first release. This first release was published on 13th December 2001 and is available in pdf file format from the ONS website in the press release facility:

http://www.statistics/gov.uk/press release/Archive.asp

More country information is available directly from the FDI inquiry itself. The contact details of the statistician responsible are printed on the front page of the first release.

Nuclear Industry

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for *(a)* fiscal measures and *(b)* other charges on the nuclear industry to take account of risks of nuclear accidents that are not met by the industry's own insurance. [27552]

Mr. Boateng: None. The third-party liability of nuclear installations is governed by international agreement. This is set at £140 million. In the UK, we require installations to purchase insurance for third-party cover for each incident up to this limit. The Department for Trade and Industry is currently negotiating with international partners to triple this limit. The nuclear industry will need to pay for additional commercial cover up to this limit; but we have no plans for fiscal or other charges.

Overseas Development

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the timetable for the achievement of the UN target for overseas development assistance and on steps taken to encourage other nations to increase aid budgets. [27569]

Mr. Boateng: The Government remain fully committed to the UN 0.7 per cent. ODA/GNP target. We have set out our plans for the next three years to 2003–04 and as these show, development assistance as a proportion of GNP will rise to 0.33 per cent. in 2003–04, up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997. In his speech in New York, the Chancellor emphasised his commitment to ensuring further substantial increases in development assistance. In his speech in New York in November, he called on all rich nations to commit further substantial increases to development assistance.

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will extend table 4.3 on the pre-Budget report by showing comparable figures for marginal deduction rates of *(a)* 50 per cent. or more and *(b)* 40 per cent. or more. [19649]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Before Budget 1998, an estimated 760,000 households faced marginal deduction rates (MDRs) of 50 per cent. or more, while 800,000 faced MDRs of 40 per cent. or more. After Budget 2001, an estimated 1.1 million households faced MDRs of 50 per cent. or more while 1.12 million faced MDRs of 40 per cent. or more. These figures, which cover the number of households in receipt of either income related benefits or WFTC where at least one person works 16 hours or more, include the effects of income tax and national insurance contributions, and the withdrawal of housing benefit and council tax benefit. The effect of tax and benefit changes introduced since Budget 1998, including the working families tax credit (WFTC), has reduced the number of households facing MDRs in excess of 70 per cent. by around half a million. As the WFTC is more generous than the family credit that it replaced, more families benefit from it, hence the larger numbers of households now facing MDRs at 40 and 50 per cent.

Tax Credits Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many penalties have been imposed on claimants for *(a)* working families tax credit and *(b)* disabled persons tax credit in each year since the credits commenced; how many of these penalties were imposed as a result of fraud; and what the total value of the penalties was. [25027]

Dawn Primarolo: The tables show the number of penalties imposed on applicants for working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit (WFTC and DPTC) for the periods in question. Since WFTC and DPTC were introduced in October 1999 up to 31 December 2001, 645 penalties have been imposed against WFTC and DPTC applicants. The total value of these penalties is £596,863.13.

	Number of penalties
WFTC	
1 October 1999–30 September 2000	106
1 October 2000–30 September 2001	401
1 October 2001–31 December 2001	128
DPTC	
1 October 1999–30 September 2000	1
1 October 2000–30 September 2001	8
1 October 2001–31 December 2001	1

Footballers' Testimonials

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will treat the proceeds from footballers' testimonials as taxable income. [29257]

Dawn Primarolo: The proceeds from footballers' testimonial events may already be chargeable to tax under present law. However, whether they are or not depends on the circumstances of each particular case.

Poverty

John Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to reduce poverty in inner city areas. [29278]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to tackling poverty and ensuring a just society with opportunity for all.

As a result of personal tax and benefit measures this Government have introduced since 1997, there are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there otherwise would have been, while the poorest third of all pensioners will receive an extra £2.5 billion this year.

The working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit, along with the first ever national minimum wage, are helping to make work pay, while prudent management of the economy is helping to achieve high levels of employment.

To increase investment in deprived areas, an exemption from stamp duty for all property transfers up to £150,000 became available in the UK's most deprived areas from 30 November 2001.

To further stimulate business investment in England, the Government have committed £20 million in match funding to a £40 million Community Development Venture Fund. This fund will provide finance for firms operating in disadvantaged areas and the Government hope to see it up and running by the end of this financial year.

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal meanwhile, sets out how the Government will go about narrowing the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest. Key to the strategy is harnessing the mainstream resources of Government Departments, but a £900 million Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is also in place to kick start the renewal process in the 88 most deprived local authority areas.

The National Strategy and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund are specific to England.

Self-Assessment (Tax)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many fines were levied for the late return of self-assessment tax forms from people resident in the Buckingham constituency in the last 12 months; and how much was raised. [30065]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not hold local figures of this nature.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people *(a)* in total and *(b)* living in the Buckingham constituency were fined for late filing of self-assessment forms in each year since 1997; and how much revenue was raised in each year. [30062]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not hold local figures of this nature. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers I gave him on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 226–27W, for the national figures requested.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to exempt small rural quarries from the proposed aggregates tax. [28717]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no such plans.

Small Businesses (Insurance)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an assessment of changes to the cost and availability of insurance for small businesses since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [27549]

Ruth Kelly: Insurance companies themselves remain responsible for determining the terms, conditions, and price of their products. Costs and availability change constantly in response to market conditions.

I am not aware of any greater changes since 11 September, except in the case of insurance against terrorism risk. Nor am I aware of any special impact on small businesses.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the reply of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 323–34W, how many of the working families tax credit applications investigated by the Inland Revenue involved co-operation between the Inland Revenue and *(a)* the investigative organisations of the Benefits Agency, *(b)* the National Intelligence Unit and *(c)* local authorities; and what proceedings are in place for facilitating such co-operation. [26473]

Dawn Primarolo: Exact figures are not available in the format requested. However, the nature of such investigations often means that information is shared and passed on between the Inland Revenue, other Government Departments and local authorities, as allowed by statutory regulations.

DEFENCE

C130K

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 662W, how many C130Ks he plans to decommission in each year over the next 10 years; and when he plans to have completed its phasing out. [26623]

Mr. Ingram: Current plans for the last element of the rolling programme to replace part of the Hercules C130K fleet with C130Js are for two of the C130K aircraft based at RAF Lyneham to be retired by 30 April 2002 and one aircraft to be retired towards the end of 2002. There are currently no detailed plans for the decommissioning of the remaining 26 C130K Hercules, which is predicted to occur by around the end of this decade.

Service Applicants (Fitness)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of applicants to the *(a)* Army, *(b)* RAF, *(c)* Royal Navy and *(d)* Royal Marines were turned down on medical grounds in each quarter of the last seven years, broken down by gender. [26136]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 339W. The information that is available is shown in the table, which includes some corrected and updated figures for Royal Marine Other Ranks. A breakdown by gender is only available for the Army. The principal reason for the significant variation in failure rates between the RAF other ranks and those of the other services is that the medical examination is undertaken at a much later stage in the selection process, by which time many of the applicants have already withdrawn for other reasons.

	Medical rejections	
Service	*Number*	*Percentage of applicants*
Royal Navy Officers		
1996–97	32	2.7
1997–98	16	1.1
1998–99	32	2.3
1999–2000	39	2.7
2000–01	43	3.0
2001–02[1]	35	3.2
Royal Navy Ratings		
1996–97	544	6.7
1997–98	764	8.9
1998–99	813	8.2
1999–2000	821	8.7
2000–01	923	9.8
2001–02[1]	626	10.2
Royal Marines Officers		
1996–97	3	0.9
1997–98	1	0.4
1998–99	3	0.9
1999–2000	18	5.7
2000–01	21	4.9
2001–02[1]	7	2.7
Royal Marines Other Ranks[2]		
1996–97	55	2.0
1997–98	91	2.8
1998–99	126	3.7
1999–2000	189	4.9
2000–01	200	5.5
2001–02[1]	140	6.3
Army Officers		
1995–96	30	2.0 (80%m, 20%f)
1996–97	38	2.4 (79%m, 21%f)
1997–98	41	2.6 (78%m, 22%f)
1998–99	42	3.7 (81%m, 19%f)
1999–2000	60	4.9 (80%m, 20%f)
2000–01	33	2.9 (76%m, 24%f)
2001–02[1]	43	7.2 (77%m, 23%f)
Army Other Ranks		
1997–98	1,880	10.3 (81%m, 19%f)
1998–99	2.304	11.1 (81%m, 19%f)
1999–2000	1,660	8.0 (84%m, 16%f)
2000–01	1,132	5.5 (87%m, 13%f)
2001–02[1]	—[3]	—[3]
Royal Air Force Officers		
1996–97	184	3.5
1997–98	183	3.8
1998–99	215	4.2
1999–2000	215	4.0
2000–01	255	5.4
2001–02[1]	107	14.2
Royal Air Force Airmen/Airwomen		
1996–97	56	1.3
1997–98	88	0.9
1998–99	105	0.6
1999–2000	126	0.8
2000–01	193	1.2
2001–02[1]	184	1.8

[1] The figures for 2001–02 are as at 7 December 2001

[2] Women are currently only permitted to join the Royal Marine Band Service

[3] Army Other Rank figures unavailable for 2001–02

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26988]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, since 1999–2000, the Ministry of Defence's total public relations expenditure has been published in the annual departmental performance report.

Legislation

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to introduce a similar measure to the US Montgomery GI Enhancement Act in the UK. [27720]

Mr. Ingram: I have no such plans.

Trident

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the studies sponsored by his Department in each of the last three years concerning future options for Trident. [28260]

Mr. Ingram: We said in the Strategic Defence Review of 1998 that we need to ensure that Trident can remain an effective deterrent for up to 30 years. As with other key military capabilities, we routinely undertake studies into options for achieving the optimum operational life and value for money.

Service Deployment

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries in which British troops are *(a)* stationed and *(b)* active. [28080]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 16 January 2002, *Office Report*, column 316. A copy of this letter was sent on 19 January 2002, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. British troops are deployed on active service in 18 countries and overseas territories in the Balkans, the middle east, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, Georgia, the United States of America, Africa and Asia, as well as at sea.

Royal Navy Vessels

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels have been brought into service since 1997; and for how long they are estimated to remain in service. [28349]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Navy has brought 16 vessels into service since 1997. On current plans their estimated remaining service lives are as shown in the table.

Vessels brought into service since 1997	*Estimated remaining service life (years)*
HMS Ocean	16
HMS Grafton	18
HMS Kent	19
HMS Portland	19
HMS Sutherland	18
HMS Penzance	21
HMS Pembroke	21
HMS Grimsby	22
HMS Bangor	22
HMS Ramsey	23
HMS Blyth	24
HMS Vigilant	[1]—
HMS Vengeance	[1]—
HMS Scott	20
HMS Raider	21
HMS Tracker	20

[1] Information withheld under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, relating to defence, security and international relations.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels have been decommissioned since 1997; and what the age of each of the vessels was. [28348]

Mr. Ingram: Since 1997 21 Royal Navy Vessels have been decommissioned. The age of each vessel when decommissioned is shown in the table.

Vessels decommissioned since 1997	*Age of vessel when decommissioned (years)*
HMS Peacock	14
HMS Plover	14
HMS Starling	13
HMS Birmingham	26
HMS Boxer	18
HMS Beaver	16
HMS Brave	17
HMS London	14
HMS Bicester	15
HMS Berkeley	14
HMS Orwell	15
HMS Orkney	22
HMS Blackwater	13
HMS Spey	13
HMS Arun	12
HMS Itchen	13
HMS Herald	28
HMS Intrepid	37
HMS Bulldog	34
HMS Cromer	11
HMS Coventry	15

Warships

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete the Review of Warship Maintenance and Support; and if he will make a statement. [28929]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence is seeking to modernise arrangements for warship support and achieve savings to the defence budget. We have received proposals from the dockyard companies for potential partnering arrangements at the naval bases at Portsmouth, Devonport and the Clyde. We have also received alternative proposals from our trade unions for the pursuit of efficiencies at the naval bases. All options are currently being compared for value for money, together with their technical, commercial and human resource implications, for a decision in the near future.

Royal Armoured Corps

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is *(a)* the establishment and *(b)* the actual strength, excluding attached troops, of the regiments of the Royal Armoured Corps. [28833]

Mr. Ingram: The establishment and strength of the regiments of the Royal Armoured Corps as at 1 December 2001 is detailed in the table:

Regiment	*Establishment*	*Strength*
Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment	324	312
Queens Dragoon Guards	358	383
Scots Dragoon Guards	451	386
9th/12th Royal Lancers	358	353
2 Royal Tank Regiment	460	447
Royal Dragoon Guards	451	459
Household Cavalry Regiment	421	412
Queen's Royal Hussars	451	300
King's Royal Hussars	451	417
Light Dragoons	429	391
Queen's Royal Lancers	451	253
Joint Nuclear Biological and Chemical Regiment	200	196

Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration the Armed Forces Pension Scheme review has given to using additional voluntary contributions as a means of making specialist pay pensionable; and if he will make a statement. [29237]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence plans to introduce a facility to enable all serving personnel to make additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) through deductions from pay, to enable them to "top up" their pension benefits where they have scope to do so under Inland Revenue rules. This would also be available for those on specialist pay. As we made clear in our consultation document on the current review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, published in March of last year, we are also considering the option that MOD, as employer, might fund part of the costs of AVCs in respect of specialist pay. The decision will depend on whether or not this is judged to be a reasonable and cost-effective way of improving recruitment and retention. A decision on the review is expected later this year.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for an education campaign to enable armed forces personnel to make informed judgments on the Armed Forces Pension Review Body's conclusions. [29495]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence is in the process of developing a multi-media communications package which we plan will comprise booklets, letters, factsheets, internet material, personal forecasts, presentations and roadshows designed to enable all serving military personnel to make a timely and informed judgment about the relative merits of the current Armed Forces Pension Scheme and the anticipated new scheme.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment the Armed Forces Pension Review Body has made of proposals to uplift for inflation the best of the three final years of a serviceman or woman's service when determining pensionable pay; and if he will make a statement. [29496]

Mr. Ingram: In the Ministry of Defence's consultation document on the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) Review, the MOD indicated the intention to move to a final salary scheme and the possibility of basing the pension on the best year's salary in the three years before retirement. In response to views expressed during the consultation, we are currently considering whether we might introduce a mechanism to provide an uplift for inflation under the new AFPS.

Welbeck Army College

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future use of Welbeck Army College. [29297]

Mr. Ingram: The Army sixth form college will remain at its current Welbeck home until at least September 2005. Following detailed examination during the Defence Training Review, it has been decided to expand the college to include students from the RAF, Royal Navy and the civil service. A public-private partnership (PPP) project is currently under way to deliver the requirements of the Defence sixth form college, and this will be judged against a benchmark site at a former Army Barracks at Garats Hay near Loughborough. I must stress that the private sector is not constrained by this benchmark, and tenderers will be given the opportunity of selecting an alternative site to provide the facilities and services. It is too early to say where the college will ultimately be sited.

Army Complement

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the change in the shortfall in the official complement of the Army was between *(a)* 1 May 1997, *(b)* 1 May 2001 and *(c)* the latest date for which the figure is available. [29469]

Mr. Ingram: The table shows the shortfall in whole Army strength figures against the in-year requirement as at 1 May 1997, 1 May 2001 and 1 December 2001 which are the latest data available.

	Shortfall
(a) 1 May 1997	4,933
(b) 1 May 2001	6,761
(c) 1 December 2001	6,169

US Forces

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he takes to ensure that activities undertaken by US forces operating in the UK are consistent with the terms of the European convention on human rights; and if he will make a statement. [28708]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* US forces operating in the UK are a visiting force, and as such are subject to the NATO Status of Forces agreement of 1951, which requires a visiting force to respect the law of the host nation. Our legislation recognises the European convention on human rights.

EU/NATO Capabilities

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* those non-EU European NATO member countries and other EU applicant countries who have offered contributions for improving European military capability and *(b)* those countries whose offer has been (i) accepted and (ii) rejected; and if he will make a statement. [29636]

Mr. Hoon: The countries are:

Bulgaria
Republic of Cyprus
Czech Republic
Estonia
Hungary
Iceland
Latvia
Lithuania
Malta
Norway
Poland
Romania
Slovak Republic
Slovenia
Turkey.

The EU has welcomed all these contributions.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress made by the EU/NATO working groups on *(a)* the preparation of an EU/NATO security agreement, *(b)* the setting of capability goals, *(c)* the preparation of an agreement on the modalities for EU access to NATO assets and capabilities and *(d)* the definition of permanent arrangements for future EU/NATO consultations in times of crisis and non-crisis; and if he will make a statement. [29635]

Mr. Hoon: Work between the EU and NATO continues in all the areas mentioned. An interim security agreement is in place. Discussions continue on details of a permanent arrangement. NATO experts have been closely involved with EU colleagues in work to elaborate and identify the capabilities required for the Headline Goal. The EU's capability action plan will be implemented in close co-operation with relevant NATO initiatives. We have made good progress towards agreement on EU access to NATO assets and capabilities, although arrangements are not yet finalised. Permanent consultation arrangements between NATO and the EU were defined at Nice and have been implemented satisfactorily. Consultation and transparency between the two organisations have been very good.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to take an initiative within the European Union to improve the arrangements for the participation of non-EU allied countries in the ESDP in order to create an associate status for the countries concerned; and if he will make a statement. [29632]

Mr. Hoon: The EU is committed to the fullest possible involvement of both the non-EU European allies and the EU accession partners in the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

The Nice European Council agreed a substantial set of provisions governing consultation with these countries and arrangements for their participation in EU-led operations. These arrangements already provide for a high level of participation by our non-EU European allies in ESDP.

Operation Fingal

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he anticipates that the UK numbers of ground troops in Operation Fingal will be substantially reduced. [29608]

Mr. Ingram: I anticipate that the number of UK forces involved in Operation Fingal, the UK contribution to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), will reduce substantially when the UK command of the ISAF ends in mid-April 2002.

International Terrorism

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his European counterparts regarding the Belgian initiative of drawing up a White Paper on European security by submitting a WEU contribution on the repercussions of countering the threat that international terrorism poses for collective defence; and if he will make a statement. [29631]

Mr. Hoon: Discussions were held during the Belgian Presidency of the EU with a view to commissioning the EU Institute for Security Studies to produce an academic overview of member states' defence policies. This work will be taken forward under the Spanish Presidency.

European Crisis Management

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the EU Council to establish an intergovernmental council fund for European military and non-military crisis-management operations outside the control of the Commission and the European Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [29633]

Mr. Hoon: Discussions are continuing between EU member states over the financial arrangements to be put in place for European military and any non-military crisis management operations under the Common Foreign and Security Policy. No decisions have yet been reached.

European Defence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to transform the informal meeting of EU defence ministers into a formal defence council meeting; and if he will make a statement. [29637]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 22 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 736W. There are no plans to transform informal Defence Ministers' meetings into a formal council.

We expect informal meetings of EU Defence Ministers to continue, and the General Affairs Council provides a forum for formal decision-making as and when required.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the EU military exercise programme covering the period 2001 to 2006. [29634]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mr. Hoon: The exercise programme is confined to political/military decision making procedures. There are no plans to hold separate EU field exercises.

European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) procedures will be exercised for the first time in May 2002. This exercise will test top level co-ordination and the decision-making procedures of the ESDP bodies, including the Political and Security Committee, the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff. In 2003 there are plans to hold another exercise at this higher strategic level with EU and NATO bodies, and a workshop to examine the role of deployable force headquarters at the operational level.

Beyond that, the EU envisages further exercises, expanded to include testing of the linkages and procedures between the higher strategic level structures and potential operational headquarters for EU-led operations, such as SHAPE or national headquarters like the UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters at Northwood. However, no detailed exercise planning beyond 2002 has been carried out.

EU troop exercises are unnecessary, as current programmes of national, NATO and bi or multi-lateral exercises are already sufficient to generate the capabilities that the EU is likely to require.

Armed Forces (Marital Status)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what programmes are run by the RAF, the Army and the Royal Navy to assist service men and women who are experiencing relationship breakdown; and if he will make a statement. [27676]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The services rarely interfere or become directly involved in matrimonial or relationship disputes, unless requested to do so by the parties concerned, as these are essentially a private matter. Nevertheless, each service places great importance on the welfare of service families, recognising the significant contribution they make as well as the deleterious effects of mobility and separation aspects of service life. Consequently, there is a range of welfare facilities able to provide help and support on a wide range of issues, including relationship breakdown if requested. The service welfare organisations liaise with Relate at local level and provide those service personnel seeking professional marriage guidance counselling with an early referral.

With the naval service personnel are able to meet with a professional from one of the Navy's caring organisations: the Naval Personal and Family Service (NPFS) or the Naval Chaplaincy Service (NCS). The NPFS employs qualified social workers able to offer direct advice, counselling, support (practical and emotional) and advocacy on behalf of clients.

Within the Army, the main source of help is through the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association—Forces Help (SSAFA-FH), a charity contracted to provide a range of professional welfare services, particularly overseas. Army personnel also have access to other welfare organisations, available at most garrisons, as follows: the Army Welfare Service (AWS), the Army Families Federation (AFF) and the Army Families Advice Bureau (AFAB). In Germany, the Army also provides funding for dependants to return to the UK to be trained in marriage guidance counselling by Relate; this then provides an additional resource in theatre.

As with the other two services, the RAF has no programmes in place specifically to provide assistance to those experiencing relationship problems. However, there are a number of networks and organisations available to individuals or couples able to provide support and guidance if requested. These include the SSAFA-FH RAF(UK) Social Work Service which has staff based on 32 Stations in the UK. The RAF has recently launched a community support website that gives practical information and links to organisations which may be able to provide the necessary help and guidance. The website, www.rafcom.co.uk, is designed to tackle issues that may contribute to relationship problems.

Gulf War

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to apply for funds, in order to assist UK service men, from the seized assets of Saddam Hussein made available by the US Government for anybody affected by the Gulf war. [29379]

Dr. Moonie: I have no such plans. The Ministry of Defence cannot use frozen Iraqi funds to pay compensation to individuals who have suffered as a result of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Only a small percentage of the Iraqi funds frozen by the UK authorities under UN resolutions actually belong to the Iraqi Government, the bulk belonging either to businesses or private individuals who are resident in Iraq. UN resolutions do not allow the use of these funds in this way.

Claims against Iraq were handled by the UN Compensation Commission (UNCC). The UNCC imposed a deadline for the submission of claims of 1 January 1995. Claims from UK claimants to the UNCC were submitted via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Claims Section.

I cannot comment on the policy of the US Government towards their own personnel.

Territorial Army

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 828–29W, on the Territorial Army, when he will write to the hon. Member for New Forest West. [29839]

Dr. Moonie: I wrote to the hon. Member on 23 January.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27396]

Mr. MacShane: The total expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on external public relations consultants in the last four years was:

	£
2001–02	[1]60,904
2000–01	347,857
1999–2000	0
1998–99	59,337

[1] Financial year to date

The bulk of the expenditure in 2000–01 relates to the "Know Before You Go" public awareness campaign aimed at encouraging UK travellers to be better prepared when travelling overseas.

Among the FCO's executive non-departmental public bodies, only the British Council has engaged such consultants in the same period. The costs were:

	£
2001–02	[1]20,925
2000–01	4,650
1999–2000	3,256
1998–99	214,901

[1] Taking December 2001 as the last month

The figure for 1998–99 includes costs connected with the British Council's "Vision" project. The project looked at re-defining the Council's purpose and strategic direction and examining its visual identity.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what costs have been incurred by his Department to date in connection with the Saville inquiry; and what his estimate is of the final cost to his Department. [29589]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has incurred no direct costs in connection with the Bloody Sunday inquiry.

A few staff spend a small amount of time dealing with issues relating to the inquiry, but they absorb this task into their normal duties, so staff time costs are not separately calculated.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to co-operate with the European Parliament's inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak. [29771]

Peter Hain: The Government are ready to co-operate with the Temporary Committee that has been appointed by the European Parliament to inquire into the recent outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. We await news of how the committee intends to proceed.

Charter of Fundamental Rights

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which cases the Charter of Fundamental Rights has been cited in the European Court of Justice in the Advocate-General's opinion or the judges' decision. [29768]

Peter Hain: Providing the full list would incur disproportionate cost.

We are aware of the following cases in the European Court of Justice where the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights has been referred to in the Advocate General's opinion or the judge's decision:

The Opinion, delivered on 8 February 2001, of Advocate General Tizzano: Case C173/99: Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematographic and Theatre Union (BECTU) *v.* Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

The Opinion, delivered on 22 March 2001, of Advocate General Jacobs: Case 270/99: Z *v.* European Parliament.

The Opinion, delivered on 14 June 2001, of Advocate General Jacobs: Case C-377/98: Kingdom of the Netherlands *v.* European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

The Opinion, delivered on 10 July 2001, of Advocate General Leger: Case C-353/99 P: Council of the European Union *v.* Heidi Hautala MEP.

The Opinion, delivered on 20 September 2001, of Advocate General Mischo: Joined Cases C20/00 and C64/00: Booker Agriculture Ltd *v.* The Scottish Ministers and Hydro Seafood.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which member state Governments have stated that they *(a)* wish and *(b)* do not wish to see the Charter of Fundamental Rights incorporated into European Union law. [29769]

Peter Hain: The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights was proclaimed as a political declaration at the Nice European Council in December 1999.

At the same time Heads of State or Government agreed to a review of the Charter's status at the next intergovernmental conference in 2004 as to whether, and if so how, the Charter should be integrated into the treaties.

A Convention on the Future of Europe, whose membership includes the representatives of the Heads of State or Government of the member states, and which will hold its inaugural meeting on 28 February 2002, has been convened to prepare the 2004 intergovernmental conference. One of the issues it will consider will be the charter's status.

European Union

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the accession process of the candidate countries for accession to the European Union under the Treaty of Nice; and what plans the Government have to ensure enlargement if the Republic of Ireland does not ratify the treaty. [29767]

Peter Hain: The Government believe that the Treaty of Nice is necessary to make enlargement a success. We understand that the Irish Government are considering how to address the concerns of the Irish people regarding the treaty. In the meantime, as agreed by all EU Governments, including the Irish Government, other member states are proceeding with their ratification processes. The Laeken

European Council in December 2001 confirmed the EU's determination to complete negotiations with those candidates that are ready by the end of 2002 so that they can join the EU in time to participate in the 2004 European Parliament elections. The UK is fully committed to this goal.

European Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's objectives are for the European Council's meeting at Barcelona; and if he will make a statement. [29765]

Peter Hain: At the European Council in Barcelona, Heads of Government will review progress on economic and social reform undertaken as a result of proposals agreed at the Lisbon and Stockholm European Councils. The Government are committed to this reform process, with its strategic aim of making the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world with full employment by 2010.

The Government's objective for Barcelona is to take stock of progress made, and to focus member states' efforts on making concrete progress on the further reforms necessary. We would particularly like to see progress in the five areas identified by the Spanish presidency as priorities: transport and communication networks; energy; education and training; labour markets; and financial services. We support the Spanish approach and will be working closely with them throughout their presidency.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in achieving the goals of economic and social reform set out at the European Council's meeting at Lisbon; and if he will make a statement. [29766]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Economic Secretary to the Treasury gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 640W.

The hon. Member may also be interested to read the recent Communication by the European Commission "The Lisbon Strategy—Making Change Happen". The Government welcome the Commission's Communication, which will feed into discussion at the European Council in Barcelona, 15–16 March. This document is available at www.europa.eu.int/comm/press_room/presspacks/Barcelona/com_en.pdf.

Gibraltar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in deciding the methods by which Gibraltarian voters will vote in European parliamentary elections; and if he will make a statement. [29770]

Peter Hain: We are seeking legislative time in order to introduce primary legislation to extend the European parliamentary franchise to Gibraltar. The detail of the legislative and practical arrangements is currently being considered by both HMG and the Government of Gibraltar and consultations between us are already under way.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Clocks (Portcullis House)

John Austin: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee how many clocks have been *(a)* ordered and *(b)* supplied for installation in Portcullis House; when the order was placed; when the installation is planned to take place; and if he will make a statement. [28331]

Derek Conway *[holding answer 22 January 2002]*: No clocks have been ordered or installed in Portcullis House.

When Portcullis House was being planned no provision was made for a master and slave clock system or individual clocks to be provided because the time would be available on other equipment in the offices: the annunciator, telephones and personal computers.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HIV

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funds her Department made available for educating children and young people in African nations on methods of HIV prevention in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [29329]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not available as DFID activities in this area usually represent only part of wider projects and as such cannot be separately identified within our statistics.

Tanzania

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of Tanzania's debt has been written off as part of the enhanced HIPC initiative; and what assessment she has made of the effect on annual debt repayments of the purchase of an air traffic control system. [29705]

Hilary Benn: Under the enhanced HIPC initiative, 54 per cent. of Tanzania's debt in real terms was written off. This does not include the full value of Paris Club debt prior to the enhanced HIPC initiative or the additional bilateral relief beyond the enhanced HIPC initiative. Additional relief beyond the enhanced HIPC initiative will reduce Tanzania's debt by a further 9 per cent.

It is difficult to assess the impact of individual projects on Tanzania's overall debt servicing obligations. However we recognise that debt management is a key part of maintaining longer-term debt sustainability. DFID is working closely with the World bank, International Monetary Fund, other development partners and the Government of Tanzania to ensure that such investments, and the resulting impact on annual debt repayments, are fully scrutinised as part of the public expenditure review and debt management processes.

GATS

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the effects of GATS—General Agreement on Trade in Services—on developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [29508]

Hilary Benn: It is not yet possible to make a full assessment as so few commitments have been made under the GATS. The Government support on-going assessment of trade in services, as do all WTO members. DFID is funding both the World bank and UNCTAD to help build capacity in developing countries to identify areas of interest to them.

Afghanistan

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what commitment the Government plan to make at the Tokyo conference on reconstruction in Afghanistan. [29274]

Hilary Benn: At the conference in Tokyo on Afghan reconstruction from 20 to 21 January, the UK announced a significant contribution of £200 million over the next five years for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. This pledge is in addition to the significant sums that DFID contributes to the World bank, European Union and Asian development banks who will also be channelling funds into Afghanistan over coming years. DFID's share of the European Union pledge alone will be 20 per cent.

Belize

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the relations between her Department and the Government of Belize. [29276]

Hilary Benn: We remain engaged in dialogue with the Government of Belize on a range of issues aimed at supporting and promoting a pro-poor Government agenda. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met with Prime Minister Musa in October 2001 as part of this engagement and DFID officials also continue to have regular contact.

PRIME MINISTER

PIU Energy Report

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Prime Minister if the finding of the PIU report on Energy will be made public; and if he will make a statement. [30188]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 816W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil S[illegible]

Ms Atherton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Government Departments are reviewing the mandatory retirement age for civil servants. [29761]

Mr. Leslie: All Departments have reviewed mandatory retirement age for their staff in the light of the "Winning the Generation Game" report from the Performance and Innovation Unit.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the *(a)* time scale and *(b)* terms of reference for the review of the mandatory retirement age for senior civil servants in his Department. [29760]

Mr. Leslie: The normal retirement age for members of the senior civil service is 60. The main objective of the review currently being undertaken is to produce a model which will provide Departments with a range of options for managing their senior civil servants. These could include opportunities for moving to flexible working patterns as part of a phased retirement process, and mechanisms for retaining staff with strong potential beyond age 60, particularly those with key skills in such areas as project management. The time scale for implementation has not been finalised but will take account of the differing circumstances and staffing structures of Departments.

WALES

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in "Good Policy Making". [28413]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has produced no regulatory impact assessments since August 2001.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by date and subject, the representations he has received in *(a)* writing and *(b)* person from (i) the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales, (ii) the Welsh Assembly Government and (iii) committees of the National Assembly for Wales regarding the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. [30673]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular meetings with the First Minister and periodic meetings with the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities. We discuss a range of matters, including the Spending Review.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by date and subject, representations he has made in *(a)* writing and *(b)* person to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. [30672]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am in regular contact with my Cabinet colleagues on the Spending Review.

Regional Regeneration

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what his estimate is of per capita Government public expenditure on regeneration in each of the Welsh regions in financial years (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02; [26868]

(2) if he will list the regeneration projects *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partly funded by the Government in the Cynon Valley for the financial years (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02 with the expenditure to date on each project. [26867]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The National Assembly for Wales has responsibility for the allocation and distribution of funds aimed at regenerating areas of Wales, including the Cynon Valley.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans his Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29036]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The existence of the Barnett formula means that I am not required to make a full Spending Review submission.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26828]

Dr. John Reid: The information is as follows:

Two portable computers, a printer and a camcorder to the value of £8,000.

In addition, computer components were reported stolen from official premises. These components were old and of negligible value.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [28004]

Dr. John Reid: On 4 December 1998, a portable computer, valued at £3,000 was reported stolen from an officer's home.

On 7 May 1999, a portable computer and printer valued at £4,500 were reported stolen from official premises.

On 26 May 1999, a camcorder, valued at £500, was reported stolen from departmental offices.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28105]

Dr. John Reid: I last used the railway service on official duties in late November 2001.

Details of the travel arrangements of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland are by convention not published.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Literacy and Numeracy Test Results

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about her Department's inquiry into the premature disclosure of the literacy and numeracy test results in September 2001. [30933]

Mr. Timms: An inquiry into the premature disclosure of the literacy and numeracy test results has been carried out by the Department's security officer, in conjunction with the Department's head of statistics and a representative of the National Statistician.

The inquiry has been unable to establish the source or nature of the leak of the 2001 Key Stage 2 test results. The main reasons for this are:

(a) There appears to have been no leak of a paper or document; the *Evening Standard* article on 14 September seems to have been based on one or more casual conversations from which the story was constructed; and

(b) Given the significant number of people in the Department for Education and Skills, Ofsted, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the associated contractors and those elsewhere who had access to the information, there is no prospect of identifying the person who provided the relevant information, unless the journalist concerned is prepared to reveal his source or sources.

The inquiry concludes that there is no evidence of a deliberate disclosure from Ministers, officials or advisers in the Department. Indeed, on the limited evidence available, the disclosure seems unlikely to have come from any departmental source.

The inquiry makes a number of recommendations for strengthening the control and management of sensitive information in advance of the advertised day of its disclosure. These are being taken forward.

Temporary Classrooms

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of temporary classrooms in each English local education authority. [29333]

John Healey: As part of the data collected through the appraisal of Asset Management Plans, the Department has some information on the overall floor area of temporary accommodation at schools, but it is not possible from these data to identify with any precision the actual number of temporary classrooms.

The data we have on temporary buildings will be appraised with a view to publishing analysis to support benchmarking later this year.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many private finance initiatives there have been which have involved replacing temporary classrooms with permanent buildings; if she will list each of these; and if she will make a statement. [29334]

John Healey: This information is not held centrally, and there would be a disproportionate cost involved in obtaining it from local education authorities and voluntary aided schools.

Scotland

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of the staff members of her Department located in London have been involved in matters pertaining to Scotland since the inception of her Department in its present form. [29517]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* This Department is broadly responsible for matters pertaining to England, with some responsibilities for Wales, and for representing UK education and skills policy to audiences outside the UK. Officials of this Department liaise with their counterparts in the Scottish Executive on matters of mutual interest. Details of the number of staff located in London who have been involved in matters pertaining to Scotland could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Hackney Borough Council

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what intervention powers her Department has used in respect of Hackney borough council since May 1997. [29732]

Mr. Timms: In July 1999 the Secretary of State directed the council to outsource its school improvement service and ethnic minority service to Nord Anglia plc under powers set out in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

In October 2001 the Secretary of State directed the council to implement arrangements to establish a new body to run the education services in Hackney from August 2002 under powers set out in the Local Government Act 1999.

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate the number of individuals in her *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26325]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of people in DfES, (and before June 2001 in DfEE) and related agencies whose annual remuneration including benefits exceeded *(a)* £100,000 and *(b)* £200,000 in each of the last four years is as follows:

Year	*Over £100,000*	*Over £200,000*
1998	3	0
1999	3	0
2000	6	0
2001	7	0

Information relating to staff for non-departmental public bodies is available in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 2000" copies are available in the Library.

School Expulsions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children from *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools were expelled from their school in each year since 1997. [28340]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on how many children have been excluded from primary and secondary schools since 1997 are set out in the National Statistics publication "Permanent Exclusions from Maintained Schools in England, Issue 10/01", published in November 2001. Information from this publication can be viewed at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/SBU/b0298/index.html. Figures for 2000–01 are not yet available.

Number of permanent exclusions

Year	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*
1996–97	1,573	10,463
1997–98	1,539	10,087
1998–99	1,366	8,636
1999–2000	1,226	6,713

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children expelled from school were *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls in each year since 1997. [28341]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on the proportion of permanent exclusions from maintained schools since 1997 are set out in the National Statistics publication "Permanent Exclusions from Maintained Schools in England, Issue 10–01", published in November 2001. Information from this publication can be viewed at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/SBU/b0298/index.html. Figures for 2000–01 are not yet available.

Percentage of permanent exclusions

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Boys	83	84	83	84
Girls	17	16	17	16

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what process is to be followed if a child is to be expelled from school. [28342]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The law governing exclusions is set out in sections 64 to 68 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The DfES guidance on the procedures for excluding pupils is set out in Circular 10/99, Chapter 6, Annexe D. Head teachers, governors, LEAs and appeal panels must have regard to this guidance in discharging their functions in relation to pupil exclusion. I have attached a copy of Circular 10/99 to this reply and will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the most common reason was for expulsion for *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls in each of the last five years. [28343]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The Department does not collect data on the specific reasons for expulsion from schools.

Pupil:Teacher Ratio

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the pupil:teacher ratio was in maintained secondary schools in each education authority in each year since 1979. [28848]

Mr. Timms: The table provides information for 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994 and each year from 1996 to 2001.

Pupil:Teacher ratio in maintained secondary schools by local education authority area, position in January each year

	2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1994*	*1989*	*1984*	*1979*
Avon[1]	—	—	—	—	—	16.3	16.2	16.1	16.4	17.0
Barking and Dagenham	16.8	16.3	16.0	15.8	15.7	16.1	17.1	14.1	15.8	15.5
Barnet	15.9	15.4	15.3	15.2	14.8	14.8	15.0	14.6	14.3	15.4
Barnsley	18.1	18.3	18.0	18.1	17.8	17.9	17.1	15.5	16.3	16.8
Bath and North East Somerset	16.9	16.8	16.6	16.9	16.6	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire[1]	—	—	—	—	17.8	17.8	17.2	16.6	17.5	17.1
Bedfordshire[2]	18.8	18.7	18.5	18.3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Berkshire[1]	—	—	—	16.5	16.6	16.3	16.0	15.5	16.2	16.8
Bexley	17.8	17.6	17.2	17.4	17.4	16.6	16.5	16.2	16.7	17.2
Birmingham	16.2	16.1	16.2	16.1	16.1	15.9	16.3	16.4	16.4	16.5
Blackburn with Darwen	16.2	16.5	16.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blackpool	17.3	17.3	17.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bolton	16.6	16.7	16.7	16.8	16.8	16.5	16.1	14.6	16.0	16.5
Bournemouth	17.6	18.2	17.5	17.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bracknell Forest	17.0	16.9	17.3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford	17.1	17.3	18.6	18.5	18.1	17.7	17.3	14.6	17.4	17.6
Brent	16.0	15.8	15.0	15.0	15.2	15.4	15.9	13.7	12.8	13.9
Brighton and Hove	16.5	16.5	16.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bristol, City of	15.7	15.7	16.0	16.1	15.6	—	—	—	—	—
Bromley	17.1	17.2	16.6	16.4	16.3	15.7	16.2	15.6	16.2	16.7
Buckinghamshire[1]	—	—	—	—	17.3	17.1	16.8	16.1	16.5	16.8
Buckinghamshire[2]	18.3	18.4	18.1	17.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bury	17.6	17.7	17.7	17.6	17.2	17.2	17.1	14.4	15.6	16.5
Calderdale	17.1	17.1	16.5	16.6	16.9	16.9	16.3	15.1	17.1	17.6
Cambridgeshire[1]	—	—	—	17.5	17.4	17.2	17.1	15.9	16.8	16.5
Cambridgeshire[2]	18.7	18.7	18.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Camden	15.3	15.6	15.2	14.6	14.3	14.9	15.3	—	—	—
Cheshire[1]	—	—	—	17.2	17.0	17.0	16.8	15.8	16.9	16.9
Cheshire[2]	16.9	17.1	17.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
City of London[3]	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	16.8	17.0	14.8	16.2	17.6
Cornwall	18.0	18.3	18.1	17.8	17.4	17.5	17.3	16.2	16.9	16.8
Coventry	17.0	17.1	16.8	16.9	16.6	16.1	15.8	13.9	15.9	16.0
Croydon	17.3	16.9	16.4	16.4	16.2	16.3	16.9	15.3	15.7	16.3
Cumbria	16.8	17.0	16.7	16.9	16.9	16.9	16.0	15.0	15.9	16.5
Darlington	16.9	17.4	17.2	17.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derby	17.1	16.9	16.9	16.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire[1]	—	—	—	—	17.4	17.0	15.7	14.1	16.9	17.5
Derbyshire[2]	17.5	17.8	17.8	17.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Devon[1]	—	—	—	17.3	17.1	17.0	16.4	16.4	16.9	17.9
Devon[2]	17.7	17.8	17.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Doncaster	17.2	17.3	16.9	16.9	16.6	16.8	16.3	15.2	16.2	16.6
Dorset[1]	—	—	—	—	17.7	17.5	17.2	16.2	17.1	17.5
Dorset[2]	18.5	18.4	18.0	18.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dudley	16.8	16.4	16.4	16.5	16.5	16.5	16.7	13.8	16.1	17.7
Durham[1]	—	—	—	—	17.4	17.5	16.6	15.9	16.8	16.8
Durham[2]	17.2	17.4	17.3	17.4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ealing	17.6	17.1	16.7	16.9	16.4	16.5	16.3	13.4	14.9	15.6
East Riding of Yorkshire	17.9	17.9	18.0	17.5	17.0	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex[1]	—	—	—	—	16.2	16.0	16.1	15.7	17.1	17.1
East Sussex[2]	17.1	17.1	16.9	16.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Enfield	16.3	16.3	15.9	15.8	15.9	16.3	16.6	15.3	15.4	16.8
Essex[1]	—	—	—	16.7	16.6	16.7	17.1	16.3	17.1	17.7
Essex[2]	17.5	17.2	16.8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gateshead	16.2	17.1	16.7	16.3	16.0	15.9	15.7	14.1	16.1	16.5
Gloucestershire	17.2	17.4	17.4	17.2	17.3	17.6	17.7	15.8	17.0	17.4
Greenwich	16.0	16.6	16.3	16.3	16.0	15.6	16.4	—	—	—
Hackney	17.1	15.5	15.7	14.5	14.9	14.7	14.6	—	—	—
Halton	16.3	16.6	16.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	17.5	18.1	17.5	17.5	17.4	16.8	15.2	—	—	—
Hampshire[1]	—	—	—	—	16.6	16.6	16.4	15.8	17.1	16.7
Hampshire[2]	17.6	17.4	17.1	16.8	—	—	—	—	—	—

Pupil:Teacher ratio in maintained secondary schools by local education authority area, position in January each year

	2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1994*	*1989*	*1984*	*1979*
Haringey	15.8	15.4	15.4	14.7	14.6	14.6	13.9	12.8	13.5	16.0
Harrow	17.0	16.8	15.9	15.9	15.5	15.6	15.7	15.3	14.1	14.9
Hartlepool	17.5	17.9	17.8	18.0	17.1	—	—	—	—	—
Havering	17.2	16.6	16.6	16.4	16.3	16.2	16.5	15.2	15.7	17.0
Hereford and Worcester[1]	—	—	—	18.0	17.8	17.7	17.3	16.6	17.5	17.6
Herefordshire[2]	17.1	17.0	17.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	16.7	16.6	16.3	16.1	13.9	15.7	15.7	15.1	16.1	15.9
Hillingdon	17.0	16.4	16.3	15.8	16.2	16.4	16.4	15.4	15.7	16.5
Hounslow	16.9	17.2	16.5	16.2	15.8	15.8	16.2	14.4	15.0	15.9
Humberside[1]	—	—	—	—	—	17.2	17.5	15.5	16.2	16.7
Inner London Education Authority[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	14.4	13.3	14.9
Isle of Wight	17.8	18.1	18.1	18.5	18.2	18.1	17.6	16.4	18.0	18.6
Isles of Scilly	10.0	8.8	8.8	8.4	9.3	8.1	8.8	7.8	11.7	11.3
Islington	15.9	15.9	16.0	16.0	15.7	15.7	15.4	—	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea	15.2	14.0	14.3	13.4	12.9	13.3	12.5	—	—	—
Kent[1]	—	—	—	16.7	16.3	16.4	16.7	16.2	17.1	17.7
Kent[2]	17.4	17.3	16.8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	18.7	18.9	18.6	18.6	18.2	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston-upon-Thames	16.9	17.1	16.7	16.4	16.6	16.2	16.0	13.8	16.2	16.1
Kirklees	17.2	17.4	17.4	17.5	17.4	16.8	15.8	14.7	17.1	17.7
Knowsley	16.2	16.5	16.6	17.0	16.6	16.6	16.9	13.7	15.3	16.3
Lambeth	15.4	15.2	15.5	14.7	15.0	14.4	14.8	—	—	—
Lancashire[1]	—	—	—	16.7	16.7	17.0	16.1	15.4	16.4	16.5
Lancashire[2]	16.9	17.0	16.8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leeds	16.8	17.0	16.9	16.8	16.9	16.6	16.0	14.7	16.4	17.8
Leicester	16.7	16.4	16.3	16.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire[1]	—	—	—	—	17.2	17.1	16.4	14.7	16.0	16.2
Leicestershire[2]	17.8	17.9	17.6	17.4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lewisham	15.8	15.6	15.7	15.6	15.2	15.2	16.2	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	17.2	17.1	16.6	16.2	15.9	15.9	15.8	16.2	17.0	17.0
Liverpool	16.2	16.7	16.8	16.7	16.7	16.2	15.9	14.1	16.3	16.1
Luton	17.9	17.3	16.9	16.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Manchester	16.0	16.0	16.1	16.1	15.9	15.5	15.7	13.4	14.8	14.9
Medway	17.3	17.4	17.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merton	18.0	17.8	17.6	17.0	17.2	17.2	16.1	15.7	17.5	17.6
Middlesbrough	16.2	16.4	16.5	16.4	16.2	—	—	—	—	—
Milton Keynes	17.3	17.1	16.7	17.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	16.6	17.0	17.0	17.1	16.8	16.9	16.5	14.3	14.2	14.7
Newham	15.8	16.6	16.4	16.3	16.3	16.5	17.1	13.6	14.1	16.1
Norfolk	16.9	16.6	16.2	16.1	15.7	15.6	15.7	15.4	16.6	17.6
North East Lincolnshire	18.8	18.5	18.2	19.1	17.9	—	—	—	—	—
North Lincolnshire	18.2	18.7	18.2	18.1	17.5	—	—	—	—	—
North Somerset	17.6	17.3	17.0	17.1	16.0	—	—	—	—	—
North Tyneside	16.5	16.8	17.2	17.5	17.2	17.1	17.0	13.8	14.5	16.0
North Yorkshire[1]	—	—	—	—	—	16.3	16.0	15.5	16.4	17.0
North Yorkshire[2]	16.6	16.6	16.7	16.6	16.4	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	17.4	17.5	17.4	17.2	16.8	17.0	16.6	15.9	16.5	17.0
Northumberland	18.6	19.0	19.0	19.2	18.6	18.5	18.1	16.2	17.3	17.5
Nottingham	16.1	16.7	16.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire[1]	—	—	—	17.4	17.3	16.7	15.8	14.6	15.8	16.8
Nottinghamshire[2]	17.5	17.9	17.8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oldham	15.7	15.9	16.0	16.1	16.0	15.9	15.6	14.9	17.0	17.6
Oxfordshire	17.8	18.1	18.3	18.0	18.1	17.9	16.8	16.1	17.2	17.9
Peterborough	17.2	17.1	16.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plymouth	17.1	17.5	—7.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Poole	16.8	17.1	16.9	16.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Portsmouth	17.9	17.8	17.8	17.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Reading	16.0	16.2	16.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Redbridge	16.7	16.8	16.7	16.7	16.5	16.2	16.6	15.4	16.0	17.1
Redcar and Cleveland	16.5	17.2	17.5	17.4	17.2	—	—	—	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	18.4	17.9	16.2	16.6	17.0	16.5	16.9	15.6	16.3	17.0
Rochdale	17.1	17.2	16.9	16.9	16.7	16.9	16.9	14.0	15.0	15.4
Rotherham	16.6	17.1	17.2	17.4	17.2	17.0	15.8	14.8	16.7	17.2
Rutland	17.1	17.0	16.8	17.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Salford	16.3	16.8	16.7	16.3	16.4	16.5	16.6	13.3	15.5	15.8
Sandwell	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.6	16.8	16.5	15.9	13.7	15.4	15.8
Sefton	16.3	16.7	16.7	16.4	16.3	16.4	16.4	16.0	16.4	17.2
Sheffield	17.3	17.6	17.6	17.7	17.3	17.5	16.5	14.8	15.6	16.4
Shropshire	17.3	17.0	16.8	16.6	16.5	16.5	16.1	15.1	16.2	16.8
Slough	16.5	16.4	16.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull	17.7	17.9	17.5	17.4	16.8	16.6	16.4	15.4	16.8	16.1
Somerset	18.5	18.6	18.4	18.1	18.0	18.0	16.6	15.8	17.6	18.5
South Gloucestershire	16.7	17.0	17.0	16.9	16.7	—	—	—	—	—

Pupil:Teacher ratio in maintained secondary schools by local education authority area, position in January each year

	2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1994*	*1989*	*1984*	*1979*
South Tyneside	17.7	17.3	17.4	17.5	16.9	16.8	17.0	14.0	14.9	16.0
Southampton	16.3	16.7	16.5	16.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southend-on-Sea	16.8	16.9	16.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southwark	16.4	16.2	15.8	15.9	15.8	16.2	17.0	—	—	—
St. Helens	16.1	16.1	15.9	16.0	15.6	15.6	15.3	13.5	15.6	16.2
Staffordshire[1]	—	—	—	—	17.7	17.6	17.5	15.9	16.3	16.7
Staffordshire[2]	17.6	17.9	17.9	18.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stockport	16.7	17.2	17.5	17.3	16.9	16.6	16.4	14.7	16.4	17.3
Stockton-on-Tees	17.3	17.2	17.5	17.3	17.1	—	—	—	—	—
Stoke-on-Trent	17.4	17.6	17.5	17.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	17.1	16.9	16.6	16.5	16.6	16.5	16.2	16.6	16.9	18.1
Sunderland	16.1	16.4	16.5	16.5	16.3	16.1	16.1	14.5	16.2	16.7
Surrey	17.6	17.3	17.1	16.9	16.9	16.6	16.8	15.2	16.4	16.2
Sutton	17.6	17.6	17.0	17.0	16.8	16.6	16.9	16.0	17.1	17.3
Swindon	17.2	17.8	18.0	17.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tameside	17.5	17.4	17.6	17.6	17.8	17.8	17.4	15.3	15.9	16.5
Telford and Wrekin	16.8	17.0	16.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thurrock	18.9	18.5	18.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Torbay	17.0	17.0	17.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tower Hamlets	16.1	16.3	16.0	15.8	15.9	15.2	14.2	—	—	—
Trafford	16.7	16.9	16.3	16.4	16.7	16.6	16.2	14.5	16.6	16.5
Wakefield	18.1	18.4	18.1	17.4	16.9	16.4	16.3	15.1	17.3	18.0
Walsall	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.3	16.2	15.8	13.6	14.9	15.8
Waltham Forest	15.8	16.0	15.7	15.6	15.6	15.8	15.9	12.5	13.7	14.7
Wandsworth	15.8	16.1	16.1	15.7	15.5	15.9	14.7	—	—	—
Warrington	17.0	17.4	17.3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	17.2	17.2	17.2	17.4	17.4	16.8	16.1	15.7	17.1	16.9
West Berkshire	16.6	16.5	16.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Sussex	17.0	17.2	16.9	16.9	16.8	16.6	16.5	16.1	17.0	18.1
Westminster	15.0	15.1	15.0	15.2	14.9	15.2	15.5	—	—	—
Wigan	16.5	16.5	16.5	16.3	16.0	16.0	15.8	13.5	15.3	15.8
Wiltshire[1]	—	—	—	—	17.0	16.8	16.7	15.6	17.0	17.7
Wiltshire[2]	17.5	17.9	17.7	17.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Windsor and Maidenhead	17.5	17.3	17.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wirral	16.1	16.5	16.4	16.4	16.2	16.2	16.3	15.4	16.1	17.1
Wokingham	16.6	16.9	17.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	16.4	16.6	16.4	16.1	15.9	16.1	15.4	13.6	14.8	15.6
Worcestershire	18.3	18.5	18.3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
York	16.6	16.9	16.7	16.2	16.3	—	—	—	—	—
ENGLAND	17.1	17.2	17.0	16.9	16.7	16.6	16.4	15.3	16.2	16.7

[1] Before local government reorganisation
[2] After local government reorganisation
[3] No schools of this type

Information cannot be provided for all the years requested in the time available.

PFI

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the costs and benefits of using private finance initiatives to improve and upgrade the school buildings in each local education authority in England; and if she will make a statement. [29197]

John Healey *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Local education authorities (LEAs) are responsible for the local strategic management of the school estate. This responsibility includes the need to ensure best value when making investment decisions. When considering major investment in school buildings, one of the options that authorities should consider is the private finance initiative. Where an LEA decides, following an options appraisal, that it wishes to pursue the use of PFI, it will submit an outline proposal to my Department. If, following evaluation against published criteria, provisional support is received to develop an outline business case, the authority must demonstrate that PFI represents a better value for money solution than a conventionally procured alternative.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many local education authorities have put in place private finance initiative capital projects since May 1997; if she will list each such local education authority and the size of each capital project; and if she will make a statement. [29199]

John Healey *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the list of current projects, regularly published by my Department, via the Teachernet website at www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolsprivatefinanceinitiative. This provides details of the numbers and PFI credit allocations for private finance initiative capital projects undertaken by local education authorities.

PFI Contracts

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on encouraging local education authorities to use PFI contracts to upgrade school buildings; and if she will make a statement. [29200]

John Healey *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The use of PFI contracts to upgrade school buildings is one of a number of funding options available to local education authorities. If an authority wishes to develop a PFI project, it must first make preliminary proposals to the Department, which are assessed against published criteria. Although the Department currently allocates each year around £850 million PFI credits, we are not able to support all of the proposals put forward. The proposals which best match the published criteria receive provisional support at this stage.

Projects are not formally approved until a full Outline Business Case (OBC) has been submitted to the Treasury-chaired Project Review Group. This OBC must include a public sector comparator (PSC). It is a condition of approval that the proposed PFI solution must demonstrate better value for money than the PSC, as well as satisfy various other criteria necessary to demonstrate the viability of the project.

Selection

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist schools are exercising the provision in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to select up to 10 per cent. of pupils by aptitude in relevant subjects; if she will list such schools; and if she will make a statement. [29205]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* On the basis of the latest collated information, 25 specialist schools are selecting a proportion of their pupils by aptitude in the relevant subjects. Details are given in the following table. Most of these schools were selecting by aptitude prior to the 1998 Act.

Specialist schools—selection by aptitude

School	*LEA*	*Specialism*	*School's status*	*Percentage of pupils selected on aptitude*
Archbishop Blanch School	Liverpool	Technology	Voluntary Aided	5.6
Archbishop Temple School	Lancashire	Technology	Voluntary Aided	10.0
Bohunt School	Hampshire	Language	Foundation	10.0
Brentwood Ursuline Convent School	Essex	Arts	Voluntary Aided	10.0
Chaucer Technical School	Kent	Technology	Foundation	[1]100.0
Chestnut Grove School	Wandsworth	Arts	Community	16.0
Cornwallis School	Kent	Technology	Foundation	10.0
Deacon's School	Peterborough, City	Technology	Foundation	15.0
George Spencer GM School	Nottinghamshire	Technology	Foundation	10.0
Heathside School	Surrey	Technology	Foundation	4.0
Hockerill Anglo European School	Hertfordshire	Language	Foundation	10.0
Intake High School	Leeds	Arts	Community	10.0
Lodge Park School	Northamptonshire	Technology	Foundation	10.0
Lynn Grove VA High School	Norfolk	Technology	Voluntary Aided	15.0
Mill Hill County High School	Barnet, LB of	Technology	Foundation	10.0
Ninestiles School	Birmingham	Technology	Foundation	10.0
Oakbank School	Bradford	Sports	Foundation	10.0
Oldfield School	Bath and NE Somerset	Sports	Foundation	10.0
Philip Morant School	Essex	Technology	Foundation	15.0
Sandwich Technology School	Kent	Technology	Foundation	10.0
Small Heath School	Birmingham	Technology	Foundation	10.0
St. Margaret's C of E High School	Liverpool	Technology	Voluntary Aided	15.0
St. Martin's School	Essex	Technology	Foundation	10.0
St. Marylebone School (The)	Westminster	Arts	Voluntary Aided	10.0
Wye Valley School (The)	Buckinghamshire	Sports	Community	10.0

[1] Up to

Notes:

1. This information was taken from progress reports submitted by 403 schools in December 2000. Progress reports for schools operational as of September 2000 have been received but the information from these has not yet been collated.
2. The 1998 School Standards and Framework Act provides for schools with a specialism to select up to 10 per cent. of their intake on the basis of aptitude for a specialist subject prescribed in regulations. Prior to the 1998 Act schools had greater discretion over aptitude selection and this accounts for the percentages above 10 per cent.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assistance the Technology Colleges Trust is giving to schools seeking specialist status; how many grants have been facilitated by the trust in order to help schools to meet the £50,000 threshold of specialist status since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [29198]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The Technology Colleges Trust is an independent charitable trust grant-aided by the Department to advise schools in drawing up applications, and through its work in promoting the Specialist Schools Programme attracts sponsorship to support individual school's applications. Detailed information on grants facilitated by the Technology Colleges Trust is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, we do have an analysis of applications for Arts, Technology and Language status in June and October 1999, and March 2000, which shows that of the 238 applications submitted 88 applicants included sponsorship facilitated through the Technology Colleges Trust.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what further research she has commissioned in order to evaluate the effects on school performance of specialist school status; and if she will make a statement. [29206]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* For Excellence in Cities (EiC) areas there is an element of work about specialist schools within the research about the impact of EiC policies being carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research. Research on the impact of specialist schools was commissioned by the then DfEE from Leeds university and the London school of economics and was published in 2000. Last October Ofsted published a report on the progress of specialist schools. Professor David Jesson will shortly be preparing an analysis of educational outcomes of specialist schools in 2001 on behalf of the Technology Colleges Trust and I expect this to be published in the spring.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Bodies

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the members she has appointed to public bodies in the last 12 months. [27885]

Tessa Jowell: In the last 12 months, my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and I made 121 public appointments and reappointments to public bodies as detailed. This does not include appointments to bodies sponsored by my Department where my role is to advise on appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister or, through him, by Her Majesty the Queen.

Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection

Dr. Richard Dorment

Advisory Committee on Historic Wrecks Sites

Dr. Mark Redknap

Alcohol Education and Research Council

Professor Ilana Crome
Peter Harraway
Angela Gaye Pedlow
John Bennett
Robin Davidson
Henry Fairweather
William Rae
Elizabeth Thom
Richard Velleman

Arts Council of England

Gerry Robinson
Deborah Bull CBE
Hilary Strong
Anish Kapoor
Joanne MacGregor

British Library

Lord Eatwell
Ian Millar
John Ritblat
Simon Olswang

Broadcasting Standards Commission

Lord Dubs
Lady Warner
David Boulton
Strachan Heppell CB
Sally O'Sullivan
Kathleen Worrall

CABE

Sophie Andreae
The Community Fund
Richard Martineau
Elaine Appelbee
Paul Cavanagh
Lorne MacLeod
James Strachan
Jeff Carroll

English Heritage

Andrew Fane
Professor David Cannadine
Jane Grenville
Leslie Sparks OBE
Professor Lola Young OBE

Film Council

Tim Bevan
Sarah Radcyffe
James Lee
Professor John Hill
Ian Smith

Football Licensing Authority

Clive Sherling
Kenneth Culley
Dr. Judith Fisher
Trevor Hobday
Professor Jan Wright

Gaming Board for Great Britain

Peter Dean CBE
Roy Penrose OBE, QPM

Historic Royal Palaces

General Sir Roger Wheeler
Angela Heylin OBE
Jane Sharman OBE
Dr. Simon Jones LVO

Horserace Betting Levy Appeals Tribunal for England and Wales

Brian Waters

Horserace Betting Levy Board

Robert Hughes CBE

Horserace Totalisator

Lord Lipsey

Horniman Museum

Professor Kenneth Gregory

Independent Television Commission

Sir Robin Biggam
Baroness Janet Whitaker
Alistair Balls CB
Sir Michael Checkland
Chitra Bharucha
Dr. Michael Shea CVO

Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester
Professor Laurie Wood

National Lottery Commission
Harriet Spicer
Timothy Hornsby

National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
Christopher Green
Professor Gordon McGregor Reid
Gillian Reynolds
Professor John Tarn
Earl of Derby
Viscountess Mersey

NESTA
Lord David Puttnam CBE
Dr. Yvonne Barnett
Professor Sir Chris Evans OBE
Dame Bridget Ogilvie
Yasmin Anwar
Graham Ross Russell
Francois Matarasso
Baroness Genista McIntosh
Paul Daniel
Professor Janice Kirkpatrick

New Opportunity Fund
Baroness Pitkeathley
Professor Eric James Bolton CB
Barbara Stephens
David Carrington
Professor John Patmore CBE
Dugald Mackie
Sian Griffiths
Polly Hudson
Geoffrey Thompson MBE
Jill Barrow
Breidge Gadd CBE
David Campbell

Public Lending Right Advisory Committee
Dr. James Parker

Public Lending Right Registrar
Dr. James Parker

Radio Authority
Thomas Prag
Geraint Talfan Davies

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art
Sir John Guinness CB
Johnny Van Haeften

Royal Armouries
Ann Green

S4C
Christopher Llewellyn
Eira Davies

Sport England
Tessa Sanderson OBE
Brigid Simmonds

Treasure Valuation Committee
Professor Norman Palmer
Thomas Curtis
Mary Sinclair
Dr. Arthur MacGregor
Dr. Jack Ogden

Theatres Trust
Sir John Drummond CBE
Sir Stephen Waley-Cohen
John Muir
Martyn Heighton

UK Sport
Sir Rodney Walker
Tanni Grey-Thompson OBE
Zahara Hyde Peters
Adrian Metcalfe OBE
Gavin Stewart

Yorkshire and Humber Regional Cultural Consortium
Clive Leach CBE.

ITC/BBC Appointments

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many names were on the shortlist she received from the panel from which she had to propose a deputy-chairman of the ITC; if she will make a statement on the process by which she chose a name to propose following her receipt of the shortlist; and if she took into account the political views of the people on the shortlist received from the panel; [29412]

(2) how many names were on the shortlist she received from the panel from which she had to propose a vice-chairman of the BBC; if she will make a statement on the process by which she chose a name to propose following her receipt of the shortlist; and if she took into account the political views of the people on the shortlist received from the panel. [29413]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Both the process for the appointment of the BBC Vice-Chair and the process for the appointment of the ITC Deputy-Chair complied with the guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. This provides that all public appointments should be governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit and that political activity is not a criterion for appointment. In the interests of confidentiality, it is not our policy to release information about individual shortlists.

Horse Racing

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if it is her policy to ensure that the racing industry is not financially disadvantaged by the end of the current levy scheme for racing; [30030]

(2) if it is her policy that the determination of the future of a racing levy scheme will establish a long term commercial relationship between racing and the betting industry. [30031]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 625–26W.

Redgrave-Pinsent Lake

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the projected completion date is for the Redgrave-Pinsent lake at Caversham; and when the athletes will be able to use the training water at the lake. [29820]

Mr. Caborn: The 2,200 metre rowing course at Caversham is expected to be completed in time for Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) training in autumn 2003.

Sport England has offered the ARA the opportunity to train on approximately 1,000 metres of the lake in the winter 2002, during construction.

National Lottery

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what targets she intends to set to reduce underspend of National Lottery proceeds. [29838]

Mr. Caborn: Around 92 per cent. of the National Lottery Distribution Fund balance is already committed to projects, and money is drawn down from the fund when it is needed and not before. The Department is working closely with the distributing bodies to reduce the distribution fund balance, so that more projects will benefit more quickly from the money the lottery raises for good causes. Distributors are collectively expecting a decline in the balance to £1.6 billion by March 2004.

Football

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what agreement she has reached with the Football Association on the appointment of new directors to WNSL. [29836]

Mr. Caborn: The Football Association and Sport England announced on 15 January 2002 that they are to reconstitute and restructure the board of WNSL. This is in line with the way forward identified in the interim report of Patrick Carter's review of the English National Stadium (HC479).

Tourism

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she intends to restore a marketing role to the English Tourism Council. [29837]

Dr. Howells: Tomorrow's Tourism did not give English Tourism Council a role to market England. However, in the light of events last year and consultations my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had with senior industry representatives, we are reviewing the options for stimulating better co-ordination of the public and private sector funds currently spent on marketing tourism in England.

Public Service Broadcasting

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list *(a)* broadcasting companies and *(b)* other organisations to which her Department has recently written consulting about the definition of public service broadcasting; and if she will place a copy of the consultation letter in the Library. [30010]

Dr. Howells: My officials had informal discussions with ITV Network Ltd., SMG Television, Granada Media Group, Carlton Television, Channel 4 Television Corporation and Channel 5 Broadcasting Ltd., as the leading commercially funded public service broadcasting organisations and companies, about implementation of the proposals on self regulation and backstop powers set out in Chapter 5 of a New Future for Communications. I shall develop my proposals on these matters, to be published in the forthcoming draft Communications Bill, in the light of these and other discussions. I am arranging for copies of the letters to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses in advance of these discussions.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support Agency

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 180W, if he will place the Action Plan referred to in the Library. [26563]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Mark Todd, dated 23 January 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply.

Mr. Smith is unavailable, therefore I am writing to you on his behalf.

You have asked pursuant to his Answer of 19 December 2001, Official Report, column 180W if the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will place the Action Plan referred to in the Library.

I have arranged for a copy of the Child Support Agency Audit Assurance Action Plan to be placed in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefit Payments (Lewes)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Lewes constituency on income support claimed this benefit for *(a)* less than three months, *(b)* three to six months, *(c)* six to 12 months, *(d)* one to two years and *(e)* more than two years, in (i) May 1997 and (ii) May 2001. [27520]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The available information is in the table. The data are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are subject to a degree of sampling error. Figures of less than 500 are subject to a high degree of sampling variation and should only be taken as a guide.

Income support recipients in the Lewes parliamentary constituency by duration—May 1997 and May 2001

Duration of claim	*May 1997*	*May 2001*
Under 3 months	200	300
3 to under 6 months	200	100
6 months to under 1 year	300	300
1 year to under 2 years	400	500
2 years and over	2,400	2,300
All cases	3,500	3,500

Note:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are subject to a degree of sampling variation. Figures of less than 500 are subject to a high degree of sampling variation and should only be used as a guide.

2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.

3. Based on constituency boundaries as at May 1997.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries, May 1997 and May 2001.

Benefits (Disabled People)

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had on developing a system of benefits easily accessible to those with mental as well as physical disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [28134]

Maria Eagle: Disability living allowance and attendance allowance provide a contribution towards the extra costs faced by severely disabled people. Entitlement to these benefits is not based on specific mental or physical disabilities, but depends upon the need for help with personal care, supervision and (in the case of disability living allowance) mobility difficulties which arise from such disabilities. This means that the benefits are already accessible to people with mental or physical disabilities, or a combination of both.

We are exploring, with the help of representatives from disability organisations, whether extra-costs disability benefits could be based on a range of activities of daily living rather than just the care and mobility tests. We are currently in the process of testing a model based on daily living activities with the help of volunteers who a have recently claimed disability living allowance or attendance allowance.

CFS/ME

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Benefits Agency has to review procedures for assessing applicants for disability benefits for sufferers of CFS/ME. [29917]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions recognises the chronic fatigue syndromes (including ME) as potentially debilitating illnesses. The rules of disability benefits, and the guidance given to those who make decisions on entitlement, as well as those doctors who assist in gathering evidence and interpreting it, already take account of this.

We have no plans to review current procedures for handling claims for disability benefits specifically for applicants who suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome/ myalgic encephalitis.

Housing Benefit

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how current spending on housing benefit is divided between *(a)* local authority, *(b)* housing association, *(c)* privately rented and *(d)* other categories of accommodation. [29918]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Forecast housing benefit expenditure, 2001–02

	£ million
Rent rebates (local authority tenants)	5,361
Rent allowance—registered social landlord tenants	3,385
Rent allowance—private tenants	2,932
Total	11,677

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million and are consistent with, and underlie, the forecasts published in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report, November 2001.

2. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

3. The figure for rent allowance paid to social landlord tenants includes housing association and non-housing association accommodation. Separate data on rent allowance paid to housing association tenants only are not collected.

Source:

Estimated out-turn expenditure calculated using actual caseload information

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households are in receipt of housing benefit. [29932]

Malcolm Wicks: 3,854,000 households in Great Britain were in receipt of housing benefit at August 2001, the latest date for which information is available.

Notes:

1. The data refer to households claiming housing benefit which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.

2. Figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.

3. The figures exclude any extended payment cases.

4. Figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. caseload count taken in August 2001.

Job Seeker's Allowance

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people claimed job seeker's allowance in the Uxbridge constituency in each September since 1997. [28533]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Randall, dated 18 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question regarding the number of people claiming job seeker's allowance (JSA) in the Uxbridge constituency in each September since 1997. (28533).

The claimant count consists of all people claiming JSA or NI credits at Employment Service local offices. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which their claim is made.

The information is given in the table below.

Claimant count level (not seasonally adjusted)—in the Uxbridge Parliamentary Constituency

Date	*Number*
September 1997	1,321
September 1998	1,021
September 1999	968
September 2000	749
September 2001	679

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Access to Children

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what amendments the Government are seeking to the September 2001 text of the draft Council regulations on the mutual enforcement of judgments on rights of access to children; and if it is the Government's policy that this Council regulation should take legal effect. [29532]

Mr. Wills: The proposal referred to was an initiative of the French presidency in July 2000, to which substantial amendments were made during the Belgian presidency, and it is expected that it will be subsumed into the recent Commission proposal on jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matters of parental responsibility.

Parental Responsibility

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what amendments the Government are seeking to the September 2001 proposal for a Council regulation on jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matters of parental responsibility; and if it is the Government's policy that this Council regulation should take legal effect. [29531]

Mr. Wills: The Government support the underlying aim of this proposal—namely, to extend the principle of mutual recognition to all decisions on parental responsibility by establishing a clear and coherent set of rules for attributing jurisdiction, and putting in place arrangements for co-operation between the courts and central authorities of the member states. The Government are concerned to ensure that negotiations take full account of the operation of the 1980 Hague Convention on Child Abduction. Negotiations are still at an early stage, and it is too early to assess whether the proposal should be adopted by Ministers and incorporated into national legislation.

Child Abduction (Hague Convention)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the actions that the Government may take to further the implementation and financing of the conclusions and recommendations of the March 2001 Meeting of the Special Commission to Review the Operation of the Hague Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. [29530]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We will continue to work with the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference and with other States Parties to the Convention in order to take forward the work resulting from the Special Commission. The Final Report on the Special Commission is expected shortly, and the Permanent Bureau is planning to complete its Final Report on Transfrontier Access/Contact in May 2002.

In addition to our standard contribution to the Hague Conference, which this year amounts to £70,514, we have made a grant of £14,452.85 to the Permanent Bureau in the current financial year, in order to assist them in carrying forward their work on children conventions. We have also subscribed a further £5,000 towards the costs of maintaining and developing the International Child Abduction Database (INCADAT).

The UK sent a delegation of senior judges and officials to a conference arranged by the Permanent Bureau at De Ruwenberg in October 2001 at which judicial co-operation and good practice in central authorities were discussed. France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States were also represented. The Permanent Bureau has begun work on producing a Good Practice Guide, and we will continue to support this.

The Permanent Bureau is currently considering whether to recommend the convening of a follow-up Special Commission later this year, in order to continue work on good practice, on transfrontier contact and on judicial co-operation. If the Special Commission takes place, the United Kingdom will send a delegation.

The Permanent Bureau also now issues questionnaires to newly acceding member states and we will take this into account in considering whether to accept their accessions in relation to the United Kingdom.

We are also providing encouragement and support to countries considering whether to join the convention. My officials have taken part in a conference of southern African countries considering child abduction and other child protection issues in London this week, and I attended and addressed the conference on 23 January.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the level of arrears of payments of fines imposed by magistrates courts in England and Wales. [28966]

Mr. Wills: Magistrates Courts Committees have responsibility for the collection of a range of debts imposed through the courts, including not only fines but also fees, compensation, confiscation orders, legal aid contributions and some maintenance orders. It is not possible to separate out just the fines from the total.

Arrears is described as the total of missed lump sums or missed instalments on impositions where deferred payment was allowed. The total amount of money owed to the courts at the end of September 2001 which was in arrears was £224,694,570.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Urban Regeneration

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by her Department; how much each scheme has available to invest; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough councils and *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25477]

Alun Michael: Regional development agencies, in partnership with the Countryside Agency, have been given the task of managing a programme aimed at the regeneration of small rural towns. Expenditure details are not yet available but £37 million was allocated to the programme for the period 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Correspondence

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the letter of 6 July 2001 from the hon. Member for Sunderland, South concerning the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [26121]

Mr. Morley: A response to my hon. Friend's letter of 6 July was sent on 3 January 2002. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Foot and Mouth

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the approximate total market value of animals killed because of foot and mouth disease; and what the total paid in compensation was; [24392]

(2) what was the total cost of valuations for animals culled in the foot and mouth epidemic that were in excess of perceived market value. [26023]

Mr. Morley: The levels of compensation paid to farmers whose animals were culled as a result of foot and mouth was determined in accordance with schedule 3 to the Animal Health Act 1981. Most valuations were made by independent valuers appointed by DEFRA who were instructed to determine the market value of culled livestock and the remainder were based on standard values published by the Department. The total paid in statutory compensation for slaughtered animals is £1,079,500,000.

The Department has not published an assessment of the total market value of animals killed because of FMD. The statistics which the Department will publish in "Agriculture in the UK" in March 2002 will show the impact of FMD on the value of the industry's assets.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many sheep have been slaughtered since the last case of foot and mouth was diagnosed in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [27621]

Mr. Morley: 5,780 sheep have been slaughtered since the last case of foot and mouth was diagnosed in the United Kingdom on 30 September 2001. These sheep came from 21 flocks (2,067 from one premises) and were culled as dangerous contacts as a result of returning sero-positive blood samples.

Note:

Figures subject to revision as more data become available.

Source:

DCS database as at 16 January 2002.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much meat from countries where foot and mouth disease is present was imported into the United Kingdom in 2001; and if she will list the countries involved. [27892]

Mr. Morley: The table details UK imports of meat from FMD susceptible species[1] between January and November 2001 from countries where FMD is present.

[1] Cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and reindeer

Product/country	*Total (tonnes)*
Meat of bovine animals and sheep[1]	
Argentina	5,453
Botswana	10,258
Brazil	75,680
Namibia	7,538
South Africa	282
Swaziland	15
Zimbabwe	4,581
Total—meat and meat products (bovine and sheep)	103,807

[1] There were no imports of pigmeat, goatmeat or reindeer meat from the specified countries between January and November 2001

European Community legislation permits the importation of meat from certain countries where FMD is present but only where the disease is restricted to specific areas. Imports are permitted either from parts of the country that are free of disease or under strict conditions that ensure the meat does not come from any animal that may have come in contact with FMD before, during or after slaughter.

All meat imported from third countries must be accompanied by veterinary certification. This must confirm that the meat is derived from animals which have been subjected to a veterinary inspection during the 24 hours prior to slaughter and showed no signs of FMD.

All meat imported into the UK from third countries must enter at designated UK border inspection posts (BIPs) where it is subject to veterinary inspections.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that extra costs associated with the showing of animals, and precautions against foot and mouth disease, will not be passed on to county shows. [28812]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Responsibility for taking the necessary biosecurity measures, to ensure that shows can be conducted without increased risk of disease spread, will rest with the organisers and participants.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if agricultural shows will remain exempt from the 20 day standstill period imposed as a result of foot and mouth disease unless the foot and mouth disease situation deteriorates. [28811]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Detailed arrangements for agricultural shows are currently being drawn up. Essentially the 20 day standstill will not be triggered provided that the animals attending shows are individually identified and kept in isolation before and after each one.

Farmers Compensation

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what compensation is paid to farmers whose applications are wrongly assessed by her Department. [28365]

Mr. Morley: Compensation in the form of interest may be paid to applicants where three criteria are met. These are that the Department was entirely at fault, it was entirely due to an administrative error and it could have been avoided.

Tenant and Hill Farmers

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to concentrate financial support to help tenant and hill farmers. [28360]

Alun Michael: Within the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), the hill farm allowance provides specific support to hill farmers. The hill farm allowance will be reviewed this year in the context of the mid-term evaluation of the ERDP. Ministers are keeping the position of tenant farmers under review.

Illegal Meat Imports

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the cost of installing *(a)* detectors and *(b)* staff to eliminate the illegal import of meat into the United Kingdom. [28114]

Mr. Morley: *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* We are considering a number of initiatives aimed at improving our ability to prevent and detect illegal imports of meat into the UK. No decisions have been taken to install new X-ray machines, although this is one of the options we are examining. We are also looking at improved intelligence to better target enforcement activity. Detailed costings will depend on what measures are decided, how they are to be targeted and what use can be made of existing resources.

Inland Waters

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the difficulties facing councils in getting access to inland waters in England and Wales. [27715]

Alun Michael: We have made no such assessment. Last month we published the findings of research establishing the facts about water-based sport and recreation. The report "Water-based Sport and Recreation" identified the powers available to local authorities to give people greater access to inland water for open-air recreation. We are looking at what action we may need to take in the light of the research report. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

Combinable Crops

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of combinable crops are grown from farm saved seed in the UK, broken down by crop. [28253]

Mr. Morley: The Department does not collect information on the use of farm saved seed.

GM Crops

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government will take to ensure that conventional seeds grown in the UK will remain free of GM contamination if GM crops are added to the National Seed List. [28252]

Mr. Morley: The Government are participating in discussions in Brussels on Commission proposals to amend the EU seed marketing directives to control the adventitious presence of GM events in conventional seeds. When EU measures are adopted, these will be implemented in the UK. Meanwhile, the Central Science Laboratory continues to audit seed companies. The audits check that companies have taken appropriate precautions against the adventitious presence of GM events in conventional seeds that will be sold to farmers and growers.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government will take to ensure that non-GM and organic crops will remain below the proposed 1 per cent. threshold if GM crops are included on the National Seed List. [29504]

Mr. Morley: The Government are exploring with interested parties the terms on which GM and non-GM crops might co-exist, recognising that this needs to be resolved before there is any possibility of GM crops being grown here commercially. Commercialisation will not occur before the farm scale evaluations have been completed, even if GM varieties are included on the National Seed List.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what factors were taken into account in the siting of a GM trial at Lower Hordley, Shropshire. [27743]

Mr. Meacher: A site in Hordley, Shropshire was selected last year to take part in the farm scale evaluations of autumn-sown GM herbicide tolerant oil seed rape. The evaluations are being conducted under an agreement between the farming and biotechnology industry body (SCIMAC) and the Government. The progress of the evaluations is being overseen by the independent Scientific Steering Committee (SSC), which includes experts from academia and conservation organisations. SCIMAC finds locations for the evaluations programme. These are then checked, assessed and selected against scientific criteria, which includes crop history, agronomy and measures of biodiversity, by the independent researchers undertaking the field study. The distribution of locations is finally approved, on scientific grounds alone, by the SSC. They have recommended that a geographical spread of sites be obtained that is representative of regional differences in crop distribution and the range of current farming methods, biodiversity and production intensities throughout Britain. The Government are not involved in the process of selecting FSE sites.

GM Trials

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Government have spent on GM trials in the past five years. [27741]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are funding two research programmes which aim to provide information on the consequences, if any, for agriculture and the environment of growing certain genetically modified herbicide tolerant (GMHT) crops. The Farm Scale Evaluations (FSEs) programme is a three-year programme allowing independent researchers to study the effect that the management practices associated with GMHT crops might have on farmland wildlife, when compared with weed control used with non-GM crops. The Botanical and Rotational Implications of Genetically Modified Herbicide Tolerance (BRIGHT) project aims to determine the agricultural implications of GMHT crops and produce management information for their sustainable production.

The costs of the FSE programme and BRIGHT project met by Government are:

Project	*£*
FSEs[1]	5,123,265
BRIGHT[2]	235,521
Total	5,358,786

[1] To end March 2002

[2] To end March 2002

IACS Payments

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the IACS payment due to be paid by 31 January is being withheld; and if she will make a statement. [27954]

Mr. Morley: The RPA expects to be able to pay the vast majority of Arable Area Payment Scheme (AAPS) claims within the regulatory time frame, which ends on 31 January. However, because of the processing time that has been lost due to industrial action, (which was suspended on 11 January), it is likely that more claims than usual will be carried over into February. Every effort will be made to keep this to the absolute minimum. As at 16 January 81 per cent. of AAPS claims have been passed for payment.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers in Wiltshire applied for assistance under the IACS scheme in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and of these how many have been paid. [28834]

Mr. Morley: 989 IACS (Arable Area Payment Scheme) applications were received from farmers in Wiltshire in 2000 and 983 have been paid.

The figures for 2001 are 979 IACS applications of which 562 have been paid. 2001 applications are still being processed.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to bring into force section 57 and schedule 6 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [28581]

Alun Michael: Section 57 introduces schedule 6 to the Countryside and Rights of way 2000, which contains a wide range of provisions relating to the creation, stopping-up and diversion of highways. These provisions require the enactment of detailed secondary legislation to bring them into effect.

I intend to implement those new measures that relate to the closure or diversion of rights of way on the basis of crime prevention and pupil and teacher safety ahead of the other provisions in schedule 6. I will be issuing a consultation paper on these shortly. The crime prevention measures will be restricted to areas designated by the Secretary of State for this specific purpose.

Public consultation on the other schedule 6 provisions is planned for early next year.

Radioactive Waste

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* levels and *(b)* amount of stock piled radioactive waste is held in the UK from (i) civilian and (ii) military establishments. [28755]

Mr. Meacher: Using data from the 1998 UK Radioactive Waste Inventory the amounts of waste (expressed in conditioned form) are as follows:

Units = m³

	Civil	*Military*
HLW	700	—
ILW	70,000	2,700
LLW	4,700	1,200

Organic Fruit Growers

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Government have spent in assistance to organic fruit growers in the past five years. [27742]

Mr. Morley: Aid is available for the conversion of land to organic farming and free advice is available to farmers through the Organic Conversion Information Service. Statistics are not available specifically on payments to organic fruit growers as the data are collected by reference to general land type.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 21 and 22 January; what the Government's position was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [30374]

Margaret Beckett: I represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture Council meeting on 21 January in Brussels. The council held initial debates on commission proposals concerning potato starch quotas and animal health requirements governing the movement of pet animals. I welcomed both proposals and, on the latter, stressed the importance of having rules safeguarding against the risk of importing rabies that were fully based on scientific advice.

The council agreed unanimously to permit Portugal to pay a state aid to pig producers to offset the repayment of aids paid illegally in 1994 and 1998. In consenting to this I expressed grave concern at the council's increasing tendency to approve aids which, particularly in sensitive sectors such as pigmeat, could undermine the integrity of the Single Market.

The council also received a report from Commissioner Byrne on the commission's progress in negotiating veterinary and phytosanitary equivalence agreements with third countries, notably in relation to the Mercosur countries and Chile. I welcomed this but called upon the Commission to ensure all Mercosur countries complied with existing obligations to permit imports of milk products and bovine semen from all EU countries.

Community Vibrancy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which organisation initiated the idea of an indicator of community vibrancy; whose decision it was to publish a list of communities' vibrancy; and if she will make a statement. [29681]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency worked with the Rural White Paper team during development of the set of headline indicators published in the Rural White Paper. Indicator 15 Community vibrancy, under the theme A Vibrant Countryside was to measure

> "% of parishes in four categories (vibrant, active, barely active, sleeping) assessed on numbers of meeting places, voluntary and cultural activities, contested parish elections."

The purpose of the indicator is to measure on a national basis the trend over time.

The list of communities' vibrancies was made available to Members of Parliament through the House of Commons Library after the information was requested in a parliamentary question by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1018W. The list had not been previously published as it represents work in progress for the headline indicator as simply a broad measure at the national level.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which organisation devised the criteria for an indicator of community vibrancy; what consultation there was with individual communities in advance of the publication of this information; and what opportunity there is for communities to dispute their classification after publication. [29682]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency published interim results from its own interpretation of community vibrancy based on three 'classes' in its State of the Countryside Report 2001. The indicator was based on interim findings of the 2000 Rural Services Survey and the State of the Countryside report recognised some limitations with the indicator, stating that these findings largely reflect the 'critical' mass of population needed to enable the community activity opportunity to become viable or functional. The indicator does not reveal the extent to which smaller settlements and parishes are able to take up community activities in neighbouring parishes. Further, communities in all size of parish may exhibit community vibrancy in other ways than those assessed here.

Consultation was not done directly with individual communities. However the scoring system used for the sub-set of parishes analysed was contained in the State of the Countryside Report 2001. Following this publication, the Countryside Agency received no comments on the components of the scoring system. The indicator is still in development and the scoring was adapted to meet the four classes used in the RWP headline indicator.

Individual parish scores were not intended to be published, but used within an overall indicator based on returns submitted through the Rural Services Survey parish questionnaire to all rural parish clerks during autumn 2000. Some forms were interpreted differently or inadequately completed and, to date, the indicator has used these returns as the sole basis. The indicator is thus based on a standard national measure for 2000. For future work, the Countryside Agency is looking at ways of improving the collection and robustness of data to inform our indicator. This will include working with DEFRA, National Association of Local Councils and bodies such as rural community councils.

The Countryside Agency recognises some shortcomings in the data and it is not intended for any listing of parishes to be used for targeting funding or similar policy initiatives. The Countryside Agency intends to look at the whole issue again through consultation on the methodology, rather than amending individual classifications. Differing views over individual classifications are inevitable but the Countryside Agency would prefer to address these in a review of the indicator rather than on a case-by-case basis. In particular, the naming convention of the groups may be reconsidered to more accurately reflect the underlying information.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the survey results of the questionnaire sent out to parish and town council clerks by the Countryside Agency in advance of its classification of communities according to the indicator of community vibrancy. [29683]

Alun Michael: The survey results of the questionnaire sent to parish and town council clerks has been published on the Countryside Agency's website at www.countryside.gov.uk/ruralservices/index.htm

Community Energy Programme

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when bids will be invited under the Government's new Community Energy programme. [30735]

Mr. Meacher: The opening 'Pathfinder' bidding round for the £50 million Community Energy programme is being launched today. We expect to allocate around

£5 million under this initial round for schemes that will provide carbon savings; help to alleviate fuel poverty among householders, and reduce fuel costs for hospitals, universities and other community buildings.

I am placing copies of the programme documentation in the House Library.

PIU Energy Review

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what format a further period of consultation following the publication of the PIU energy review will take. [28981]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The PIU have yet to publish their report and may make recommendations for taking the report forward. As such, Ministers have not yet decided the format of any consultation follow up to the report.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Advertising

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the advertising campaigns which he and his predecessors have commissioned since May 1997, showing for each *(a)* its objectives, *(b)* its beginning and end dates, *(c)* the media used, *(d)* criteria adopted to judge its effectiveness, *(e)* the extent to which effectiveness criteria were met, *(f)* agency involvement and *(g)* its cost. [26660]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* For details of the costs of my Department's advertising campaigns, the media used and effectiveness, I refer the hon. Member to the reply by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 20 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 168–69W.

Final outturn figures for 2000–01 and provisional outturn figures for major advertising campaigns in 2001–02 and advertising agencies involved are:

£ million

		Expenditure	
Campaign	*Agencies*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Road Safety	AMV/BDDO; D'Arcy	7.8	9.5
Fire Safety	Euro	[2]—	2.9
traveline	RKCR/Y&R	0	1.7
Foot and mouth public information	Ogilvy	0	1.2
Are you doing your bit?	AMV/BBDO	5.6	[3]—

[1] Provisional

[2] Home Office responsibility

[3] DEFRA responsibility

Activity on road and fire safety is ongoing and objectives are to reduce deaths and injuries. Advertising to support traveline commences in March 2002. Objectives are to increase awareness and promote use of the line. The foot and mouth public information campaign ran during March/April 2001 and provided guidance for visitors to the countryside. "Are you doing your bit?", launched in March 1998, was designed to motivate individuals to take simple actions to protect the environment.

Number Plates

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the new Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) regulations will allow European number plates with a national identifier in the UK. [27411]

Mr. Spellar: Motorists will be able to make a choice. They will be able to display either the European circle of stars with GB as the UK national identifier or they will be able to display one of the four flags, (Union Jack, Cross of St. George, Saltaire or Welsh Dragon) with any one of a number of identifiers, for example UK or GB, "Eng" for England, "Sco" for Scotland or "Cym" for Wales.

Starter Home Initiative (Probation Officers)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if probation officers are counted as key workers for schemes set up under the Starter Home Initiative in London. [27859]

Ms Keeble: A wide range of workers, including probation officers, are eligible for help under the Starter Home Initiative, although priority is being given to teachers, police, nurses and other essential health workers. Among those benefiting from round one of the initiative in London are social workers, fire fighters and transport workers. None of the successful bids in London targeted probation officers. The second round of funding of £20 million is being allocated to housing hot spots outside London.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in "Good Policy Making". [28411]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

Slam-door Trains

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which he would delay the phasing out of slam-door trains. [28556]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the provisions of the Railway Safety Regulations 1999. These require the removal of Mark I rolling stock unless the Health and Safety Executive make an exemption. Under section 6(2) of the regulations there is a requirement on the HSE to consult on any exemptions they propose.

Council Tenants

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage real terms increase in each year he predicts for formula rents for council tenants in each individual local authority until 2011. [28368]

Ms Keeble: In 2002–03, we predict that the average rate of increase in real terms for formula rents for council tenants will be 1 per cent. Taking into account the policy that Registered Social Landlord rents increases should be limited to RPI plus 0.5 per cent. a year, it is likely that average council rents will have to rise by about an average of about 1.5 per cent. a year in real terms over the next 10 years to achieve Ministers' intention that similar rents should be charged for similar council and housing association properties by 2012. This is about half the average rate of council rent increases over the last 10 years.

However, the precise path of social rents over the next 10 years will depend, among other things, on the outcomes of future Spending Reviews and the decisions taken by individual landlords who retain responsibility for rent setting.

Clean Fuels

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number and percentage of *(a)* cars, *(b)* buses and *(c)* lorries which (i) run on LPG or similar clean fuels and (ii) are adapted to run on conventional and clean fuels. [28579]

Mr. Jamieson: There are estimated to be around 50,000 LPG cars in the UK. Motorists are converting to LPG at an increasing rate, with the number expected to increase by about 25,000 over the next year, prompted by the Government grants available, and the fact that low-cost LPG fuel is now available in all areas of the country.

DVLA data provide more disaggregated information on alternative fuel use as follows:

Vehicle class	*Dedicated gas*	*Percentage of total fleet*	*Bi-fuel*	*Percentage of total fleet*
Cars/LGVs	1,3[illegible]	0.005	23,622	0.01
Buses	74	0.08	66	0.07
Trucks	202	0.05	25	0.006

But this understates the number of vehicles because not all conversions to alternative fuelling are notified to DVLA.

DVLA statistics do not distinguish between liquified petroleum gas (LPG) and natural gas vehicles. However, cars and light commercial vehicles tend to use LPG, while heavier vehicles use natural gas.

Although DVLA does not keep statistics on the number of battery electric cars, my Department estimates that there are approximately 400 of these in the UK. In addition, DVLA statistics show that there are 484 hybrid petrol/electric cars.

Train Overcrowding

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last discussed with the SRA overcrowding on trains. [28662]

Mr. Spellar: Ministers and officials from my Department have regular meetings with the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss all aspects of service provision.

London Underground

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many and what percentage of *(a)* Metropolitan and *(b)* Piccadilly line trains departed at least five minutes late from Uxbridge in each month in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [28478]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground, who inform me that they do not hold the information requested in a readily available form and that it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how each local authority performed against the local government performance indicators on housing benefit and council tax benefit in the most recent year for which figures are available. [28393]

Dr. Whitehead: Details of the estimated outturn performance on housing benefit and council tax benefit for individual English authorities at 31 March 2001 is available on the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions website at: www.local-regions.dtlr.gov.uk/bestvalue/indicators/indicatorsindex.htm.

The estimated overall performance of local authorities in England against each relevant best value indicator in 2000–01 was as follows:

Housing benefit and council tax benefit best value performance indicators

Indicator[1]	*Average*	*Top quartile*	*Median*	*Bottom quartile*
76 Security—whether authority has written and pro-active strategy for combating fraud and error (Yes/No)	89% Yes	n/a	n/a	n/a
77 Average cost of handling HB/CTB claim	£82.39	£102.00	£75.25	£51.00
78a Average time for processing new claims	50 days	35 days	45 days	60 days
78b Average time for processing notifications for changes of circumstance	23 days	10 days	18 days	31 days
78c Percentage of renewal claims processed on time	71	90	75	57
79a Percentage of case for which the benefit calculation was accurate	93	97	95	92
79b The percentage of recoverable overpayments (excluding council tax benefit) that were recovered in the year	95	70	61	48

[1] Numbers refer to the BVPIs published in Best Value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 2000–01 available on www.local-regions/dtlr.gov.uk//bestvalue/indicators/indicatorsindex/htm

Note:

Details of the final outturn performance data for 2000–01 will be available shortly on the same website.

Trans-European Rail Networks

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with his European colleagues regarding retention of the identified trans-European rail networks within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [28747]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no discussions about the TEN rail network in the UK. The Commission has published proposals to amend the guidelines governing the development of the TEN (Decision No. 1692/96), and we are about to publish a consultation document to consider the draft revisions. However, no substantial changes to the network in the UK are proposed.

Regional Assemblies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many written representations he has received in the last 12 months expressing support for an elected regional assembly in the *(a)* South East, *(b)* Eastern region, *(c)* South West, *(d)* West Midlands, *(e)* East Midlands, *(f)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(g)* North West and *(h)* North East, broken down by constituency. [29109]

Mr. Byers: The information is in the table:

Region	*Number of written representations*	*Number attributable to constituencies*
South East	2	
Winchester		1
Fareham		1
East of England	1	
Hitchin and Harpenden		1
South West	0	0
West Midlands	1	0
East Midlands	0	0
Yorkshire and Humber	1	0
North West	5	
Salford		1
Burnley		1
North East	13	
Wansbeck		1

It is not possible to give a definitive breakdown of constituencies as a number of these representations were from organisations as opposed to individuals.

We have also received five written representations in favour of directly elected assemblies generally.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average time is that the Head of his Department has recommended since May 1997 between a special adviser leaving his Department and taking up outside employment; and if he will make a statement. [28911]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 594W.

Speed Cameras

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed cameras the Government have part-funded in the last two years; and how many lives are estimated to have been saved as a consequence. [29392]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government do not fund speed cameras. The cost of purchasing and operating cameras falls to the local authorities and police. Eight police force areas have been trailing a new funding system that allows some fixed penalty fine revenue to be netted-off and re-invested in speed camera operation. It is estimated that 109 fewer people were killed or seriously injured as a result of the increased enforcement in the trial areas. The new funding system is now available nationally and I fully expect, as more areas join, the numbers of those killed or seriously injured to decrease still further.

Bus and Rail Journeys

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* bus and *(b)* rail journeys there were in each year since 1995; and if he will express the figures as an index using 1997 as the base. [29697]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures for bus journeys are collected by financial year. The table provides statistics from 1995–96 to 2000–01 and index numbers based on 1997–98 = 100.

Bus and rail journeys in Great Britain

Million

Financial year	*Local bus*	*Index*	*National rail*	*Index*
1995–96	4,383	101.2	761	90.0
1996–97	4,350	100.5	801	94.7
1997–98	4,330	100.0	846	100.0
1998–99	4,248	98.1	892	105.4
1999–2000	4,281	98.9	931	110.0
2000–01	4,309	99.5	957	113.1

Road/Rail Interface Risks

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made on the report from the Health and Safety Commission's working group on risks associated with road/rail interface since December 2001; if he will give a date for its publication; and if he will make a statement. [29580]

Mr. Jamieson: The report is progressing to schedule and I understand from the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) that it will be discussed by them on 12 February. It remains the hope of the HSC that its report will be available in the first quarter of 2002. I look forward to receiving the report when Ministers will consider any recommendations contained therein.

Shenfield-Colchester Transport Links

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the costs and viability of *(a)* constructing an additional railway track between Shenfield and Colchester and *(b)* upgrading the equivalent stretch of the A12 to dual 3. [29624]

Mr. Jamieson: The London to Ipswich Multi-Modal study will recommend a plan for transport in the London to Ipswich corridor over the next generation.

Traffic Signs

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 204W, on traffic signs, (1) whether the conditions under which the 1989 Guildford Direction Signs Demonstration Project were conducted met the standards that are required for similar research undertaken by his Department today; [29719]

(2) what lessons were learned from the Guildford Direction Signs Demonstration Project of 1989; [29718]

(3) whether the Guildford Direction Signs Demonstration Project was conducted in a car park; [29720]

(4) what assessment he has made of the academic rigour with which the 1989 Guildford Direction Signs Demonstration Project was conducted; and if he will publish it. [29721]

Ms Keeble: The Guildford Direction Signs Demonstration Project was used to trial a number of recommendations made in the report on the Direction Signs Review, published by the Stationery Office in 1987. The project was jointly administered by Surrey county council, Guildford borough council and the Department. It entailed the replacement of 420 directional signs across the town and its approaches with new versions. None of the work was carried out in car parks.

A number of ideas were tested, including improvements to the system of colour-coding routes to emphasise their status. This and other features illustrating good practice were incorporated in the revised Traffic Signs Regulations that followed in 1994 and in departmental guidance to highway authorities.

The project was carried out to standards similar to those which would apply to a comparable project today, with close involvement of the Department's own specialists. I have no reason to question the rigour with which the work was conducted. Descriptions of the project written by some of the individuals who took part were published in the technical press (*Highways and Transportation Journal* July 1989 and February 1990).

Housing Associations (Right to Buy)

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to extend the right to buy scheme to housing associations. [29651]

Ms Keeble: We have no plans to extend the right to buy scheme further to housing association tenants.

Pre-1988 secure tenants of non-charitable housing associations already have a right to buy and tenants of former local authority stock which has transferred to registered social landlords have a preserved right to buy. In addition, under the Housing Act 1996, eligible tenants of registered social landlords have a right to acquire their rented home.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 336–37W, if he will require UK airline companies to supply copies of the Government's pamphlet, "Advice on Travel Related Deep Vein Thrombosis", to passengers on long distance flights. [29805]

Mr. Jamieson: UK airlines are aware of the health advice recently published by the Government and I understand they are using a variety of means to communicate that information to their passengers. At present the Government have no plans to require the airlines to provide health information in a specific format, but we are in contact with them to ensure that they provide their passengers with relevant advice in the most appropriate form, particularly that relating to deep vein thrombosis.

Railway Signals

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many signals on railways in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* Oxfordshire are illuminated by oil lamps; and if he will make a statement. [29738]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what sterling to euro exchange rate applies on tolls at the *(a)* Severn bridges, *(b)* Dartford crossing, *(c)* Humber crossing, *(d)* Mersey tunnels, *(e)* Tamar bridge and *(f)* Tyne tunnels. [29910]

Mr. Jamieson: There are currently no legal requirements for any of the mentioned undertakings to accept any currency other than sterling. Therefore, exchange rates are not fixed and are subject to change at the operators' discretion.

Where they do accept payment in euros, each of the undertakings has a different method for working out the toll charged. Our calculation of the equivalent charges is:

	Euro to £1
(a) Severn bridges	1.67
(b) Dartford crossings	1.85
(c) Humber bridge	1.88
(d) Mersey tunnels	[1]—
(e) Tamar bridge	1.6
(f) Tyne tunnel	1.67

[1] Euros currently not accepted.

Rail Incident (Abergavenny)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what investigations are to be undertaken into the incident on the railway line between Abergavenny and Cwmbran on 17 January; and if he will make a statement. [30160]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mr. Jamieson: A Railway Inspector from the Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) is investigating the circumstances of the rail incident at Abergavenny on 18 January.

Transport Provision

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what effort he has made to ensure that service providers, employers and public transport users are involved in determining what constitutes adequate transport provision *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Teesside. [29972]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department issues many draft policy documents, consultation papers, revisions to regulations and guidance on transport, inviting comments and suggestions from all interested parties. For example, the Department is currently consulting on "Powering Future Vehicles: Draft Government Strategy" with responses due by 1 March 2002.

In addition, local authorities have produced five-year local transport plans in accordance with guidance issued by the Secretary of State. This guidance provides for full consultation at the local level. This applies equally to Teesside as it does to all English local authorities.

In accordance with Planning Policy Guidance No. 11, regional planning bodies are required to produce regional transport strategies, again with full participation and consultation with all interested parties.

The Department complies with the Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultation, which came into effect in January 2001. The code aims to increase the involvement of people and groups in public consultations, minimising the burden it imposes on them, and giving them a proper time—a standard minimum period of 12 weeks—to respond.

Housing (Solihull)

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the anticipated density of the Cala Homes development in Solihull (appeal reference: APP/Q4625/AOI/1065304) exceeds the density recommended in PPG 3. [29902]

Ms Keeble: The appeal by Cala Homes (Reference APP/Q4625/A/01/1065304) related to an application for 78 apartments on a site of about one hectare at Church Hill road and Whitefields road, close to the town centre of Solihull. Paragraph 57 of PPG3 stresses that local planning authorities should avoid the inefficient use of land. The second bullet point of paragraph 58 states that local planning authorities should encourage development which makes more efficient use of land (between 30 and 50 dwellings per hectare net) and the third bullet point advises authorities to seek greater intensity of development at places with good public transport accessibility such as city, town, district and local centres or around major nodes along good quality public transport corridors.

The inspector allowing the appeal by a decision dated 31 December 2001 judged the site to be one to which the third bullet point applies. Consequently, the density would not exceed that recommended in PPG3.

Driving Standards Agency

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appeals have been received by the DSA over the past two years against the refusal to grant second trainee licences; how many of these have been *(a)* successful, *(b)* unsuccessful and *(c)* are still pending; and of those appeals which have been unsuccessful, if he will place in the Library a list of grounds on which appeals have been rejected. [30187]

Mr. Jamieson: In the two years ending 31 December 2001, there were 387 appeals made against the registrar's decision to refuse a second trainee licence; 282 cases were withdrawn by the appellant before the appeal was determined, generally because the appellant had completed the qualifying process before the appeal was considered; and 24 cases are still pending.

In the remaining 81 cases, independent Appeals Boards recommended to the Secretary of State refusing the applications, citing one of two grounds for dismissing appeals. These were accepted by the Secretary of State.

The first ground was that the purpose of a trainee licence was to afford a reasonable opportunity—normally six months—to prepare for the third part of the qualifying examination via experience working as an instructor. A trainee licence was not an alternative to registration, and must not be allowed to become so.

The second ground was that the appellant had failed a third attempt at the third part of the qualifying examination, therefore the person would need to start the qualifying process from the beginning, and was not eligible to hold a trainee licence.

Agriculture Industry

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to improve health and safety within the agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement. [29998]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government and the Health and Safety Commission have set national targets for reducing work-related deaths, injury and ill health in Great Britain. The Commission has selected the agricultural industry as a priority programme where improvements are needed if the national targets are to be met.

Details of the agriculture priority programme and the Health and Safety Commission and Executive's Programme of Work for improving health and safety in the agricultural sector are set out in the Commission's Strategic Plan 2001–04. Copies can be found in the Library of the House.

Widford Bridge (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the space to allow cars access that are under the weight restriction on the Widford Bridge in Chelmsford with respect to avoiding *(a)* undue hazard to motorists and *(b)* possible damage to vehicles; [29666]

(2) for what reason advance warning signs of *(a)* weight restrictions and *(b)* roadworks at the Widford Viaduct in Chelmsford on the (i) A12, (ii) A414 (formerly the A1016) and (iii) A414 from Harlow were not erected prior to the work commencing; [29670]

(3) who has responsibility for posting advance warning signs about the *(a)* weight restrictions and *(b)* traffic works on the Widford Viaduct in Chelmsford; [29668]

(4) what the earliest date is that work can commence on replacing the Widford Bridge; and if he will bring that date forward; [29672]

(5) for what reason early advance warning signs at *(a)* weight restrictions and *(b)* roadworks at the Widford Viaduct in Chelmsford have not been erected on roads carrying traffic from (i) Ingatestone, (ii) Ongar, (iii) Witham and (iv) Boreham; [29671]

(6) when advance warning signs of *(a)* weight restrictions and *(b)* road works at the Widford Viaduct in Chelmsford will be posted on the (i) A12, (ii) A414 (formerly the A1016) and (iii) A414 from Harlow; [29669]

(7) what the total cost is of replacing the Widford Bridge in Chelmsford; and who will bear responsibility for the cost of the replacement work. [29673]

Mr. Jamieson: The Widford Bridge is situated on the old A12 (now A1114) through Chelmsford. Chelmsford borough council manage the road on behalf of the Highway Authority, Essex county council, although pending its replacement, the bridge remains the responsibility of the Highways Agency.

Because the bridge's condition has deteriorated, the agency has had to restrict to three tonnes the weight of vehicles using it. To achieve this, vehicle widths are restricted to 6 ft 6 in. The signing arrangements were designed for the borough council by the agency's design agents. The programming of the work to implement the width restriction and the installation of advance and permanent signing on the local road network are being organised by the borough council. All work is being carried out by the borough council's contractors although the Highways Agency is paying for it.

A scheme to replace the bridge is currently expected to start in autumn 2003. The cost, which will be borne by the agency, is expected to be about £4.5 million. Given the large amount of detailed design and preparation work that needs to take place, and also taking into account the long lead in time necessary to carry out work over a busy railway line, this is the earliest date work can start.

Housing (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to make a decision on the transfer of Chelmsford borough council's housing stock to Chelmer Housing Partnership; and if he will make a statement. [29667]

Ms Keeble: The transfer of Chelmsford borough council's housing stock to Chelmer Housing Partnership is scheduled for Monday 11 March. The Secretary of State expects to decide whether to give consent to the transfer during the preceding week.

Departmental Press Office

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has to reorganise the Press Office at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and if he will make a statement; [29983]

(2) what civil service procedures were followed in the interviewing and appointment of a new Head of Media at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; [29984]

(3) when he expects to announce the appointment of a new Head of Media at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; [29985]

(4) if he will list each meeting he has had since 1 December 2001 with the Director of Communications of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and what was the subject of each meeting. [29982]

Dr. Whitehead: The appointment was announced on 21 January. It was made following an open competition for the post under the procedures in the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code.

My right hon. Friend meets his Director of Communication on a regular basis to discuss relevant issues. Organisational matters within the Department are a matter for the permanent secretary, who consults my right hon. Friend in accordance with the practice of successive Administrations.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the *(a)* public investment expenditure, *(b)* public resource expenditure and *(c)* private investment is for each year 2001–02 to 2010–11 broken down by (i) strategic roads, (ii) rail, (iii) local transport, (iv) London, (v) other transport areas and (vi) unallocated at (A) outturn prices and (B) 2000–01 prices; [29936]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of the *(a)* public investment expenditure, *(b)* public resource expenditure, *(c)* private investment, *(d)* public expenditure supporting private investment and *(e)* public spending from local charging revenue planned for each year 2001–02 to 2010–11 as allocated in the 10 year transport plan of July 2000, subdivided between (i) strategic roads, (ii) rail, (iii) local transport, (iv) London, (v) other transport areas and (vi) unallocated at (A) outturn prices and (B) 2000–01 prices; [30345]

(3) if he will list the total public expenditure supporting private investment spent and planned for each year from 1997–78 to 2010–11 broken down by *(a)* strategic roads, *(b)* rail, *(c)* local transport, *(d)* London and *(e)* other transport areas at (i) outturn prices and (ii) 2000–01 prices. [29937]

Mr. Jamieson: The information expressed in outturn prices requested in questions *(b)* and *(c)* is contained in Table A3 (page 99) of "Transport 2010: the 10-Year Plan". A copy of this was placed in the House Library when the plan was published in July 2000.

All the other requested information is provided in tables A to E as follows.

10-Year Plan: Revenue support for private investment—Table A: Outturn prices

£ million

	Strategic roads	*Railways*	*Local transport*	*London*	*Other transport areas*	*Total*
1997–98	88	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	88
1998–99	131	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	131
1999–2000	205	[1]—	1	[1]—	[1]—	206
2000–01	202	[1]—	3	[1]—	[1]—	205
2001–02	206	0	0	0	0	206
2002–03	220	12	0	0	0	232
2003–04	239	50	8	0	0	297
2004–05	261	101	27	28	0	417
2005–06	353	187	57	29	0	626
2006–07	447	337	102	29	0	915
2007–08	454	430	162	30	0	1,076
2008–09	517	531	237	33	0	1,318
2009–10	604	633	312	48	0	1,597
2010–11	609	726	387	50	0	1,772
1997–98 to 2010–11	4,536	3,007	1,296	246	0	9,085

Table B: 2000–01 prices

£ million

	Strategic roads	*Railways*	*Local transport*	*London*	*Other transport areas*	*Total*
1997–98	94	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	94
1998–99	137	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	137
1999–2000	209	[1]—	1	[1]—	[1]—	210
2000–01	202	[1]—	3	[1]—	[1]—	205
2001–02	201	0	0	0	0	201
2002–03	209	11	0	0	0	221
2003–04	222	46	8	0	0	276
2004–05	236	92	24	26	0	378
2005–06	312	165	50	25	0	553
2006–07	385	291	88	25	0	789
2007–08	382	362	136	25	0	905
2008–09	424	436	195	27	0	1,081
2009–10	484	507	250	38	0	1,279
2010–11	476	567	302	39	0	1,384
1997–98 to 2010–11	3,973	2,477	1,057	205	0	7,712

[1] Data not available

10-Year Plan public expenditure and private investment—Table C: Public investment

£ million (2000–01 prices)

	Strategic roads	*Rail*	*Local transport*	*London*	*Other*	*Unallocated*	*Total*
2001–02	972	245	1,300	591	71	0	3,179
2002–03	1,073	955	1,469	736	70	0	4,302
2003–04	1,099	2,106	1,575	881	78	0	5,739
2004–05	1,122	1,922	1,742	825	56	99	5,766
2005–06	1,000	2,343	1,686	661	55	116	5,861
2006–07	1,113	2,101	1,798	600	54	237	5,903
2007–08	1,230	1,016	1,834	589	53	1,393	6,115
2008–09	1,380	746	1,797	564	51	1,595	6,133
2009–10	1,381	749	1,763	559	50	1,807	6,310
2010–11	1,363	749	1,743	559	49	2,016	6,478
2001–02 to 2010–11	11,733	12,931	16,706	6,565	587	7,264	55,786

Table D: Public resource[1]

£ million (2000–01 prices)

	Strategic roads	*Rail*	*Local transport*	*London*	*Local charging revenue*	*Other*	*Unallocated*	*Total*
2001–02	420	1,323	2,719	598	0	128	0	5,187
2002–03	434	1,244	2,736	657	0	145	0	5,216
2003–04	466	1,163	2,735	677	0	137	0	5,178
2004–05	485	1,150	2,717	686	123	135	0	5,296
2005–06	486	1,059	2,693	672	239	133	0	5,282
2006–07	430	1,012	2,671	661	260	132	0	5,166
2007–08	439	865	2,640	650	275	130	0	4,999
2008–09	421	868	2,621	641	297	129	0	4,977
2009–10	404	705	2,596	631	314	127	0	4,777
2010–11	410	633	2,575	607	302	126	0	4,653
2001–02 to 2010–11	4,395	10,023	26,702	6,478	1,811	1,322	0	50,731

[1] Excluding revenue support for private investment

Table E: Private investment

£ million (2000–01 prices)

	Strategic roads	*Rail*	*Local transport*	*London*	*Other*	*Unallocated*	*Total*
2001–02	169	3,566	546	704	0	0	4,985
2002–03	212	3,566	642	670	0	0	5,091
2003–04	225	3,517	725	610	0	0	5,077
2004–05	136	3,584	781	553	0	0	5,053
2005–06	287	2,791	842	926	0	32	4,846
2006–07	366	2,714	905	1,242	0	38	5,226
2007–08	337	2,621	890	1,373	0	77	5,220
2008–09	246	2,600	858	1,211	0	453	4,915
2009–10	160	2,606	797	1,002	0	519	4,564
2010–11	156	2,624	777	644	0	588	4,202
2001–02 to 2010–11	2,294	30,189	7,762	8,935	0	1,707	49,180

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the public spending from local charging revenue planned for each year 2001–02 to 2010–11 is at *(a)* outturn prices and *(b)* 2000–01 prices. [29938]

Dr. Whitehead: English local authorities have reported receiving £6.5 billion in income from sales, fees and charges in 1999–2000 excluding the amounts paid into the housing revenue account and the capital account. More recent information is not yet available, and projections have not been made for future years.

Planning Consents

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many planning consents have been granted on green belt land in each of the past 10 years. [30243]

Ms Keeble: The information requested is not held centrally by the Department and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

School Buses

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about pilot studies being carried out into requiring traffic to stop for school buses. [29914]

Ms Keeble: As far as we are aware, there are no pilot studies being carried out into requiring traffic to stop for school buses. FirstGroup plc will shortly be starting pilots of American-style yellow school buses, but the pilots will not involve traffic being required to stop for the buses as it is required to do in the United States.

Council Tax

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the liability of people in hospital to pay council tax. [29933]

Dr. Whitehead: During temporary stays in hospital, people remain liable for council tax at their normal addresses. However, when someone's main residence is a hospital, their previous home will be exempt from council tax if it is unoccupied.

Railways (South-West)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the provision of extra resources for the improvement of railway facilities in the south-west. [29913]

Mr. Jamieson: Each individual rail project and improvements negotiated through franchise agreements will usually benefit more than one part of Britain. The SRA has therefore not attempted to break down its planned expenditure on a regional basis.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans to issue guidance on the environmental objectives which the Civil Aviation Authority must follow in exercising its air navigation functions. [30736]

Mr. Jamieson: I am today giving guidance to the CAA under section 70(2) of the Transport Act 2000 on environmental objectives for the authority in exercising its air navigation functions. While safety must always remain the paramount consideration, for the first time guidance is being given to the CAA on the Government's sustainable development strategy and environmental policies and how these relate to the authority's air navigation functions. It includes guidance on environmental problems commonly associated with aviation, including advice on best practice, noise mitigation procedures, and steps the authority should ensure are followed, including consultation, when changes to air navigation procedures become necessary that might have a significant effect on the environment. Links are made to the substantial body of guidance to regional and local planning authorities where there is a read across with air navigation procedures and the design of controlled airspace around larger airports. I have placed copies of the guidance in the Library.

Planning Green Paper

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish his consultation document on the Use Classes Order that was promised in the Planning Green Paper. [30819]

Ms Keeble: We are today publishing a consultation document entitled "Consultation on possible changes to the Use Classes Order and temporary uses provisions".

This completes the series of consultation papers that together are designed to deliver a radical reform of the planning system.

Planning permission is required for a material change of use. However, certain uses are so similar, for example in terms of noise, traffic, appearance and parking, that there is no obvious reason why planning permission for change of use from one to the other should be required. The Use Classes Order (UCO) excludes from planning control any change of use where both the existing and proposed use fall within the same class. The General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) provides further flexibility by classifying certain moves between the Use Classes as permitted development, so that a developer does not need to apply for planning permission.

It is important that the Use Classes Order should be up to date and relevant and reflect current policy priorities. In our view, the order and related GPDO provisions should be constructed in a way which allows the maximum possible freedom from planning control consistent with delivering planning policy and wider objectives, including protecting amenity.

The consultation document sets out a range of options for changes to the use class provisions and temporary use provisions. We will consider responses carefully before deciding on the most appropriate way forward.

Copies of the consultation document will be placed in the Library of the House.

Regional Planning Guidance

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Regional Planning Guidance for the east midlands will be published. [30820]

Dr. Whitehead: The Regional Planning Guidance for the east midlands (RPG8) is being published today.

The RPG sets out the spatial development strategy that encompasses proposals for the development of the region's economy, infrastructure, housing and other land uses. The guiding principle is that the main urban areas and previously developed land should be the preferred locations for most development. RPG also sets out proposals for the conservation, management and enhancement of the region's natural and cultural environment.

I am pleased that much of the format and content of RPG8, including the vision, objectives and core strategy, carries forward much of what was proposed in the original draft RPG prepared by the East Midlands Regional Local Government Association (EMRLGA). RPG8 reflects very effective working between EMRLGA, local authorities and other stakeholders, all of whom have made valuable contributions to refine and enhance the original draft strategy. It builds on the new inclusive process for preparing RPG that the Government have put in place. The RPG was prepared before our planning Green Paper proposals were announced in December. I look to the Regional Planning Body to take strategy forward and to monitor and review it in line with the regional planning principles set out in the Green Paper.

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many times he has met Lord Birt to discuss transport; [29314]

(2) if Lord Birt will be considering the role of the taxi as part of his transport analysis; [29312]

(3) what access to civil servants in his Department has been afforded to Lord Birt; [29316]

(4) if he will arrange for Lord Birt, as part of his transport work, to make an extended study of the operation of the Circle Line. [29311]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Unitary Local Authorities

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of the population is covered by unitary local authorities. [29299]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Mann, dated 24 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the percentage of the population who live within unitary authorities.

The percentage of the population of England at mid-2000 who lived within unitary local authorities created under the Local Government Act of 1992 is 16.6%. All local authorities in Wales are unitary authorities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people live within the recommended safe distance from nuclear power plants in the UK. [25251]

Mr. Wilson: There is no official recommendation relating to safe distances at which to live from nuclear power plants. All operators of civil nuclear installations in the UK are required to have emergency plans, as a condition of their site licences. These plans include a Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) around each site, defined in relation to the potential release of radiation from a reasonably foreseeable accident. The operators of UK civil nuclear power station sites have estimated that a total of 4,030 people are permanently resident within these DEPZs.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the potential future liabilities that the Government will incur owing to decommissioning in the nuclear industry; and if she will make a statement. [28920]

Mr. Wilson: At 31 March 2001 public sector civil nuclear liabilities—i.e. those liabilities for which UKAEA and BNFL are responsible—were estimated to be over

£42 billion. Liabilities estimates are reviewed annually by UKAEA and BNFL. Information is published in their annual reports and accounts.

In her statement to the House on 28 November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry outlined the nature of these liabilities and the Government's plans for improving management arrangements and ensuring that the nuclear legacy is dealt with safely, efficiently and cost effectively. A White Paper will be published in the spring

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total level of Government financial support to the nuclear industry was in each year between 1980 and 1990, broken down by *(a)* research grants, *(b)* non-fossil fuel levy, *(c)* investment in BNFL facilities, *(d)* running costs of UKAEA and Ninex and *(e)* other sources. [27455]

Mr. Wilson: Funding to the UK nuclear industry in this period was provided primarily in the form of grant and grant in aid to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). The funding enabled UKAEA to undertake civil nuclear research programmes and to discharge liabilities arising from past programmes.

The sums provided were as follows:

	£ million
	Grant, and grant in aid
1980–81	158
1981–82	164
1982–83	215
1983–84	204
1984–85	196
1985–86	169
1986–87	163
1987–88	148
1988–89	247
1989–90	196

Notes:

Figures are taken from Government Expenditure Plans Reports, which until 1991 did not list separate funding for fusion.

The non fossil fuel obligation and fossil fuel levy were first put in place in 1990 and therefore did not exist in the period in question.BNFL, like other companies, made various applications for and received funding under the first of the Government's Regional Development Grants schemes (RDG I) established under the Industry Act 1972 and the Industrial Development Act 1982. This scheme ended in 1984 and was replaced by a successor scheme (RDG II). BNFL did not receive any payments under the RDG II scheme. The Government's and BNFL's records relating to grants paid to BNFL under the RDG I scheme are no longer available.

Government grants were reported in the source and application of funds statement (which, in accordance with the accounting conventions of the time, did not necessarily disclose actual cash flows) in BNFL's annual report and accounts as follows:

	£ million
1980–81	24.5
1981–82	30.6
1982–83	36.4
1983–84	40.7
1984–85	32.1
1985–86	18.5
1986–87	1
1987–88	Nil
1988–89	Nil
1989–90	Nil

The costs of UK NIREX were met by subscriptions from its members (UKAEA, the Central Electricity Generating Board, South of Scotland Electricity Board and BNFL.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the status of the dismantling and decommissioning programme for the Windscale Number One Pile at Sellafield. [28522]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 20 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 168W.

Nuclear Decommissioning

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the costs of *(a)* managing civil nuclear waste and *(b)* decommissioning civil nuclear facilities in each year since 1995; and if she will estimate the costs this year and in the remaining years of the current expenditure plan. [29699]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) on 17 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 25–26W.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the cost to BNFL of decommissioning nuclear plants for which it has responsibility. [28740]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* BNFL's annual report and accounts state that decommissioning expenditure charged against provisions since financial year 1993–94 was as follows:

	£ million
2001	82
2000	76
1999	80
1998	10
1997	1
1996	1
1995	1
1994	7

Prior to this date no decommissioning expenditure charged against provisions was disclosed in BNFL's annual report and accounts. Information on any such expenditure is not readily available and would require disproportionate time and cost to bring together.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the source of the figures for the number of fuel poor households which are not connected to the gas network given in paragraph 9.12 of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy; what the definition is of fuel poverty used in this paragraph; what verification of the figure has been carried out by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* independent bodies; and if she will make a statement. [25280]

Mr. Wilson: Paragraph 9.12 of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy states that around 1.3 million people without a gas supply in Great Britain are thought to be in fuel poverty. This figure is a broad estimate derived from estimates for England (0.9 million), Scotland (0.3 million) and Wales (0.05 million) based on official data sources. The production of these figures, and the overall estimate, have been overseen by members of the Government Statistical Service.

England

It is estimated that in 1998 there were approximately 0.9 million households in England which were fuel poor and did not have mains gas in the home (the householder stated that there was no gas supply in the home). The source of this information was the 1998 Energy Follow Up Survey which was carried out by the Building Research Establishment on behalf of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This figure has been derived under both main definitions of fuel poverty used in the Government's UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, set out as follows. There is a small difference (0.08 million) between the figures under these two definitions; however, both figures round to 0.9 million.

(1) Fuel poverty defined as when a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) on fuel in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime;

(2) Fuel poverty defined as when a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (excluding housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) on fuel in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime.

A summary of the fuel poverty results from this survey is available at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/fuelpoverty/index.htm

Scotland

It is estimated that in 1996 there were approximately 320,000 households in Scotland which were fuel poor and did not have a mains gas supply in the home (i.e. there was neither a gas meter, nor a mains gas pipe in the home). This is the latest information available for Scotland. The source of this information is the 1996 Scottish House Condition Survey which is carried out on behalf of the Scottish Executive.

The definition of fuel poverty which was used is that a household needs to spend 10 per cent. or more of income (including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) on all fuel use.

Wales

It is estimated that in 1997–98 there were approximately 50,000 households in Wales which were fuel poor and did not have a mains gas supply in the home. This is derived from information from the 1998 Welsh House Condition Survey which was carried out on behalf of the National Assembly for Wales. The estimate of fuel poverty in Wales is based on the number of households eligible for assistance through the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (222,000 in 1997–98). Figures are not currently available under definitions of fuel poverty, and this "eligibility measure" is used as a proxy.

Electricity

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to ensure that Ofgem has adequate financial services expertise to monitor and prevent any collapse in the new electricity trading arrangements. [26600]

Mr. Wilson: I have asked Callum McCarthy, the chairman of Ofgem, to respond directly to the hon. Member on the issue. I will ensure that copies of the letter are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the Energy Regulator's statement in favour of small generators and transmission losses from large remote power stations. [29491]

Mr. Wilson: The treatment of losses through transmission has been a long running issue in the electricity industry, the general consensus within the industry is that the current arrangements are not ideal. It will be important that any proposed change to the system carefully considers the effect on both small and large-scale generation, including remote sites.

Icelandic Water Trawlermen's Compensation Scheme

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants under the Icelandic water trawlermen's compensation scheme have had payments reduced to take account of previously paid exgratia payments. [27629]

Ms Hewitt: Up to 11 January 2002 there were 2,606.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total amount is which has been deducted from the compensation paid under the Icelandic water trawlermen's compensation scheme as a result of previously paid exgratia payments. [27628]

Ms Hewitt: Up to 11 January 2002 the total amount was £5,887,609.

Launch Aid

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason the conditions attached to the grant of launch aid are deemed commercially confidential. [28046]

Mr. Wilson: The conditions of Launch Investment are commercially confidential under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The disclosure of the terms and conditions of Launch Investment would harm the commercial interests of the companies concerned.

Arms Sales

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the level of debt owing to the United Kingdom by overseas Governments as a result of arms sales for the years 1997 to 2002. [27216]

Ms Hewitt: The table shows future amounts due on guarantees, and unrecovered claims in respect of ECGD guarantees issued in support of defence business during the financial years shown. The year of ECGD guarantee issue does not necessarily reflect the year that the equipment was sold.

		£ million
Year	*Future amounts due on guarantees*	*Unrecovered claims*
1997–98	118	5
1998–99	284	0
1999–2000	508	0
2000–01	1,893	0
2001–02[1]	10	0
Total[2]	2,814	5

[1] Pre 1 January 2002

[2] 1 April 1997 to 1 January 2002

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by her Department in each of the last four years. [27955]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has not carried out a full refurbishment of any buildings during the last four years. The capital costs of minor works, redecorations, maintenance and partial refurbishments in these years has been as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1997–98	2.28
1998–99	2.17
1999–2000	2.85
2000–01	2.70

Wind Power

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what landscape criteria she applies in determining applications for wind power stations with an output greater than 50 MW. [28388]

Mr. Wilson: All relevant criteria set out in planning guidance and environmental assessment guidance are taken into account. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry also has a duty under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 to have regard to the extent to which a person who formulates a proposal has complied with his duty of having regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty and do what he reasonably can to mitigate any effect the proposal would have on the natural beauty of the countryside. In addition the views of the relevant local planning authority which will be familiar with the local terrain are also taken into account.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what approvals she has given to wind power stations with an output greater than 50 MW in the last 12 months; and what public consultation was undertaken in each case. [28389]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has approved in principle the application for a windfarm at Cefn Croes. Formal approval will be issued once the necessary planning conditions and planning obligations have been agreed. The public were consulted on the application and their views were taken into account. There have been no other windfarm approvals.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the criteria used when deciding whether to erect wind farms apply to the whole of the United Kingdom. [29273]

Mr. Wilson: Decisions on wind farms or any other type of power station over 50 megawatts in England and Wales are handled by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. In reaching her decision my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for will consider all relevant criteria set out in planning guidance and environmental assessment guidance. Other competent authorities responsible for authorising smaller power stations can be expected to apply similar criteria.

Applications for power stations in Scotland and Northern Ireland are devolved matters. As a consequence the criteria are a matter for them.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the money paid out in industrial injuries compensation to former coal miners in the Easington constituency relating to chronic bronchitis and emphysema has been taken back by the compensation recovery scheme. [28351]

Mr. Wilson: There are 4,763 claims registered for compensation for respiratory disease in the constituency of Easington, to date. 1,227 interim payments have been made and 288 claims have been settled in full. £6.0 million has been paid in damages in this area.

Compensation recovery legislation ensures that personal injury victims are not compensated twice for the same loss—once by the state and once by the compensator. So far, £82,635.82 has been paid to the Compensation Recovery Unit by the Department of Trade and Industry in respect of claims from Easington. None of this has been reclaimed from claimants' awards.

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the Government have paid in lawyers' fees in respect of miners' compensation in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland since 1997. [28492]

Mr. Wilson: Since the Department assumed responsibility for British Coal's liabilities in January 1998, payments to solicitors, excluding trial costs, and disbursements total £64.2 million in England, £16.8 million in Wales and £6.3 million in Scotland.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* Merseyside and *(c)* England who have submitted compensation claims for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* respiratory diseases have attended a medical assessment. [28701]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* In the time given, the Department is unable to provide a breakdown of claimants in St. Helens, South and Merseyside who have attended medical assessment. However, former miners with respiratory disease in these areas will be advised to go to centres at Wigan, Wrexham and Manchester. Former miners with vibration white finger, VWF, will be advised to go to the centre at Manchester.

The number of former miners who have undergone medical assessments at the centres mentioned is as follows:

Number of former miners who have been medically assessed

Centre location	*Number*
Respiratory disease	
Wigan	923
Wrexham	237
Manchester	403
England total	16,841
Vibration white finger, VWF	
Manchester	2,318
England total	59,628

Note:

In addition, 23,508 claims by the estates of former miners have also been assessed. It is not possible to break down these figures by region.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average waiting time for former miners for a medical assessment appointment is in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* Merseyside and *(c)* England in connection with a claim for (i) vibration white finger and (ii) respiratory diseases. [28702]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* In relation to vibration white finger, VWF, the occupation group must first be identified before medical assessment can be made. The time from confirmation of occupation group to MAP appointment is as follows:

Region	*Time to MAP as defined (days)*
(a) St. Helens, South	38
(b) Merseyside	40
(c) England	67

Before a claimant can attend an appointment to undergo the Medical Assessment Process, MAP, for compensation for respiratory disease, the recovery of the claimant's medical records must first be completed. Appointments are then made, with the most elderly and ill claimants receiving priority. Low priority claimants will not have an appointment booked if a higher priority claimant is available. In the time given, the Department is unable to provide an average timescale for the time from completion of records recovery to MAP appointment for England, but, given the comparatively small numbers of claims in these areas, a breakdown for St. Helens, South and Merseyside has been possible and is given in the table. The claims have been split into two categories for purpose of analysis:

	Merseyside	*St. Helens, South*
Category 1 claimants[1]		
Number of claimants	430	186
Average waiting time (days)	63	66
Category 2 claimants[2]		
Number of claimants	16	5
Average waiting time (days)	38	39

[1] Claims which have been assessed

[2] Claims which are un-assessed but with a future booked appointment

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which solicitors are charging both the client and the Government for their services in dealing with the claims from miners suffering from respiratory diseases and vibration white finger. [29381]

Mr. Wilson: Solicitors are under strict professional and legal duties to inform their clients of the basis on which work is carried out, including the fee structure (Solicitors' Practice Rules 1990 and Solicitors' Costs Information and Client Care Code 1999). The Department has no sight of, or influence over, terms and conditions that claimants enter into with solicitors. It is the Department's view that, because it is covering solicitors' costs, the claimants should not be asked to make any payment towards costs.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice is being given to ex-miners about Government's payments to solicitors for each miner's compensation claim. [29391]

Mr. Wilson: Solicitors are under strict professional and legal duties to inform their clients of the basis on which work is carried out, including the fee structure (Solicitors' Practice Rules 1990 and Solicitors' Costs Information and Client Care Code 1999). The mining unions are also well aware that the Department covers solicitors' costs and will no doubt advise their members accordingly. The Department has made public on many occasions that claimants should not have to make a payment towards solicitors costs.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which 12 solicitors handle the largest number of compensation claims for miners suffering from respiratory disorders and vibration white finger. [29382]

Mr. Wilson: The 12 firms dealing with the largest numbers of respiratory disease and vibration white finger claims listed alphabetically are:

1. Browell Smith and Co.
2. Furley Page Fielding
3. Graysons
4. Hugh James
5. Irwin Mitchells
6. Mark Gilbert Morse
7. O. H. Parsons
8. Raleys
9. Thompsons
10. Towells
11. Watson Burton
12. Randell Saunders.

These solicitors and their contact details are listed on the Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what statutory requirement there is for *(a)* claims handling companies and *(b)* solicitors to advise clients that the Government have an agreed handling fee for miners' compensation claims. [29359]

Mr. Wilson: Claims handling companies are unregulated and are not subject to the same duties as solicitors. Solicitors are under strict professional and legal duties to inform their clients of the basis on which work is carried out, including the fee structure (Solicitors; practice Rules 1990 and Solicitors; Costs Information and Client Care Code 1999). This would include the liability of any other party, in this case the Department, to meet the claimants' costs.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many solicitors are dealing with miners' compensation claims for respiratory diseases and vibration white finger. [29383]

Mr. Wilson: In relation to respiratory disease, there are approximately 270 firms dealing with compensation claims and about 210 firms processing vibration white finger claims. These are listed with contact details on the Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth.

Miners' Pension Fund

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of former miners who were working in Staffordshire in the 1980s lost their jobs but were not entitled payments from the pension fund. [29401]

Mr. Wilson: None. All former British Coal miners when reaching pensionable age, whether dismissed or not, are entitled to the pension benefits they have accrued whilst in employment.

I announced on 11 December that certain miners dismissed during the 1984–85 strike, would receive an enhancement to their pension in recognition of the years of further service they lost as a result of British Coal's decision not to re-employ them.

Hawk Jets

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Indian Government concerning the BAE Systems bid to supply Hawk jets; and if she will make a statement. [28302]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has had no discussions with the Indian Government concerning the BAE Systems bid to supply Hawk jets.

Landscape Industry

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she supports the aims of the British Association of Landscape Industries to get their registration of landscape operatives affiliated to the Construction Industry Certification Scheme. [28012]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* The question of possible affiliation between the two schemes is one for the Board of the Construction Skills Certification Scheme Ltd. to consider, together with managers of the British Association of Landscape Industries' scheme.

However, given my ministerial responsibility for construction, I do welcome all efforts aimed at achieving greater collaboration in the industry with a view to improving standards of health and safety, and training standards generally. I am also keen that, wherever possible, the industry improves its working practices to allow greater flexibility for those that move between different sectors in the industry.

I understand that discussions are taking place between the Chairman of CSCS Ltd., Anthony W. Merricks CBE, and the Vice Chair of BALI, David Spencer. If a satisfactory solution can be reached, and I understand that discussions are proceeding in a positive way, this would be welcomed.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress made on the roll-out of "Your Guide" to sub-post offices. [28679]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* My Department has provided £25 million funding for the pilot of "Your Guide" currently operating in Leicestershire and Rutland. The pilot was fully up and running by the end of August last year and will finish on 1 March this year. The results of the pilot will be fully evaluated and decisions on national roll-out will be based on the findings of the evaluation and on further work on funding and service design. Among other things the evaluation and associated work will establish the costs of implementing a "Your Guide" scheme nationally and will compare these with the benefits. Work on evaluating the pilot has already begun and a full evaluation should be completed by the end of June. Work on funding and the design of a national service will be progressed as far as possible in parallel with evaluation of the pilot so that firm decisions on a national scheme can be taken next autumn.

Oil and Gas Directorate Posts

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of her Department's Oil and Gas Directorate posts were in *(a)* Aberdeen, *(b)* Glasgow, *(c)* London and *(d)* elsewhere, in 2001. [29478]

Mr. Wilson: The number of Oil and Gas Directorate posts located in *(a)* Aberdeen, *(b)* Glasgow, *(c)* London and *(d)* elsewhere, in 2001 is as follows:

2001

Aberdeen—84.5
Glasgow—0
London—96.6
Elsewhere—0.

This represents an increase of 12.2 posts in Aberdeen, and a decrease of 7.2 posts in London compared with the previous year.

Overhead Transmission Lines

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent changes she has made to her policy on overhead transmission lines. [29576]

Mr. Wilson: None.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has taken to ensure that contractors working on the Lackenby to Shipton overhead transmission line will comply with legal and safety requirements. [29492]

Mr. Wilson: The relevant local planning authority is responsible for seeing that planning conditions are complied with. The enforcement of other statutory requirements falls to the relevant agencies.

Electromagnetic Fields

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the World Health Organisation's policy of prudent avoidance to exposure to electromagnetic fields; and if she will make a statement. [29256]

Mr. Wilson: The World Health Organisation, in its publication "Electromagnetic Fields and Public Health—Extremely low frequency fields and cancer", Fact Sheet No. 263, October 2001, refers to certain precautionary measures that can be taken by Government, industry and individuals. Several of these measures are already in place in the UK.

Regional Development Agencies (Partnership)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-regional partnerships of regional development agencies are being established; and how many are business led. [29300]

Alan Johnson: Sixty-one sub-regional economic partnerships are either already in existence or are currently being established with the help of the regional development agencies. The RDAs will be working closely with the partnerships to deliver the regions' economic strategies. The majority are chaired by business people or have substantial business involvement in their boards, but all are expected to be fully representative of the public and private sectors.

Energy Sources

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's targets are for *(a)* the proportion of the national energy portfolio that will be met by renewable sources by 2010 and *(b)* the proportion of nationally generated renewable energy sources that will be derived from onshore wind power generation by the same date. [29287]

Mr. Wilson: Our target is that, by 2010, 10 per cent. of UK electricity sales by licensed suppliers will come from sources eligible for the Renewables Obligation. This is subject to the cost to consumers being acceptable.

While wind energy at both onshore and offshore installation can be expected to contribute significantly to the achievement of this overall target, the Government do not set targets for growth in each type of renewable energy generation. How each type will contribute to overall targets for renewable energy will be a matter for the market.

Your Guide Scheme

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the expected time scale is for implementing the "Your Guide" scheme throughout the post office and sub-post office network; what the cost will be of implementing the scheme throughout the network; and what the average cost to each sub-post office business of introducing terminals to the "Your Guide" system will be. [28430]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* My Department has provided £25 million funding for the pilot of "Your Guide" currently operating in Leicestershire and Rutland. The pilot was fully up and running by the end of August last year and is not due to finish until 1 March this year. The results of the pilot will be fully evaluated and decisions on national roll-out will be based on the findings of the evaluation and on further work on funding and service design. Among other things the evaluation and associated work will establish the costs of implementing a "Your Guide" scheme nationally and will compare these with the benefits. Until work on the design of a national service is further advanced it will not be possible to estimate the cost of providing the necessary equipment to individual sub-post offices.

A full evaluation of the pilot should be completed by the end of June. Work on funding and the design of a national service will be progressed alongside evaluation of the pilot so that firm decisions on a national scheme can be taken next autumn.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many officials from her Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [28998]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* None.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many environmental appraisals have been published by her Department since 1 January 2001; and if she will list the last four. [28994]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* None. The last four self-standing environmental appraisals published by DTI are as follows:

Enterprise, Skills and Innovation White Paper (February 2001)

UK Coal Operating Aid Scheme (December 2000)

Modernising the Framework of Utility Regulation (January and April 2000)

The New Electricity Trading Arrangements (October 1999).

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures her Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [28996]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* DTI's aim is to mainstream the environment—within the wider context of promoting sustainable development—into the Department's operational management and policy-making.

To this end, DTI's Estates and Management Facilities Directorate run an Environmental Managements System accredited to ISO 14001 covering DTI's HQ buildings.

This incorporates monitoring, control and regular audits to ensure the continued effectiveness of the system and to track progress towards targets.

The effectiveness of DTI's procedures for environmental screening and appraisal of policies were reviewed last year by a member of the Foresight Environmental Appraisal Task Force and the Department's Internal Audit. Revised guidelines are being finalised which will be published on DTI's website.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the last occasion was on which she requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [28995]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Where environmental considerations are relevant they form an integral part of policy advice to Ministers.

Departmental Spending Review

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans her Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its spending review submission to the Treasury. [28997]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* In line with HM Treasury's guidelines, DTI will submit a Sustainable Development report (SDR) in which the Department will explain the sustainable development implications of the Department's proposals. As part of the spending review, the Department will also consider how its PSA targets relate to sustainable development and summarise how sustainable development has influenced the Department's priorities.

Export Credits

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 103W, on the Export Credits Guarantees Department, what estimate she has made of the savings produced by refinancing; over what period of time she expects these to be realised and under which Vote; and if she will make a statement. [29692]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 508W.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the objections made by the Export Credits Guarantee Department to US proposals on greater transparency at the recently concluded OECD negotiations on common approaches to officially supported export credits and the environment. [29408]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* At the June 2001 meeting of the OECD Export Credit Group, the USA rejected latest proposals of the common approaches recommendation as they did not "require" Export Credit Agencies (ECAs) to make public environmental impact information relating to projects being reviewed by ECAs before the ECA reaches its decision on supporting a project.

ECGD would have been content to discuss this issue further and was successful with its proposal that the following wording should be included:

> "Members are expected to encourage project sponsors to make environmental impact information publicly available".

Several of the country representatives stated that their domestic legislation prevented their ECA from making publicly available any information concerning applications for support. Several more made it clear that, at this stage, they could not consider publishing any information "prior" to making their decision on support. It was therefore apparent that a consensus could not have been achieved.

Given the significance of the issues that could be agreed and the commitment to review the agreement by the end of 2003

> "to enhance it in the light of experience".

ECGD concluded that this agreement was a good first step in order to cement the progress made.

ECGD will be consulting about the timing of the publication of EIAs in early 2002 as part of its review of its "Impact Questionnaire" and associated case impact analysis process.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library a list of the *(a)* projects and *(b)* companies supported by the Export Credits Guarantee Department since 1 January 2001. [29410]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* A list of guarantees issued in the financial year 2000–01 was provided in ECGD's annual report and resource Accounts 2000–01 and is shown in the table. Details of overseas investment insurance and other insurances are treated as commercial-in-confidence by ECGD and are thus not given here. ECGD requires exporters' consent to publish guarantee details and will be writing after the end of this financial year to seek this consent for guarantees issued in 2001–02.

Market	*Exporter*	*Buyer/airline/operating lessor*	*Project*
Austria	Airbus Industrie	Austrian Airlines	Airbus Aircraft
Azerbaijan	Rolls Royce	Azerbaijan Hava Yollari	Aero Engines
Bahrain	Airbus Industrie	Gulf Air Company GSC	Airbus Aircraft
Barbados	Angloco Ltd.	Ministry of Finance & Economic Affairs, Barbados	Fire Engines
Barbados	NSG Exports Ltd.	Government of Barbados	Public Service Vehicles
Brazil	Airbus Industrie	TAM	Airbus Aircraft
Brazil	Fairbank Brearley Ltd.	Metallugica Tuzzi Ltda.	Hydraulic Machinery
Brazil	VAI Industries (UK) Ltd.	CIA Siderurgica Tubaro (CST)	Steel Mill
Brazil	VAI Industries (UK) Ltd.	Companâhia Siderugica Nacional (CSN)	Rebuild of Blast Furnace
Canada	Airbus Industrie	Air Canada	Airbus Aircraft
Chile	Airbus Industrie	Lanchile	Airbus Aircraft
China	Airbus Industrie	China Eastern Airlines	Airbus Aircraft
Croatia	Aeromatic-Fielder Ltd.	Pliva DD	Pharmaceutical Production Line
Croatia	Airbus Industrie	Croatia Airlines	Airbus Aircraft

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Market	*Exporter*	*Buyer/airline/operating lessor*	*Project*
Dominica	Carillion Construction (West Indies) Ltd.	Ministry of Finance, Dominica	Construction of Building
Dominican Rep	Motherwell Bridge Engineering Ltd.	CESPM	San Pedro Power Project
El Salvador	Airbus Industrie	TACA International Airlines	Airbus Aircraft
Finland	Airbus Industrie	Finnair	Airbus Aircraft
Hong Kong	Airbus Industrie	Dragonair	Airbus Aircraft
Hong Kong	Airbus Industrie	Cathay Pacific Aiways Ltd.	Airbus Aircraft
Hong Kong	Dennis Specialist Vehicles Ltd.	Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1993) Ltd.	Buses
Hong Kong	Volvo Bus Exports (UK) Ltd.	Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1993) Ltd.	Buses
Iceland	Rolls Royce	Icelandair	Aero Engines
India	Kier International Ltd.	Dabhol Power Company	Port Development
Iran	Cementation Skanska	National Iranian Steel Corporation Ltd.	Coal Mine
Jamaica	Kier/ Mabey (Kingston) Joint Venture	Ministry of Transport and Works, Jamaica	Flyover Bridges
Kazakhstan	Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd.	Agency for Health Care	Hospital
Malaysia	Air Products plc	Petroliam Nasional Berhad	Supplies for Gas Plants
Malaysia	Air Products plc	Petroliam Nasional Berhad	Supplies for Gas Plants
Mexico	Alstom Power UK Ltd.	PEMEX	Gas Turbines & Associated Equipment
Mexico	European Marine Contractors Ltd.	PEMEX	Pipeline Installation
Mexico	Gall Thomson Environmental plc	PEMEX	Anti-Pollution Couplings
Mexico	Howden Power Ltd.	Comision Federal de Electricdad	Power Station Air Pre-Heater Enhancements
Netherlands	Airbus Industrie	Aerfi	Airbus Aircraft
Netherlands	Airbus Industrie	Premiair A/S	Airbus Aircraft
Oman	Weir Westgarth Ltd.	Ministry of Electricity and Water, Oman	Desalination Plant
Philippines	The Balfour-Cleveland Consortium	Department of Public Works and Highways, Philippines	Bridging Components
Philippines	Mabey & Johnson	Government of the Republic of the Philippines	Steel Bridging
Republic of Korea	Airbus Industrie	Korean Airlines	Airbus Aircraft
Singapore	Airbus Industrie	SALE	Airbus Aircraft
South Africa	BAE Systems	Government of South Africa	Trainer/ Fighter Aircraft
Sri Lanka	Airbus Industrie	Sri Lankan Airlines Ltd.	Airbus Aircraft
Switzerland	Airbus Industrie	Flightlease	Airbus Aircraft
Turkey	Airbus Industrie	Turkish Airlines	Airbus Aircraft
Turkey	Alstom Power UK Ltd.	AK Enerji	Gas Turbine Generators
Turkey	Battenfield Gloucester Europe Ltd.	Onur Kimya AS	Food Packaging Plant
Turkey	Corus UK Ltd.	Turkey Electricity Generation & Transmission Corp	Steel Products for Thermal Power Plant
Turkey	Gateway (Textiles) Ltd.	Alkan Yatak Yorgan ve San Tic STL	Mattress Machinery
Turkey	Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd.	Tubitak-Bilten	Micro Satellite
Turkey	York International Ltd.	Ulusal Finansal Kiralma AS	Airconditioning Equipment
United Arab Emirates	Airbus Industrie	Emirates	Airbus Aircraft
United States	Airbus Industrie	ILFC	Airbus Aircraft
United States	Airbus Industrie	GECAS	Airbus Aircraft
United States	Airbus Industrie	CIT	Airbus Aircraft

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make environmental and social impact assessments of the Yusefeli Dam available for public discussion before a final decision is taken on extending export credit support to Amec. [29407]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* An Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) has been conducted and we expect that a Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) will also be produced. Prior to making any final decision for ECGD support, the Government would need to be satisfied that such reports have taken into account best international practice.

The EIAR is not the property of the UK Government, and its release by ECGD would require the consent of the party who has supplied it to ECGD. Such considerations would also apply to the RAP when that document is produced in due course.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Export Credits Guarantee Department will take to implement the recommendation for public discussion contained in the OECD agreement on common approaches to officially supported export credits and the environment. [29427]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The recommendations for public discussion in the Common Approaches on Environment and Officially Supported Export Credits are:

> "Members are expected to:
>
> Publish national ECA environmental statements/principles and procedural guidance. ECGD published its "Statement of Business Principles" in December 2000. A "Case Handling Process—Information Note" and the "Impact Questionnaire" were placed on ECGD's website in January 2001.
>
> When appropriate, exchange views with stakeholders. ECGD consulted stakeholders during the development of the "Statement of Business Principles" and is about to launch a formal review of the "Impact Questionnaire" and the case impact analysis process.
>
> Encourage project sponsors to make environmental impact information publicly available. For greenfield projects in sensitive sectors or locations ECGD normally expects an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out. Best practice for EIAs includes consultation with the affected communities and in many counties the EIA legislation requires this. ECGD expects project developers to take account of best practice in the preparation of EIAs.
>
> Make available to the public at least annually, subject to legal provisions on public disclosure in members' countries, information on projects classified in Categories A and B. ECGD's latest annual report contains details of all the guarantees issued, irrespective of environmental category, during the financial year 2000–01. It is intended to provide this information, on a quarterly basis, on the ECGD website during 2002".

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what equipment has been stolen from her Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26826]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Department of Trade and Industry holds this information in respect of IT equipment only. Other stolen items are recorded on its log of missing items and to extract and list only those items which have been stolen would incur disproportionate costs. The list of stolen IT equipment is as follows:

Date	*Description*	*Value (£)*
20 May 1997	Laptop	2,000
22 May 1997	Laptop	3,000
6 June 1997	Laptop	2,000
16 June 1997	Laptop	2,000
21 August 1997	Modem	300
2 September 1997	Modem	250
27 September 1997	Laptop	1,500
14 November 1997[1]	Network analyser	2,500
8 December 1997[1]	Laptop	1,500
15 December 1997	Video projector	6,000
18 December 1997	Psion	300
9 January 1998	Monitor	300
19 January 1998	PC base unit	1,000
10 February 1998	Laptop	1,000
31 March 1998	PC base unit	1,000
1 May 1998	Server	1,500
13 May 1998	Two printers	267
9 June 1998	Laptop, printer	3,000
9 October 1998	Laptop	1,500
13 November 1998	Laptop	1,500
16 November 1998	Answerphone	50
1 February 1999	Answerphone	50
23 February 1999	Laptop	300
16 March 1999	Laptop	1,810
22 March 1999	Printer	167
22 March 1999	Printer	300
25 March 1999	Video camera	172
24 June 1999	PC	600
8 July 1999	Psion	300
10 August 1999	PC	1,200
21 October 1999	Laptop	2,356
1 November 1999	Laptop	700
3 November 1999	Modem	250
29 November 1999	Ethernet hub	300
13 December 1999	PC	1,700
10 January 2000	Laptop	2,300
26 July 2000	Two laptops	2,800
19 February 2001	Mobile phone	50
14 March 2001	Laptop	1,400
10 December 2001	Flat screen	536
21 December 2001	Flat screen	536
27 December 2001	Flat screen	734

[1] Estimated value

Unitas report for 1 April 2001 to date

	£
Five MURA laptops	9,315
One other laptop	1,700
Three PCs	3,450
Flat screen	361

Computer Usage

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what controls exist in respect of *(a)* the placement of cookies on websites and *(b)* the use of such cookies to monitor the computer usage of individuals. [28329]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Where the use of cookies by website operators involves the processing of personal data, they are subject to control under the Data Protection Act 1998. Website operators are required to ensure that users are aware who is processing such data and why, and give them an opportunity to refuse.

There are proposals for further regulation of the placement and use of cookies in the proposed communications data protection and privacy directive, which is currently under negotiation. A draft provision agreed by member states at the Telecoms Council on 6 December would extend the requirement to provide information and an opportunity to refuse to cookies which do not involve the processing of personal data.

Manufacturing

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of net changes in manufacturing employment in the UK over the last 12 months; and what projection her Department has made of expected changes in manufacturing employment between January and December 2002. [30147]

Mr. Wilson: The number of manufacturing employee jobs stood at 3,760,000 in November 2001, a fall of 153,000 jobs on a year earlier. The Government do not forecast levels of employment.

Cashpoints

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ATMs were installed in sub-post offices in each month from July 2001 to date; what the take up rate by sub-post offices is of offers to install ATMs; what percentage of the total number of ATMs installed at sub-post offices are accessible outside trading hours; and what the scale of charges levied on customers using ATMs is at *(a)* sub-post offices and *(b)* Crown post offices. [29377]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Decisions relating to ATMs are a commercial matter for Post Office Ltd. who tell me that the number of ATMs installed were:

	Number of ATMs
July 2001	9
August 2001	17
September 2001	11
October 2001	59
November 2001	121
December 2001	212

There are 858 ATMs operating in the network and machine providers have indicated an interest in installation at some 7,500 further outlets, subject to survey.

The majority of ATMs are being installed at sub-post offices which are convenience stores or newsagents with extended trading hours from early morning to 10 pm.

Wherever possible Post Office Ltd. prefer to install a machine without transaction charges but, particularly in small and remote locations, installation is not viable for the machine provider unless a convenience fee is levied. In these cases the customer is advised of the charge and has the ability not to proceed with the transaction should they so decide.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements have been made for maintaining, servicing and stocking ATMs installed at sub-post offices and at whose cost; what payment is made to sub-post masters per ATM transaction; and what assessment has been made of the additional net income generated by ATMs to sub-post masters as a proportion of average income. [29376]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Decisions relating to ATMs are a commercial matter for Post Office Ltd. who tell me that maintenance arrangements vary according to the type of ATM machine and the provider of the machine. However, all technical servicing is undertaken by the machine's provider. In the more remote locations some maintenance and stocking of cash is carried out by the sub-postmaster. Payment for sub-postmasters is based on transaction volumes and in some cases a fixed sum up to a transaction volume threshold. No assessment has been made of additional income generated for sub-postmasters by ATM machines; Post Office Ltd. is not party to the retail trading performance of individual sub-postmasters.

Coal Health Claims Schemes

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the procedure is for establishing a compensation claimant under the coal health claims schemes as being a priority case. [29378]

Ms Hewitt: The Department and claimants' solicitors have agreed a priority points system which is set out in the Handling Agreement. Claimants with higher points will have greater priority.

There are predominantly two stages of prioritisation in respect of living former miners claiming compensation for respiratory disease:

A. Claimants undergoing screening spirometry;

B. Claimants proceeding through the medical assessment process, MAP, after lung function testing.

A. Screening Spirometry

Three factors are taken into account as follows:

(1) age of claimant;

(2) date of receipt of claim;

(3) short life expectancy (as recorded by the GP).

Points are allocated for short life expectancy if IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, receive written confirmation from the claimant's GP that the claimant has a life expectancy of less than two years. The age of the claimant and any short life expectancy are considered to be more important factors than the date of claim and, accordingly, are weighted more heavily in the points system.

B. Claimants proceeding through the medical assessment process, MAP, after lung function testing

Further points are awarded on the basis of a claimant's spirometry test result to a maximum of 150. Claimants who are unable, for medical reasons, to produce a spirometry result, will receive points in lieu of those that would otherwise have been awarded after spirometry testing.

Deceased mineworkers

With regard to deceased mineworkers, these claims will be processed by a paper-based assessment with priority being given to widows. Points are awarded according to the age of claim and any short life expectancy of the widow.

Presently, the Department is processing claims as set out in the Handling Agreement with the most elderly and ill being dealt with first. Widows are also being dealt with as a priority.

It should be noted that prioritisation does not override geographical variations in the availability of resources for live claims. All available resources will be used to the maximum even though claimants based in one area may be tested or examined ahead of someone with a higher priority score in another.

Miners Pension Surpluses

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made on her Department's review of the distribution of miners' pension surpluses. [27574]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on 17 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 403W.

Land Rover

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement about the employment situation in the west midlands, with special reference to Land Rover. [29447]

Alan Johnson: The latest labour force survey data shows that there were 2,505,000 people resident in the west midlands who were in employment in the period September to November 2001. This represented an increase of 30,000 or 1.2 per cent. on the previous three-month period and an increase of 42,000 or 1.6 per cent. on the equivalent period a year earlier.

Land Rover employ a total of around 12,000 people in the west midlands. With regard to the current situation between Land Rover and KPMG (administrative receivers to UPF Group) both parties are in urgent negotiations to resolve their differences. We hope that a satisfactory solution is found that safeguards security of supply to Land Rover and also enables the UPF business to be sold as a going concern. DTI continues to remain in contact with all the key players but essentially this is a commercial matter for Land Rover and KPMG.

Sellafield

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the security of nuclear materials stored at the Sellafield reprocessing plant. [29831]

Ms Hewitt: All aspects of required security arrangements for nuclear materials stored at the Sellafield reprocessing plant are kept under continuing review by the Director of Civil Nuclear Security, the security regulator. Stringent security measures apply at all civil nuclear sites including Sellafield. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites.

Post Offices

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions she has held with Consignia concerning the possible closure of post offices; and if she will make a statement; [30006]

(2) what recent guidance she has given Consignia concerning the closure of urban post offices. [30008]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have agreed in principle to support the compensation package negotiated between Post Office Ltd. and the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters for a restructuring of the urban post office network. Where appropriate, compensation will be made available to sub-postmasters affected. Detailed discussions continue on the programme.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ensure that Consignia's proposals for possible post office closures are made public. [30007]

Ms Hewitt: The programme to restructure the urban post office network will be taken forward in consultation with individual sub-postmasters, the local community and Postwatch. To ensure that post offices meet the high expectations of customers and are in the right locations for their communities, the programme will be carefully tailored to the circumstances of each locality.

Gas Transportation Tariffs

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she raised the effect of gas transportation tariffs on Northern Ireland when she met representatives of Centrica on 6 December 2001; and if she will make a statement. [29474]

Mr. Wilson: I met representatives of Centrica on 6 December 2001 when we discussed a number of issues in confidence and, under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it would be inappropriate to go into detail.

Gas is transported to Northern Ireland under the terms of a commercial contract. This contract is a matter for the parties involved.

HEALTH

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to increase the availability of digital hearing aids. [10002]

Jacqui Smith: We announced the modernising hearing aids services project in October 2000. Since then, to the end of December 2001, 19,368 digital aids had been fitted, 19,353 adult patients had been assessed and 14,856 adult patients fitted. By the end of March, we expect to have fitted over 18,000 patients.

I announced on 24 December 2001 that a further £20 million would be made available in 2002–03 so that a further 30 national health service sites can join the modernising hearing aids project during that year. Decisions on which sites will become involved in the project next year will be made shortly.

The Institute of Hearing Research is evaluating the project, and its findings will help planning of the wider availability of changes in hearing aid services, which include the provision of digital hearing aids, to all NHS audiology departments.

In the meantime, all NHS trusts with the ability, in terms of staff, training, equipment and experience, to provide digital hearing aids, are able to apply for access to a favourable contract for supply of digital hearing aids.

Hospital Admissions

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for admission to hospitals, including suspended patients but not including self-deferred cases, in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS trust in England in the year ending 31 March. [13621]

Mr. Hutton: The number of in-patients waiting for treatment and the number of patients suspended from the waiting list at end March 2001 is given in the table, which has been placed in the Library.

Patient Choice

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to impose *(a)* geographical and *(b)* financial limits on the ability of patients to have greater choice over the location of their hospital treatment; [15412]

(2) what elements of provision he envisaged constituting plurality of provision; and what proportion of each of those elements he envisaged in the final state of plurality he is aiming for as referred to in his speech to the Fabian Society; [15413]

(3) what expansion of capacity is required to enable patients to have a choice of hospital for treatment; [15324]

(4) how he intends to enable patients to have the choice of access to a local hospital as referred to in his speech to the Fabian Society; and what definition of local he uses in this context. [15414]

Mr. Hutton: On 6 December 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced proposals to give patients choice over where they are treated in the national health service.

From July 2002, all patients who have been waiting more than six months for heart surgery will be offered a choice of treatment at another NHS hospital; a hospital in the private sector; or possibly a hospital abroad. Patients opting to stay with their current hospital will do so on the basis that they will wait no more than 12 months in total there.

By 2005, all patients and their general practitioners will be able to book hospital appointments at both a time and place that is convenient to the patient.

Proposals to increase the capacity of the NHS are set out in the NHS Plan. The proposals to increase choice are set out in the discussion paper "Extending Choice for Patients", copies of which are available in the Library.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what IT changes will be required to enable patients to have information about the choices open to them described in the Secretary of State's speech to the Fabian Society; [15415]

(2) what IT changes will be required to enable general practitioners to act as the navigators referred to in the Secretary of State's speech to the Fabian Society; [15416]

(3) what IT investment will be required to allow general practitioners to offer patients hospital treatment at a time and place convenient to them. [24604]

Mr. Hutton: An outline business case (OBC) has been developed, proposing a framework for implementing electronic booking systems. The OBC can be found at: www.doh.gov.uk/nhsplanbookingsystems/.

The framework was developed in consultation with stakeholders. It is based around local health communities and will allow them to implement locally based solutions within a consistent common national framework. It builds on the national information and information technology infrastructure.

Information on the estimated IT investment to implement electronic booking systems is in the OBC.

East Cheshire Hospice

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was provided by the NHS to the East Cheshire Hospice in each of the last 10 years. [18449]

Yvette Cooper: South Cheshire health authority funding for East Cheshire Hospice for the past six years (since the creation of the health authority) is as follows:

	£000
1995–96	279
1996–97	248
1997–98	253
1998–99	262
1999–2000	272
2000–01	282

The figures exclude the cost of drugs, which is also funded by South Cheshire health authority. Last year this was approximately £50,000 but the amount can vary year to year depending on requirements.

NHS Magazine Website

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is of maintaining the NHS Magazine website per annum. [24578]

Ms Blears: The NHS Magazine online was started in February 2001. It had set-up costs of £5,875 and has running costs of £51,000 a year. NHS Magazine online carries all the content of NHS Magazine plus two extra features and twice-weekly news updates for NHS staff.

Redwood Unit

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the ratio of public to private staff is for work carried out at the Redwood unit on behalf of the NHS; [24587]

(2) if NHS patients treated at the Redwood hospital in Redhill will be given the same level of facilities as private patients treated there. [24605]

Mr. Hutton: The detailed arrangements for operation of the BUPA Redwood facility as a diagnostic and treatment centre for national health service patients are currently in development between BUPA and the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust. It is not possible to say at this stage what the ratio of public to private staff will be or how the facilities will be used for NHS patients. This information will be made available prior to commencement of the new arrangements. Human Resource issues are of paramount importance in the development of this concept, and the trust will be working closely with the Department to ensure that the most appropriate arrangements are agreed.

We are also committed to ensuring that NHS patients treated at BUPA Redwood receive a high standard of treatment.

GPs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on expenditure on reviewing of out-patient appointments by general practitioners in the last 12 months. [24602]

Mr. Hutton: Out-patient appointments are routinely reviewed to ensure that all patients on the waiting list still require appointments. Some general practitioners, in partnership with national health service trusts, assist in validating out-patient lists in this way. Arrangements for doing this are made at local level.

Data are not collected on the cost to GPs of carrying out this validation.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission and publish an independent report on the reasons for the level of sickness absence in his Department. [26970]

Ms Blears: The Cabinet Office already commissions and publishes an independent annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". The report includes details of the causes of absenteeism. The report for the year 2000 will be published shortly.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days were lost through sickness absence in his Department in each of the last four years. [26945]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Average[1] days lost per employee through sickness

(per staff year)

	Number
1997	7.8
1998	[2]9.2
1999	6.6
2000	not yet published

[1] Working days absences exclude weekends and bank holidays for staff working a 'Monday to Friday' week.

[2] Based on pre-audit data and methodology. In 1998 Civil Service departments and agencies undertook an audit of their monitoring systems following the "Working Well Together" report. The re-worked figures were not submitted in time for publication of the 1998 report and unadjusted figures were published in this year.

Source:

Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service BMI Health Services report (1997 Table I, 1998 Table K) and Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service BIOSS report Table H (1999)

Family Pharmacies

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department is doing to safeguard local family pharmacies; and if he will make a statement. [26931]

Ms Blears: Our programme for pharmacy in the national health service is set out in "Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan", a copy of which is available in the Library. We are committed to continuing to ensure ready access to community pharmacies throughout the country. Special arrangements are in place to support pharmacies which dispense relatively few prescriptions, but which are more than one kilometre from the next pharmacy. These may qualify for subsidy payments under the Essential Small Pharmacies Scheme to bring their income from NHS services up to a target level.

Patient Telephone System

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of privately provided patient telephone systems charge premium rates for incoming calls; and what guidance has been given on the provision of these services to trusts. [27229]

Ms Blears: Of the 59 schemes currently installed and operating in the national health service, 56 are with the two firms that charge full premium rate.

The model concession agreement includes an agreed pricing structure covering all the services provided. All the licensees have declared their policy structure over the period of the contract and the patient power steering group, led by NHS Estates, has agreed the proposals. These represent the maximum the licensee can charge. There are provisions within the agreement for local negotiation.

We are working with suppliers to continually improve the service, including incoming call charges.

Infertility Treatment

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the review of infertility treatment available across the NHS will be published by NICE; and how long the review has taken to date. [27616]

Yvette Cooper: Following an announcement of a new clinical guideline work programme, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence draws up a timetable for each guideline. The commencement of work on individual guidelines is staged according to available capacity in the institute's collaborating centres. The collaborating centre on women's and children's health is about to begin the development of the infertility guideline. I understand that the development of a clinical guideline usually takes up to two years.

Blood Donors

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason identity cards given to blood donors are not recognised in areas other than where they are issued; [27281]

(2) what measures his Department will implement to introduce a national blood donor register that enables blood donor identity cards to be recognised throughout the UK. [27280]

Yvette Cooper: Three National Blood Service (NBS) databases of blood donor details covering London and the south east, the midlands and the south west and the north and north Wales were established reflecting the original NBS zonal structure. Donors are currently unable to use their identity card outside the region served by their database. However, they can still give blood in another region if they register as a new donor.

The NBS plan to introduce a national donor register from April 2004. This will enable donors to use their identity card in any NBS session in England and north Wales. There are no plans to integrate the registers for the four United Kingdom blood services.

Air Pollution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* deaths of vulnerable people, *(b)* hospital admissions and *(c)* readmissions in the Buckinghamshire health authority area in the last 12 months, which may be associated with (i) short and (ii) long term air pollution. [27783]

Ms Blears: The Buckinghamshire health authority have no patients classified on admission or death under the International Classification of Diseases code z58.1 (exposure to air pollution).

Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Two Shires Ambulance NHS trust met its performance targets for responding to *(a)* Category A and *(b)* Category B/C emergency calls in each year since 1997; [27786]

(2) how many emergency calls were received *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Two Shires Ambulance NHS trust area in each year since 1997. [27787]

Ms Blears: Information about the number of emergency calls and the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of a reported incident within the Government's target response time, for both the Two Shires Ambulance national health service trust and all other ambulance trusts in England, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Following a review of standards in 1996 ambulance services were required to introduce systems to prioritise emergency calls. Two Shires Ambulance NHS trust moved to the new system from 1 April 1998. In 1998–99 and each year since then Two Shires has met and exceeded the target for Category B calls—95 per cent. within 19 minutes (rural service target).

On Category A calls the trust has been making steady progress towards the target of 75 per cent. within eight minutes. Details of performance are in the statistical bulletin.

The Two Shires Ambulance NHS trust is expected to achieve the 75 per cent. target for Category A this year.

Macular Degeneration

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned in each of the last five years into the causes and treatments of age-related macular degeneration; what further research he intends to commission; and how much his Department has spent on this research in each of the last five years. [26812]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The main Government agency for research into the causes and treatment of disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which is funded through the Department of Trade and Industry. MRC expenditure on research since 1997 that is directly relevant to macular degeneration is estimated as follows:

	£
1997–98	300,000
1998–99	82,000
1999–2000	78,000
2000–01	140,000

The MRC has funded a number of projects looking at macular degeneration. Projects include:

Radiotherapy in the treatment of subfoveal neovascular membranes (CNVM) in age related macular degeneration of the eye: a randomised controlled trial.

Dr. G. Silvestri Queen's University of Belfast: Refining phenotypic variation in age related macular degeneration.

Professor R. D. Lund: Schwann and schwann cell line transplantation to prevent photoreceptor loss.

Professor U. Chakravarthy: Optical coherence tomography scanning of diseases of the macular of the eye.

Dr. R. W. Yates: Genetic Susceptibility to Age Related Macular Degeneration

The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for support into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health. The Department has supported, through national and regional programmes, research on macular degeneration. Projects include an on-going project due to complete in July 2002 on "A clinical technique for measuring macular pigment optical density in patients with macular degeneration".

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the number of people treated in the last year with photodynamic therapy in the private sector following a diagnosis of wet age-related macular degeneration in an NHS hospital. [27033]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* As the Department does not routinely collect information on operations carried out privately, we are unable to make an estimate.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the therapies licensed in the UK for the treatment of age-related macular degeneration; when they were licensed; how much the NHS has spent on them; and how many people have benefited from them in each of the last three years. [26814]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Currently the only product licensed for the indication age-related macular degeneration is Visudyne. A European-wide licence was granted by the European Commission on 27 July 2000. We do not hold information on the number of patients treated with Visudyne or the amount of the product that the national health service has purchased.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether photodynamic therapy of age-related macular degeneration is generally available within the NHS. [26813]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The treatment is not generally available under the national health service. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is carrying out an appraisal of the use of photodynamic therapy in the treatment of macular disease which they expect to complete in July. The Department has asked NHS bodies to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all relevant factors including the available evidence on effect.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the number of people diagnosed each year with age-related macular degeneration. [26815]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* A recent study sponsored by the Macular Disease Society estimated that there are currently 182,000 people suffering from age-related macular degeneration with a best eye visual acuity below that judged appropriate for certification as blind or partially sighted. The study forecast that this number would increase to 194,000 by 2008.

NHS Appointments

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that hon. Members are notified of appointments to new health authorities and trusts covering their constituencies; and if he will make a statement. [26819]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* This is a matter for the National Health Service Appointments Commission. At present, all appointments to NHS boards are publicised locally by press release. I have also asked the commission to ensure that hon. Members are informed of all of appointments made to trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts which serve their constituencies.

NHS Prescriptions

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from community pharmacists based in Teesside concerning the cut in the fee paid for dispensing NHS prescriptions. [27867]

Ms Blears: We have received a letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) enclosing representations on this matter from a community pharmacist based in his constituency.

Westmorland General Hospital

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to extend services at the Westmorland General Hospital's emergency and minor accident department; [28276]

(2) what change in service levels has taken place at the Westmorland General Hospital's emergency and minor accident department in each of the last five years; [28275]

(3) if he will make a statement on the merits of operating a 24-hour minor accident department at the Westmorland General Hospital; [28273]

(4) how many ambulance emergency cases were taken to the Westmorland General Hospital's emergency and minor accident department in each of the last five years; and how many of these were then taken to Lancaster Royal Infirmary; [28277]

(5) what his plans are for the future of Westmorland General Hospital; and if he will make a statement; [28271]

(6) what assistance he provides to recruit extra staff to work at the Westmorland General Hospital's emergency and minor accident department; [28274]

(7) how many people have been treated at the Westmorland General Hospital's emergency and minor accident department in each of the last five years; and how many of these were treated between the hours of 11.00 pm and 6.00 am; [28270]

(8) if he will ensure that the Westmorland General Hospital's emergency and minor accident department continues to operate on a 24-hour basis; [28278]

(9) what the recommended manpower level is for doctors in an emergency and minor accident department. [28272]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 January 2001]:* Morecambe Bay Hospitals National Health Service Trust and Morecambe Bay Primary Care Trust intend to review the delivery of emergency and out-of-hours services for residents of South Lakeland. This work will take place with full public involvement and in the context of existing and developing national guidelines, the local modernisation review process and relevant staffing considerations. It is anticipated that detailed information of the nature requested will emerge as part of that exercise. A report, with recommendations, will be produced by 31 May 2002, to be considered by the boards of the trust, primary care trust and Cumbria ambulance service. Any proposals for significant variations in existing service provision would, of course, be subject to full public consultation at a later stage.

Health Authorities

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance he has issued on the balance of representation from different parliamentary constituencies in cases where several constituencies are covered by the same health authority or NHS trust. [28047]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 January 2001]:* No such guidance has been issued. Appointments to the boards of national health service trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts are now a matter for the NHS Appointments Commission. The commission always aims to ensure that board membership properly reflects the geographical area served by the NHS body.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance he has issued on increasing the representation of *(a)* women, *(b)* members of ethnic minority communities and *(c)* other under-represented groups on NHS trusts and health authorities. [28049]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State issues equal opportunities goals and objectives on an annual basis for all public appointments to national health service boards, special health authorities and non-departmental public bodies. The goals and objectives set in July 2001 for achievement by December 2004 are available in the Library.

We have made huge strides over recent years in increasing the proportion of women and black and ethnic minority candidates appointed NHS boards. 49 per cent. of all NHS board members and 41 per cent. of chairs are now women, and 12 per cent. of members are black or from ethnic minorities. This compares with figures of only 39 per cent. and 5 per cent. at the time of the 1997 general election. The proportion of disabled candidates appointed over the last five years has also more than doubled. As a result, the boards of these bodies are now much more representative of the communities they serve.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken to seek applications from those living in communities with the greatest health needs for non-executive appointments on health authorities and NHS trusts. [28048]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* All vacancies for national health service boards are now widely advertised within the communities they serve. Candidates who apply are all assessed on their merits against criteria laid down by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The criteria require among other things that, to be appointed, candidates must be able to demonstrate a commitment to the needs of the local community and have a strong personal commitment to the NHS.

West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many candidates *(a)* applied and *(b)* were interviewed for (i) the chairmanship and (ii) the post of chief executive of the new west midlands, south strategic health authority. [28593]

Yvette Cooper: I understand from the National Health Service Appointments Commission that there were six applications for the chair post, and three candidates were interviewed.

91 individuals applied in response to the advertisement to recruit chief executives designate to all strategic health authorities. 52 candidates were interviewed for all posts. Appointments were made to each authority from a shortlist of successful candidates.

Candidates were asked to indicate their preference in their applications in terms of the geographical location they wish to work based on the current NHS regional boundaries. 26 applicants expressed an interest in being a chief executive of a strategic health authority in the west midlands, either exclusively or as a multiple choice. 11 were interviewed.

NHS Trusts (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many candidates *(a)* applied and *(b)* were interviewed for the chairmanship of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust after the resignation of Mr. Harold Musgrove. [28592]

Yvette Cooper: I understand from the National Health Service Appointments Commission that there were 17 applications for the post, and four candidates were interviewed.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria were used to select the Chairman of the South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust. [28591]

Yvette Cooper: The criteria are set out in the National Health Service Appointments Commission guidance on the appointments process for NHS chairs and non-executives, a copy of which is in the Library. The Appointments Commission will shortly be sending copies of the guidance to all hon. Members.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many candidates *(a)* applied and *(b)* were interviewed for the chairmanship of the South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust. [28594]

Yvette Cooper: I understand from the National Health Service Appointments Commission that there were 11 applications for the post, and three candidates were interviewed.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were treated for food poisoning arising from food prepared and consumed *(a)* at home and *(b)* by others outside the home, in each year since 1990. [28043]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally. The source of illness can generally be determined only when two or more cases are linked (an outbreak). The great majority of cases of food poisoning cannot be linked in this way.

Health Care Assistants

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health care assistants were employed in *(a)* acute hospital trusts and *(b)* primary care trusts in England in each of the last five years; [28224]

(2) what measures he is taking to increase the recruitment of health care assistants in the *(a)* acute and *(b)* primary care sectors; and if he will make a statement. [28225]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested for the number of health care assistants is in the table.

We aim to increase recruitment of health care assistants by developing career paths to encourage unqualified staff to work in the national health service across general practice and acute care. Dedicated investment in NVQ training will allow NHS staff to gain transferable skills to recognised national standards and enable more staff to gain qualifications to enter professional training and progress their careers further. In 2001–02 we expect over 2,000 health care assistants to start nurse training courses.

Investing in staff who do not have a professional qualification supports the goal of increasing career opportunities and qualifications for the support work force, while improving the quality of direct care for patients and freeing up professionals to make better use of their skills.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS)—health care assistants and unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed by acute hospital trusts and PCTs in England as at 30 September each year

Headcount

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
All England					
Health care assistants and unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	134,720	138,600	141,820	146,440	151,550
of which:					
Health care assistants	20,220	21,500	24,630	25,470	27,500
Unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	114,500	117,110	117,190	120,960	124,060
Acute hospital trusts					
Health care assistants and unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	45,150	45,780	40,290	40,290	43,670
of which:					
Health care assistants	10,000	11,130	9,980	10,830	11,300
Unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	35,150	34,650	30,320	29,460	32,360

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS)—health care assistants and unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff[1] *employed by acute hospital trusts and PCTs in England as at 30 September each year*

Headcount

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
PCTs					
Health care assistants and unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	500
of which:					
Health care assistants	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	40
Unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	460

[1] Unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff includes unclassifiable staff

[2] Not applicable

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.

Source:

Department of Health Non Medical Workforce Census

Ambulance Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the maximum number of casualties the Isle of Wight ambulance service could cope with in one incident; and what additional resources are required to meet a major incident. [28234]

Ms Blears: It is not possible to define the number of casualties that the Isle of Wight could cope with in one incident. That would depend on the nature of the incident.

Each incident is assessed by a duty officer, and if there were insufficient resources available locally to deal with the incident, we would instigate the escalation procedure in our major incident plan. This would involve calling upon the neighbouring ambulance services (Hampshire ambulance national health service) for assistance.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of attendances is per year in district general hospital accident and emergency departments in *(a)* England, *(b)* south-west England and *(c)* south-east England. [28226]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect this information in the form requested.

Accident and emergency attendance is collected by national health service trusts.

Primary Care Trusts

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis primary care trusts will be funded from 2003–04. [29221]

Mr. Hutton: We currently allocate funding to health authorities, and they allocate funding to primary care trusts, on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each health authority and primary care trust's fair share of available resources, to enable them to commission similar levels of services for populations in equal need.

In future the intention is that allocations will be made direct to primary care trusts. This is subject to the passage of legislation through Parliament. Allocations will continue to be based on the principle of weighted capitation.

MMR

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of Dr. Elizabeth Miller *(a)* in the designing of safety studies into MMR, *(b)* in clearing the original UK trial cohort of 10,000 children and *(c)* in advising his Department on the safety of MMR. [28788]

Yvette Cooper: Dr. Elizabeth Miller is currently head of the Immunisation Division of the Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre of the Public Health Laboratory Services (PHLS). With PHLS colleagues Dr. Miller has conducted a number of studies designed to investigate possible adverse effects of measles, mumps and rubella vaccines. The results of these studies have been subjected to independent peer review and published as follows:

1. Miller C., Miller E., Rowe K., Bowie C., Judd M., Walker D. Surveillance of Symptoms following MMR Vaccine in Children. *The Practitioner*, 1989; 233: 69–75.
2. Miller E., Goldacre M., Pugh S., Colville A., Farrington P., Flower A., Nash J., Macfarlane L., Tettmar R. Risk of aseptic meningitis after Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccine in UK children. *Lancet* 1993;341:979–982.
3. Farrington P., Pugh S., Colville A., Flower A., Nash J., Morgan-Capner P., Rush M., Miller E. A new method for active surveillance of adverse events from Diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis and Measles/mumps/rubella vaccines. *Lancet* 1995; 345:567–569.
4. Nash J.Q., Chandrakumar M., Farrington C.P., Williamson S., Miller E. Feasibility study for identifying adverse events attributable to vaccination by record linkage. *Epidemiology and Infection* 1995; 114: 475–480.
5. Farrington C.P., Nash J., Miller E. Case Series Analysis of adverse reactions to vaccines: A comparative evaluation. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 1996;143:1165–73.
6. Taylor B., Miller E., Farrington P., Petropoulos M.C., Favot-Mayaud I., Li J., Waight P.A. Autism and measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine: no epidemiological evidence for a causal association. *Lancet* 1999; 353:2026–2029.
7. Miller E., Waight P., Farrington P., Andrews N., Stowe J., Taylor B. Idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura and MMR vaccine (short report). Archives of Disease in Childhood 2001;84:227–229.
8. Farrington C.P., Miller E., Taylor B. MMR and autism: further evidence against a causal association. *Vaccine 2001*; 19:3632–3635.

Dr. Elizabeth Miller, under the direction of the then head of the immunisation division, Dr. Christine Miller, assisted in the design and analysis of the study in 10,000 children that was carried out in 1987–88. The results of that study were not used for licensure of MMR vaccine in the United Kingdom. The responsibility for licensure resides with the Medicines Control Agency and is based on the evidence of vaccine safety, efficacy and quality provided by the manufacturer.

The Department would expect the head of the immunisation division to provide advice to the Department on all aspects of immunisation. Dr. Miller would also provide advice to the Department's independent advisory committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, and, as required to the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Coronary Surgery (West Midlands)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on waiting times for coronary surgery in the west midlands. [28898]

Yvette Cooper: We are committed to improving waiting times for cardiac surgery, and in the west midlands initiatives include a new £13 million purpose built cardiac surgery critical care unit which recently opened at the University Hospitals Birmingham national health service trust.

A new purpose built cardiac surgery centre is being developed at the Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS trust, which is due to open in 2004, and is the first new specialist cardiac centre to be built in the west midlands for 30 years. The cardiac surgery unit at Stoke-on-Trent is also being expanded in 2002.

In the interim, private capacity is also being purchased at Leicester BUPA Hospital and the Priory Hospital, Birmingham to ensure no patient waits longer than 15 months.

In order to facilitate the treatment of urgent patients within the region, a cardiac services capacity manager has been appointed to ensure that urgent patients in the west midlands are treated quickly.

Renal Transplants

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the reasons are for his proposed transfer of renal transplant operations from St. Helier to St. George's; and if he will make a statement. [28746]

Mr. Hutton: Any decision to transfer renal transplant operations from St. Helier to St. George's hospitals will be decided locally. St. George's, Epsom and St. Helier national health service trusts, Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, Merton and Sutton community health council and patient groups are all working to ensure that any proposals put forward are in the best interests of the patients and staff of the renal service. A final decision will not be made until the health authority has conducted a formal public consultation which will commence in March 2002.

Haywood Hospital

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what remedial action is planned following the clean hospitals programme report into Haywood hospital, Stoke-on-Trent. [28917]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised that the action plan agreed by the North Staffordshire Hospital National Health Service Trust following the clean hospitals programme report into Haywood hospital following the inspection in March is progressing well and includes:

- a large redecoration programme including the entrance, main reception areas, wards and common areas;
- improvements to internal and external signage;
- improvements to visitors' toilet facilities;
- investment in new furniture—improving the overall quality of the furniture stock;
- improvements to catering services;
- implementation of in-house support services staff performance monitoring scheme;
- improvements to hospital grounds and gardens.

We believe that infection control and basic hygiene should be at the heart of good management and clinical practice in the NHS which is why we have a £60 million clean hospitals programme.

The clean hospitals programme is intended to introduce and restore standards in cleanliness and the patient environment. Delivery progress under the clean hospitals programme is showing tangible improvements in every hospital.

Spending Review

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29026]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Environmental implications are considered as part of the normal policy making process, which includes spending review proposals.

Contact Lenses

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received on, and what assessments he has made of, the health implications of the sale of cosmetic patterned contact lenses. [27143]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The General Optical Council (GOC) has proposed to the Department that the sale of cosmetic contact lenses, which do not have a corrective refractory power, be subject to tighter regulation because of the risk to eye health from the misuse of contact lenses. Views differed when we consulted on this proposal and, to inform our policy considerations, we are collaborating with the GOC on an assessment of the extent of the risks.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to bring forward changes to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 to allow a child of a deceased father to include his or her father's name on their birth certificate. [29296]

Yvette Cooper: We supported a private Members Bill on this last year, which unfortunately had not completed all its stages when the general election was called. We are committed to bring forward this legislation as soon as parliamentary time is found.

NHS

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the discussions taking place on the new pay structure for the NHS involving a nation-wide job evaluation exercise. [29331]

Mr. Hutton: Considerable progress is being made in the "Agenda for Change" pay modernisation talks. In particular the job evaluation scheme has been developed further so that it is now generating credible and consistent results over the range of jobs covered by the United Kingdom-wide national health service. It has now been used to carry out evaluations on around 400 examples of the most common NHS jobs, which provides the basic data needed for negotiating the new pay structure. The central negotiating group has prepared negotiating documents covering all areas of the new pay system, with remaining differences between the Health Department's proposals and the views of staff representative organisations highlighted.

We have decided to leave final decisions on the new system until after the 2002 Spending Review is announced. Until then all parties have agreed that the job evaluation scheme and models of a new pay structure should continue to be developed. The aim will be to complete this work as early as possible this year to enable swift agreement with a view to starting implementation at the earliest possible opportunity.

PFI Contracts

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the order of costs incurred by private sector PFI partners in securing contracts for community hospital building projects; and if he will make a statement. [27343]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not held centrally of costs incurred by private sector firms in bidding for community hospital projects. Such costs are incorporated into a bidder's best and final offer which national health service bodies compare to their public sector comparator to determine which option offers better value for money.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private sector PFI partners are available for community hospital building projects of the order of £25 to £35 million; which are acceptable to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [27344]

Mr. Hutton: Listed are private finance initiative projects with a capital value of between £10 million and £35 million which have been signed with private sector partners. This captures the private sector constructors which are involved in delivering medium size hospital schemes, including community hospitals.

Trust	*Project description*	*Capital value*[1]	*Constructor*
Cornwall Health Care NHS Trust	Bodmin Community Hospital	10.20	Grosvenor House Group plc
Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust	Mental Health Reprovision and Geriatric Day Centre	10.80	Ryhurst (Redbridge) Ltd.
East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental Health Reprovision	12.08	Allenbuild (South East)
Royston Buntingford and Bishop's Stortford Primary Care NHS Trust	Herts and Essex Hospital	14.70	Rydon Construction
Luton and Dunstable Hospitals NHS Trust	St. Mary's Wing	14.70	MJ Gleeson Group
Oxleas NHS Trust	Reprovision of Mental Health	15.00	Ryhurst (Bexley) Ltd.
Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital NHS Trust	ENT/Ophthalmology	16.60	Glugston PF Ltd.
Northumbria Health Care NHS Trust	Phase 11 Development of Wansbeck General	17.82	MJ Gleeson Group
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	Maternity and Acute Development, Hull Royal Infirmary	18.19	Bilfinger and Berger/Haden Young
Sussex Weald and Downs NHS Trust	Graylingwell Hospital Reprovision	22.00	James Longley/Kier Regional
Northumbria Health Care NHS Trust	Redevelopment of Hexham General Hospital	29.10	Bovis Group
West Berkshire Priority Care Services NHS Trust	Prospect Park mental health redevelopment	29.70	Kier Group
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	Acute Rationalisation	33.00	Bougyes UK

[1] £ million

Children's Commissioner

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the benchmark criteria his Department uses to evaluate the performance of the children's commissioner for Wales for the purpose of considering and evaluating the need for the creation of a children's commissioner for England. [29330]

Jacqui Smith: All parts of the United Kingdom are united in a common aim to improve safeguards for children. However, devolution means that we can each take different paths to achieve that common goal.

We are committed to learning the lessons from the Welsh experience of appointing a children's commissioner that prove relevant to England. To this end, departmental officials will continue to liaise with officials in the National Assembly for Wales, in order specifically to learn more about how the commissioner in Wales may be adding value to children's lives in Wales and improving outcomes for Welsh children.

Here in England, we have made major advances through the creation of the children and young people's unit, the children's rights director and the national clinical director for children.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Intrusive Surveillance

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many intrusive surveillance operations were authorised by *(a)* chief officers of police and *(b)* customs officials in the United Kingdom in each year from 1995. [28326]

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Mr. Denham *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* No records are centrally held of the number of intrusive surveillance operations authorised by chief officers of police or customs officials from 1 January 1995 to 22 February 1999. The number of intrusive surveillance operations authorised by the chief officers of police and customs officials since 22 February 1999 are as follows:

	Chief officers of police	*Customs officials*
22 February to 31 December 1999	1,432	346
1 January to 31 December 2000	1,609	523
1 January to 31 December 2001	458	38
1 January to 17 January 2002	20	7

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what controls govern the monitoring of conversations by equipment which picks up vibrations in window panes. [28625]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 provides a statutory basis for the authorisation of intrusive surveillance. RIPA also provides for independent oversight of such authorisations by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner and the Intelligence Services Commissioner.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if use by the law enforcement agencies of technology which remotely takes a phone off the hook and thereby allows the monitoring of conversations close to that phone requires authorisation as if it were a telephone intercept; and whether the use by others of such technology constitutes a criminal offence. [28328]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The monitoring of conversations by law enforcement agencies which are not conducted on a public or private telecommunication system fall within the surveillance provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000. RIPA provides a statutory basis for the authorisation of intrusive surveillance. RIPA also provides for independent oversight of such authorisations by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner.

Schengen Information System

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 84–85W, if she will list *(a)* the areas in which the Justice and Home Affairs Council is examining the scope for SIS II to have an increased range of functions and *(b)* the authorities being considered eligible for access to SIS data. [28321]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* This work is at a very early stage. Officials in the relevant council working group are examining the possible future requirements for SIS II and proposals will be submitted to the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council at key stages in the process. A first discussion of this work was held by the Mixed Committee with Norway and Iceland, meeting at ministerial level in the margins of the JHA Council on 6–7 December 2001 and reported to the House in my reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 89W. The authorities which would be considered eligible for access to SIS data will be determined according to the purpose for which it is agreed that data will be stored. This work will require amendment to the Schengen acquis and will thus be the subject of formal decisions at European Union level; these will be subject to United Kingdom parliamentary scrutiny in the normal way.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken from receipt of an asylum appeal by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and to *(a)* the ending of the appeal to the Immigration Appellate Authority, *(b)* determination of the appeal by an adjudicator and *(c)* where leave to appeal is granted final determination of the appeal by the Immigration Appeal Tribunal. [28778]

Angela Eagle: For the 12 months ending 30 September 2001, data from the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) for those cases where data are available indicate that the cumulative average times taken from the receipt of an asylum appeal by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to:

(a) the receipt of an appeal by the IAA is nine weeks;

(b) the determination by an adjudicator is 25 weeks;

(c) the final determination by the Immigration Appeal Tribunal is 45 weeks.

Crime Reduction Violence Against Women Initiative

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the projects financed under the Crime Reduction Violence Against Women Initiative until March. [28905]

Mr. Denham: The information is as follows:

Standing Together—Civil (Hammersmith and Fulham, London)
West Somerset Polaroid Cameras (Taunton)
Brighton and Hove Intimidated Witness Support Scheme
Gloucestershire Co-ordinated Community Response
Zero Tolerance/South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (Thurrock)
Southampton Rape Crisis Star project
NSPCC (National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children)
Patchwork Domestic Violence project (North Yorkshire)
Bridgend Education
Hastings and Rother Rapid Response Crisis Intervention Team
Buxton Women's Aid
St. Austell Support Workers
Warwickshire Domestic Violence Support Services (Stratford-upon-Avon)
Thurrock Police Co-ordinator
Rhondda Cynon Taff, South Wales Alarms
Birmingham Reducing Domestic Violence project
Tower Hamlets Stop the Violence project
Croydon Domestic Violence Advocacy project
Birmingham Health Development (south west Birmingham)

North Devon and Torridge Early Intervention project

Salford GP Evidence Gathering

Wakefield Primary Health Care project

Standing Together—Health (Hammersmith and Fulham, London)

Cheshire Multiple Interventions

Northampton Domestic Violence Action Centre

Camden Safety Net

Bradford Staying Put

St. Mary's Rape and Sexual Assault Centre—Training of a Forensic Nurse (Manchester)

STAR (Surviving Trauma After Rape) (West Yorkshire)

REACH (Rape Examination, Advice, Counselling, Help) (Newcastle upon Tyne)

Understanding attrition, decreasing early withdrawals and developing best practice for reported rape (research project)

Rape Crisis development of data systems

Sex offenders: an exploration of discriminatory factors, repeat victimisation and risk (research project)

National evaluation of sexual assault centres

Rape perpetrator programme

Young male perpetrator programme and witness support (Hull).

Child Curfew Orders

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child curfew orders have been issued in Essex in each of the last five years for which records exist. [28418]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* No applications have been received to impose child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which took effect on 1 August 2001, extended the upper age limit to 15 and allowed the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes. Local areas are assessing the implications of these changes and we know that local consultation is taking place.

Community Sentence Orders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is the practice of the Probation Service not to exercise arrest warrants for those breaking the terms of community sentence orders if they have been outstanding for more than a year; and if he will make a statement. [30117]

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is the practice of the Probation Service not to exercise arrest warrants for those breaking the terms of community sentence orders if they have been outstanding for more than a year; and if he will make a statement. [29824]

Beverley Hughes: Each case is dealt with on it merits. There is no general policy that a warrant outstanding for a year, or indeed any particular period of time, should be returned to the court to consider withdrawal.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many outstanding arrest warrants issued for those breaking the terms of community sentences there are; and if he will make a statement. [29829]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

Lead responsibility for execution of community penalty breach warrants was transferred from the police to magistrates courts committees on 1 April 2001. Prior to the transfer, statistics on community penalty breach warrants were not routinely kept. The Lord Chancellor's Department is now collecting data but complete figures are not yet available. Of the community penalty breach warrants issued since the transfer 8,014 were outstanding as at 28 December 2001.

Prison Sales

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to sell Holloway Prison; and if he will make a statement; [29828]

(2) what plans he has to sell Wormwood Scrubs Prison. [29827]

Beverley Hughes: There are no current plans to sell Holloway or Wormwood Scrubs prisons.

Trial by Jury

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the future of trial by jury; [29825]

(2) what plans he has to introduce legislation to allow the overturning of perverse verdicts returned by juries as recommended by the Auld report; and if he will make a statement. [29826]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts, the report of which was published last October, made a number of recommendations with major implications for trial by jury. The report is currently the subject of public consultation, and the Government will consider their response in the light of the views received.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21319]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office currently employs a total of 11 people under the new deal for young people.

New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The costs of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Crime (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been taken in Coventry to improve the protection of pensioners in their homes from burglary. [28882]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Coventry is covered by our home security scheme for low-income pensioners living in areas with burglary rates above the national average. This provides security checks and additional security measures where needed for eligible pensioners, including better door locks, window locks, door chains and viewers.

In addition, a total of over £320,000 funding has been provided for five projects in Coventry under the reducing burglary initiative. These projects, while not specifically aimed at the elderly, target local burglary problems and are of benefit to the community as a whole.

Locally, the Coventry Crime and Disorder Partnership is undertaking work on crime against older people (particularly distraction burglary) as part of its wider community safety plans and strategies.

Mobile Phone Theft

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will introduce guidelines for the mobile telephony companies to share the international mobile equipment identity code when mobiles are stolen. [28949]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* As part of the on-going work of the Home Secretary's Mobile Phone Steering Group, we are currently in discussion with the mobile phone industry and the police about the feasibility of setting up and implementing a shared database of stolen handset IMEI numbers.

Mr. Robert Clark

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received on the handling by the Police Complaints Authority of a complaint by Mr. Leslie Clark into the case of Mr. Robert Clark; [28872]

(2) what representations he has received regarding the handling by the Metropolitan police service of a complaint by Mr. Leslie Clark into the case of Mr. Robert Clark. [28871]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), in his former capacity as a Minister of State, Home Department received representations on this subject from the hon. Member and replied to his correspondence in February and April of last year.

Police (Complaints)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints received by the Metropolitan police service from members of the public during 2000 were *(a)* forwarded to the Police Complaints Authority and *(b)* recorded initially as complaints and then reclassified and cancelled. [28875]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* From 1 January to 31 December 2000 there were 6,211 public allegations against the Metropolitan police service, making up 3,887 cases. Of these, 3,050 allegations (49 per cent.) have so far been referred to the Police Complaints Authority. There are 60 allegations (1 per cent.) that are shown as 'Not Resolved' or 'De-Recorded'.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement recommendation 49 of Setting the Boundaries to introduce into UK domestic law a specific offence of people trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. [29676]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Home Office Ministers are currently considering this and all of the other recommendations made to Government by the Sex Offences Review, in the light of responses to a public consultation process. The Government have indicated their intention to introduce new legislation to target the evils of trafficking in human beings. They are considering how that legislation should be framed and are examining suitable legislative vehicles.

The new legislation will also implement our international obligation in respect of trafficking, contained in the United Nations (UN) Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children for Sexual Purposes, the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime, and a European Union (EU) Framework Decision on Trafficking currently under negotiation.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received to amend section 22 of the Sex Offences Act 1956 to make it an offence for a person to procure under 18s for the purposes detailed in sections 22(1), *(a)(b)* and *(c)* of the legislation. [29675]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Sex Offences Review recommended to Government that section 22 of the Sex Offences Act 1956 should be replaced with a range of gender neutral offences relating to the commercial sexual exploitation of a child under 18 and the trafficking of a person for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Home Office Ministers are considering this recommendation and the responses received during the consultation period in light of the Government's intention to introduce new legislation to target the evils of trafficking in human beings and the United Kingdom's international obligations in this regard.

Police Custody (Deaths)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths in police custody there were in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by force; what is being done to reduce the number of recorded deaths in police custody; what action he will take as a result of responses received to the recent consultation document concerning deaths in police custody; and if he will publish, following the conclusion of the consultation, a list of those who responded to it. [27854]

Mr. Denham: Statistics for deaths in police custody for 2000–01 were published on 29 November 2001. Copies can be found in the Library. The total number of deaths in custody fell from 70 in 1999–2000 to 52 in 2000–01. Police forces are taking a range of actions to reduce the number of deaths. These include safer custody facilities, close circuit television (CCTV) monitoring and an emphasis on better care, assessment and monitoring of detainees. Work is also in hand to develop a national protocol to cover health care professionals working within the custody environment.

The responses received to our recent consultation document concerning the definition of deaths in police custody will be fully considered before changes are introduced. I will publish a list of those who responded.

Tetra Communications System

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Tetra communications system is to be introduced in police forces nationwide; what recent discussions he has had with the Police Federation and others concerning its safety; and if he will make a statement. [28576]

Mr. Denham: Airwave, the new national communications service for the police forces, is being introduced throughout England, Wales and Scotland. It is already operational in Leicestershire, Lancashire and Greater Manchester and will be ready for service in North Yorkshire, Suffolk and West Mercia by the end of February 2002. It is planned to complete the roll-out in England and Wales by 2004, and in Scotland during 2005.

In November 2001 the Home Secretary and I met with representatives of the Police Federation to discuss their concerns on health and safety aspects of the Tetra technology used by Airwave. The Home Office has provided answers to the questions raised by the Police Federation. These can be found on the website of the Police Information Technology Organisation (www.pito.org.uk).

Crime Statistics (Midlothian)

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the figures are for crime against the person in the Midlothian constituency in the most recent 12 months for which figures are available; what percentage of this figure was related to mobile phone crime; and what the Government are doing to *(a)* help reduce crime and *(b)* improve community safety in the Midlothian constituency. [27181]

Mr. Denham: This detailed information on Midlothian is a matter for the Scottish Executive. But Scotland should benefit from work undertaken in England and Wales in researching the problem of mobile phone theft, and in working with the industry. Although other measures are important, more needs to be done by the industry to enhance the security of their product, and we are pressing them to do more to prevent their customers from becoming the victims of crime.

We have succeeded in gaining the commitment of United Kingdom phone operators to some early measures to test ways of putting stolen phones out of action. In particular, we are exploring with the police and the operators a Dutch initiative which disables stolen phones by "bombing" them with teletext messages every few minutes. The operators have also agreed to improve security as investment takes place in new systems, and we are seeking similar commitments from manufacturers.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of animal experimentation and animal welfare in universities. [28846]

Angela Eagle: Some 40 per cent. of regulated scientific procedures using live animals in Great Britain are conducted in universities and medical schools. They form part of a wide range of programmes of fundamental and applied medical research.

All such procedures in the United Kingdom are regulated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The Act provides for a three-tier licensing system covering the establishments concerned, the research programmes undertaken, and the individuals carrying out the work.

Under the Act the procedures can be licensed for only a limited number of permitted purposes, and then only if there is no alternative to the use of animals. Moreover, use of animals will not be permitted unless the benefits of the proposed research are deemed to outweigh the welfare costs to the animals. The number of animals then used, and the suffering they are caused, must be minimised. This reflects the application of the "three Rs" in relation to animal experimentation; replacing the use of animals with alternative methods, reducing the number of animals needed for a particular purpose and refining the procedures to minimise suffering.

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate assesses all licence applications and monitors compliance with licence authorities to ensure appropriate standards of animal welfare. Required minimum standards for the housing and care of the animals are set out in detail in published codes of practice.

Hertfordshire Police Force

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were serving in the Hertsmere Division of the Hertfordshire Police Force on *(a)* 1 July 2001, *(b)* 1 October 2001 and *(c)* 1 January 2002. [25990]

Mr. Denham: The information in the table has been provided by the chief constable of Hertfordshire constabulary. On 1 October 2001 Hertsmere division joined with two other divisions to become part of the 'Central Area'. To provide a proper comparison, the table shows the total officers on 1 July 2001 deployed on the three divisions which now make up the Central Area; and totals for the Central Area on 1 October 2001 and 1 January 2002.

Date	*Police officers*
1 July 2001	420
1 October 2001	419
1 January 2002	417

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how (1) many officers were recruited by the Hertfordshire constabulary in each year since 1983; [25246]

(2) how many officers left the Hertfordshire constabulary in each year since 1983. [25245]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table.

Year	*Officers recruited*	*Total officer leaving*
1982–83[1]	62	[4]—
1983–84[1]	62	[4]—
1984–85[1]	74	[4]—
1985–86[1]	72	52
1986–87[1]	95	85
1987–88[1]	114	97
1988–89[1]	107	79
1989–90[1]	101	100
1990[2]	74	69
1991[3]	96	62
1992[3]	73	73
1993[3]	54	59
1994[3]	72	55
1995–96[3]	109	80
1996–97[3]	148	90
1997–98[3]	78	95
1998–99[3]	79	91
1999–2000[3]	167	115
2000–01[3]	110	117

[1] *Source:*

Hertfordshire constabulary records 1982–990 Hertfordshire constabulary records are kept by financial year (April to March). The force does not have wastage figures for before 1984–85.

[2] 1990 only represents nine months from April to December 1990 due to changes in Home Office collection and collation arrangements (April-June from Hertfordshire constabulary records, July-December from Home Office records.

[3] *Source:*

Home Office Statistics 1990–2001. Home Office data was kept by calendar year until 1995 when this was changed to financial year. The data for 1995–96 therefore represents 15 months from January 1995 to March 1996.

[4] Not available

Driving Offences

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers were successfully prosecuted in 2001 for a driving offence; and how many of these offences involved the use of a hand-held mobile phone. [28352]

Mr. Denham: Statistics on prosecutions for motoring offences in 2001 will be published in the autumn.

There is no separate offence of driving a vehicle using a hand-held mobile telephone, and any prosecution is likely to be for driving without due care and attention or for not being in proper control of a vehicle.

Foreign Armed Forces

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to his answer of 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 862W, on foreign armed forces, what protections under international instruments are available for individuals *(a)* serving under the command of and *(b)* associated with the armed forces of the former Government of Afghanistan. [29251]

Peter Hain: I have been asked to reply.

Categories of persons who are prisoners of war (POWs), or who are to be treated as POWs, are set out in Geneva Convention III and, where applicable, Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions. The legal status of a detainee has to be determined by reference to these provisions in each individual case. Those detainees who do not enjoy prisoner of war status must in any event be treated humanely.

Protection of Children

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average prison term is for a person convicted of child abuse. [26608]

Beverley Hughes: 'Child Abuse' is not a specific offence but actions of this nature can be prosecuted under a number of offences. Recorded crime statistics show the categories of offence with the largest numbers of offences specifically against children are: cruelty or neglect to a child (2,558 offences in 2000–01) and gross indecency with a child (1,336 offences in 2000–01).

In the year 2000, 616 prisoners were received for the offence of gross indecency with a child. They had been given, on average, a sentence of 27.5 months. In the same year, 124 prisoners were received for the offence of cruelty to a child. They had been given, on average, a sentence of 16.4 months.

Other offenders imprisoned for actions against children would have been included in offence categories that do not separately identify children, eg rape, incest, homicide, etc. It is not possible to identify the sentence lengths given for these cases from central records, although all those convicted of murder would have received a mandatory life sentence.

Under the broad review of sentencing that began in July, the Government are looking at tougher determinate sentences for sex offenders that will ensure they stay in prison, up to the full term if necessary, so long as they continue to present a risk of harm to our communities and that they are subject to strict and extended supervision on release. The Government are also looking at a requirement that where a life sentence is an option judges should not shy away from using it if the professional evidence shows that there is a clear risk that the offender will commit further sex offences.

Child Asylum Seekers

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on (i) the numbers of and (ii) factors leading to unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK. [28513]

Angela Eagle: We have not commissioned any research or evaluation into the factors which lead unaccompanied minors to seek asylum in the United Kingdom. However, the Research Development Statistics (RDS) Directorate is currently in discussion with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to identify any possible research needs in this area.

Information on the numbers of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the United Kingdom is already available (up to August 2001).

Information on unaccompanied minors is published annually in the statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library, and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 25 January 2002

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Road Traffic Legislation

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend the Road Traffic Act 1984. [27461]

Mr. Spellar: None. There is no such Act of Parliament.

Departmental Consultants

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 584W, on departmental consultants, if he will set out the criteria for determining that contracts let to *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Mercers Management Consulting and *(d)* Schroder Salamon Smith Barney, on matters relating to Railtrack should not be subject to open competition. [27206]

Mr. Byers: The issues involved were highly sensitive, involving discussions being conducted with Railtrack and their advisers on the basis of strict confidentiality.

Piracy

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 208W, on piracy, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of *(a)* shipping and *(b)* port security measures in the United Kingdom. [29279]

Mr. Jamieson: The United Kingdom has a comprehensive security regime in place for maritime passenger operations.

The basis of this security regime is the Aviation and Maritime Security Act (AMSA) 1990, which enabled mandatory measures to be introduced for the maritime industry. These measures are formally required by Directions served on the industry covering a range of security issues, including searching of passengers and vehicles, the establishment of Restricted Zones (in which only passengers and other authorised persons are allowed) and pass wearing.

These Directions establish the security standards that the Government expect the industry to comply with, by ensuring that appropriate procedures are in place.

Inspectors from my Department undertake a continuous and comprehensive system of compliance visits to passenger ports and also undertake ship inspections, to ensure that effective security regimes, in accordance with the Directions, are maintained. They are empowered to take enforcement action against harbour/ship operators if the required standards are not being met.

Following the events of 11 September 2001, the UK's maritime passenger industry was required to operate in accordance with increased levels of security requirements. These increased measures are kept under constant review.

Consideration has also been given to additional initiatives. This work has been undertaken within Whitehall and has included, for the first time, offering general security advice to non-passenger ships and non-AMSA ports.

Nuclear Materials (Transportation)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the condition of railway lines leading to nuclear power stations. [29497]

Mr. Jamieson: Maintenance of railway track leading to nuclear power stations which forms part of the Railtrack controlled infrastructure is the responsibility of Railtrack. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), through its HM Railways Inspectorate (HMRI), regulates health and safety on the railways. HMRI currently has a focus on track maintenance issues as one of its mandatory inspection programmes. HSE has advised me that HMRI is not aware of any specific problems at present with the condition of track leading to nuclear power stations.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the requirements are for local authorities to prepare emergency plans for incidents involving trains carrying nuclear materials. [29498]

Mr. Jamieson: The responsibility to prepare emergency plans for transport of nuclear material by rail rests principally with the train operator, facility owner and infrastructure controller. They have a duty under The Packaging, Labelling and Carriage of Radioactive Material by Rail Regulations 1996 (RAMRail) to have emergency arrangements and to co-operate with each other so as to ensure effective co-ordination of their respective safety systems and procedures. Also under the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 (REPPIR), carriers are required to prepare emergency plans and to consult with appropriate local authorities. Some types of consignment are exempt from these regulations, however, including material in packages which are designed and tested to meet severe accident conditions, and small quantities of material which present a very limited risk.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many incidents there have been where flasks carrying radioactive material on trains have been found to be over the permitted radiation level, broken down by location and level of radiation. [29488]

Mr. Jamieson: Such incidents are included in the annual reports to which I referred the hon. Member in my reply of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 576W.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the incidents in which trains carrying *(a)* radioactive material and *(b)* other nuclear materials have been involved which resulted in release of their materials in the north-west of England in the last six months. [30635]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no such incidents.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Department's definition is of 'no significant radiological safety implication', as used in the report, Radiological Consequences Resulting from Accidents and Incidents involving the Transport of Radioactive Materials in the UK-200 Review, published in October 2001. [30555]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no formal definition of "significant" in the context of this report. A significant radiological consequence would be if radiation exposures approach or exceed the statutory limits. The radiological consequences listed in the report are much lower than this and are therefore not considered significant.

Train Protection Systems

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of trains using Paddington station have *(a)* ATP and *(b)* TPWS in place. [30309]

Mr. Jamieson: Train protection systems are operational on all train services using Paddington station. First Great Western and Heathrow Express services are fitted with Automatic Train Protection (ATP) and Virgin Cross Country and Thames Trains services are fitted with the Train Protection and Warning Systems (TPWS).

Council Tax Enforcement

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many officials responsible for the policy for council tax enforcement in his Department have, as part of their training and information gathering, *(a)* visited a money advice centre, a magistrates court and the High Court when they are hearing cases for committal for council tax arrears and *(b)* discussed the difficulties with council tax application forms with the applicants. [29533]

Dr. Whitehead: No such visits have been made. However, officials are in regular contact with the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Local Government Association and local authorities about enforcement matters. Last November, officials also met with representatives of the Zacchaeus 2000 Trust to discuss committal for local tax debts and are happy to meet other organisations and advice centres to discuss such matters.

Local Tax Arrears

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many warrants for committal to prison owing to local tax arrears were issued in 1999. [29535]

Dr. Whitehead: Statistics on committal orders are published in The Institute of Public Finance Accountancy (CIPFA) Revenue Collection Statistics.

For 1999–2000, their estimated total number of orders obtained but postponed on payment terms was 22,119, based on grossed up actual figures provided by 253 of 376 local authorities.

For the 253 responding authorities, the actual number of people committed to prison was 117.

Local Authority Statutory Notices

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent guidance his Department has issued on the publication of statutory notices by local authorities in the local press. [30217]

Mr. Byers: None. We issued general guidance about planning notices in Circular 15/92, "Publicity for Planning Applications". This includes advice on the categories of planning application that must be advertised in local newspapers. Separate requirements to advertise planning appeals and called-in planning applications are set out in secondary legislation. The Government's recently published planning Green Paper "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change" indicates our intention to retain the requirement on planning authorities to advertise certain applications in the local press. However, we will review the requirement to publicise planning appeals and called-in planning applications with the aim of encouraging greater community participation.

Allotments

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what recent guidance his Department has issued on consultation on *(a)* supplementary planning guidance and *(b)* the change of use of allotments; [30218]

(2) what recent guidance his Department has issued to local authorities on the change of use of allotments. [30219]

Mr. Byers: In March 1998, my Department issued guidance to local authorities to ensure that the availability of statutory allotments are actively promoted before applications for consent to their disposal are submitted. We have since consulted on draft Planning Policy Guidance note: (PPG) 17, which sets out revised criteria against which applications for consent to dispose of statutory allotments are to be determined. We will shortly be issuing the revised guidance to the Government offices and local authorities.

My Department, in conjunction with the Local Government Association, published: "Growing in the community: A good practice guide for the management of allotments" in June 2001. This guide provides comprehensive advice and good practice for local authorities on all aspects of allotment management. My Department has also recently published "Allotments: a plot holders guide", which provides advice to current and potential allotment plot holders.

Bus Ticketing

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to improve the inter-changeability of bus tickets on routes served by different bus companies. [30220]

Mr. Byers: We wish to encourage joint ticketing schemes between bus operators, aimed at making life easier for bus users.

Last year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, on the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, made an Order to exempt multi-operator ticketing schemes from having to be notified individually to the Office of Fair Trading. Any such scheme that meets the terms of the Order is therefore automatically exempted.

I am, however, aware of the concern expressed both by bus operators and local authorities about the terms of the ticketing schemes block exemption. It would be highly undesirable if operators felt compelled to abandon existing worthwhile initiatives, or were deterred from developing new ones. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport has written to the Director General of Fair Trading, emphasising the importance that we place upon the continuation of sensible, multi-operator ticketing schemes that have proved popular with the travelling public.

Rural Bus Challenge

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce the results of the 2001 Rural Bus Challenge Competition. [31138]

Ms Keeble: I am pleased to announce today approval of the 58 projects listed which were submitted as bids by local authorities in this competition. This follows careful consideration of the 107 bids totalling more than three times the funding available submitted by authorities. Funding for the successful bids will total £20.5 million.

2001 Rural Bus Challenge Competition—awards

Authority/bid reference/name	*Funding awarded*
Cambridgeshire	
Taxi Plus	151,000
West Huntingdonshire Rural Links	339,839
Cheshire	
Chester-Whitchurch Corridor—a rural Bus Quality Partnership	718,000
Services for Young People in Vale Royal	67,500
Rural Recovery—Blazing Trails	160,000
Cornwall	
Integrated Bissoe Valley Services	469,000
Cumbria	
Cumbria Connexion Enhancement	250,000
Windermere Shuttle Bus	292,300
Darlington	
Provision of Quality Passenger Infrastructure	118,887
Derbyshire	
Clay Cross Accessible Transport Initiative (CATI)	291,625
Devon	
Devon Fare Cars	471,000
Life in the Bus Lane—North Devon (Buses are Cool)	373,000
Durham	
County Durham RESPONSE	941,300
East Riding	
PATHFinder	825,000
East Sussex	
Travel Choice in the South Downs	363,000
Essex	
Harwich Connection Community Bus Co-operative	293,500
Essex Taxi-Bus Carrier	20,500
Greater Manchester	
Expansion of Existing Rural Transport Co-operative in Partington and Cadishead	188,000
Expansion of Existing Demand Responsive Taxi Service in Summersheat, Tottington and Ramsbottom	45,000
Hartlepool	
Enhanced Daytime Bus Service	135,000
Herefordshire	
Rural Taxibus Project	396,000
Hertfordshire	
Improving Access to Health Facilities	190,000
Rural Community Transport and Accessible Vehicles	386,700
Roundabout Transport	112,900

2001 Rural Bus Challenge Competition—awards

Authority/bid reference/name	*Funding awarded*
Kent	
Rural demand responsive transport in Shepway	168,000
Lancashire	
Bowland Transit	634,375
Lincolnshire	
InterConnect—Responding to Rural Demands	771,500
Milton Keynes	
Demand Responsive and Evening Service	199,603
Norfolk	
Transport, Health and Well Being—Making the Links	471,000
North Yorkshire	
Friarage Hospital, Northallerton—Bus Turning Area and Waiting Facility	114,700
Kirky overflow and Sicklinghall Area Minibus, Dunkeswick Lane End Interchange	276,000
Ingleton and Settle Area Taxibus and Stationlink	170,000
North Selby Taxibus	246,000
Four in One	372,173
Northamptonshire	
Kettering Area Transport Demonstration Project	423,380
"The Villager" Corby Rural Bus Scheme	111,860
East Northamptonshire Connecting People Project	247,277
Wellibus Villager—Enhanced Service	143,200
Northumberland	
Hadrian's Wall Bus	128,845
Peterborough	
Demand Responsive Bus Service	266,350
Somerset	
Community Transport in Mendip 'Special Rural Component'	89,000
South Somerset Links, Langport and Chard	197,000
The Rural Surrounds of Wiveliscombe	100,000
South Gloucestershire	
Continuation of Existing Vale-Link Dial-a-Ride Services	578,827
South Yorkshire	
Stocksbridge and Penistone Rural Link	1,013,689
Staffordshire	
Stone-Uttoxeter Rural Shopperbus	222,000
Suffolk	
3 into 1 Will Go	490,676
Shotley Peninsula	256,497
Surrey	
Waverley Transport Solutions	150,000
Telford and Wrekin	
Cross Boundary—Rural to Town Link	742,895
Warwickshire	
Southam Flexibus	433,195
West Berkshire	
Widespread Introduction of Call-A-Bus	493,950
West Sussex	
DoRiS Plus	442,000
West Yorkshire	
Otley Area Transport Scheme	802,800
Wiltshire	
Expansion of Demand Responsive Bus Network	854,000

2001 Rural Bus Challenge Competition—awards

Authority/bid reference/name	*Funding awarded*
Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Bus	435,000
Wokingham Twyford Community Bus	470,000
Worcestershire EasyLINK flexi	340,000
Total awards	20,454,843

Refrigerator Disposal Costs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements he has made with regard to the allocation of the adjustment to the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block, announced in the provisional local government finance settlement, to cover the cost of implementing refrigerator disposal regulations. [29117]

Mr. Byers: Pursuant to my answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 718W, £6 million has been added to the upper tier sub-block of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services Standard Spending Assessment for 2002–03 for the costs of implementing refrigerator disposal regulations for the period 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2002.

Ozone Depleting Substances

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he intends to match the costs in the next financial year to Hertfordshire county council in complying with EC Regulation 2037/2000 on ozone depleting substances. [29360]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

In December we announced a payment of £6 million funding for local authorities to cover their costs until March 2002. We are continuing to assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Foreign Language Programmes

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans she has to encourage the provision of foreign language programmes on independently owned *(a)* television channels and *(b)* radio stations; [29094]

(2) what responsibility her Department has for the provision of foreign language *(a)* television and *(b)* radio within the United Kingdom; [29093]

(3) what recent representations her Department has received from *(a)* right hon. and hon. Members and *(b)* others on the provision of foreign language television and radio in the United Kingdom. [29092]

Dr. Howells: My Department has no responsibility for the provision of foreign language television or radio and the Government have no plans to intervene in the UK market for such services. The Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority are responsible for regulating television and radio programme services, including foreign language services, provided from places in the UK.

I have received one recent representation on this subject from the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) about the withdrawal of Spanish, Italian and German channels by a cable operator. I understand that members of the public have very occasionally raised the issue with my Department.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the expenditure of her Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30086]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport spend was as follows:

Type of publication	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Newspapers	9,135	8,747	10,800	12,221	13,432
Magazines	8,440	7,015	7,371	6,917	8,068
Periodicals	8,167	7,447	10,185	6,498	6,734
Total	25,742	23,209	28,356	25,636	28,234

Football

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) when she last met representatives of the Football Association to discuss matters relating to violence associated with the game on and off the pitch, and if she will make a statement; [29749]

(2) what recent representations she has received about violence associated with football, and if she will make a statement; [29750]

(3) when she last met representatives of the Football Association to discuss the monitoring of legislation concerning travel by supporters to overseas games, and if she will make a statement. [29751]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received 14 representations concerning football-related violence over the last five months.

The Secretary of State maintains a close relationship with the Football Association. She has not met the FA recently to discuss football-related violence or the

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monitoring of legislation concerning travel by supporters to overseas games as this is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

The Government have placed extensive legislation for tackling football hooliganism at the disposal of the police and the courts. The scenes witnessed in Cardiff and other grounds should be placed in a proper context. Our stadia remain among the safest and most secure in the world and there is no evidence of a return to the mass hooliganism that marred our national game in previous decades. The Government are not complacent. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary liaises closely with the police and football authorities in monitoring supporter behaviour and in assessing the impact and effectiveness of current legislation.

The measures introduced by the Football (Disorder) Act 2000 empower the courts to impose banning orders on individuals who have previously caused or contributed to violence or disorder at football matches, where there are reasonable grounds to believe that making an order would help to prevent violence or disorder at future matches.

The imposition of sporting sanctions for misbehaviour by players on the field of play is the responsibility of the football authorities. However, the Football (Disorder) Act 2000 applies to all individuals, irrespective of their profession.

Analogue Switch-off

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Uxbridge, of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 340W, on analogue switch-off, how access to digital equipment is determined. [30009]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* As a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers should have access to equipment capable of receiving digital television services. The Digital Television Action Plan includes a specific action to conduct a comprehensive review of progress towards digital switchover, with particular reference to the accessibility, availability and affordability tests announced in September 1999. The review will refine the tests and report on how progress towards meeting them is to be measured. A first report is due by the end of March 2002.

Olympic Games

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to make a UK bid for the 2012 Olympic Games; and if she will make a statement. [31315]

Mr. Caborn: The decision on whether or not to launch a UK bid to host the Olympic Games is a matter principally for the British Olympic Association which has yet to decide whether to bid for the 2012 Olympic Games. It is current BOA policy that any UK bid should be based on London. The BOA's eventual decision will inevitably be influenced by public opinion both in London and across the UK, together with the views of London and central Governments.

The BOA has formed a key stakeholders group involving my Department, the Greater London Authority, UK Sport and Sport England to discuss the prospects for a London bid. The key stakeholders group have appointed Arup consultants to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of bidding for and, if successful, staging an Olympic Games in London. The consultancy will form part of the on-going work that is assessing the viability and merits of a potential London Olympic bid for 2012.

Arup consultants were appointed following a competitive tendering process. I have placed copies of the Invitation to Tender in the House Libraries. The consultancy will be jointly funded by DCMS, UK Sport, the London Development Agency and the British Olympic Association.

This consultancy will include an assessment of the costs to public and private funds of bidding and—if successful—of staging a London Games. It will also contain a breakdown of the potential benefits that would accrue from the bid process and through subsequently hosting the event.

The consultants are due to present their completed report to the funding bodies in early May. A decision on whether or not to publish the report will be taken once the extent of commercially confidential information it contains is known.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Pay Review Body

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the appointment to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body of a replacement for Vice Admiral Sir Toby Frere KCB. [31313]

Mr. Hoon: I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Vice Admiral Sir (Anthony) Peter Woodhead KCB to a three-year term. This appointment has been conducted in accordance with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointment's guidance on appointments to public bodies.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United States personnel have visited the Atomic Weapons Establishment in each of the last three years; and from which United States departments and establishments these visitors have come. [28257]

Mr. Hoon: The number of United States personnel who visited the Atomic Weapons Establishment in each of the last three years is shown as follows:

1999—there were 100 visits involving 365 different people

2000—there were 98 visits involving 384 different people

2001—there were 87 visits involving 296 different people

(in each year a number of personnel visited more than once).

These visitors were from the following State departments or establishments:

Alme Associates—Government Contractor
Applied Research Associates
Allied Signal, Kansas City
Bechtel Nevada
Central Intelligence Agency
Chew and Associates Incorporated

Department Internal Audit
Department of Defense
Department of Energy HQ and Operations
Defense Threat Reduction Agency
Honeywell Kansas City Plant
ITT Industries
Kaiser Hill—Consultants
Los Alamos National Laboratory
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
Lockheed Martin Missiles and Space
Lockhead Martin Technology Services
Logicon RDA
Mound, Miamisburg
National Nuclear Security Agency
Naval Research Laboratory
Naval Surface Warfare Center
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Pantex Plant
Picatinny Arsenal
Program Management Office, Strategic Systems Programs
Pacific Northwest National Laboratory
Pro2serve—Consultants
Science Applications International Corporation
Schmitt—Consultants
Sandia National Laboratory
Space Electronics—Consultants
Special Projects UK Office
Strategic Systems Programs
Titan Corporation
University of California
US Strategic Command
Y-12 Plant, Oak Ridge.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28399]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office gave him on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

Joint Working Groups

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Joint Working Groups operating under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement; and how many Joint Working Group meetings have been hosted in the *(a)* UK and *(b)* USA under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement since May 1997. [29957]

Dr. Moonie: The Joint Working Groups currently in existence under the terms of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement are:

Joint Working Group	*Title*
6	Radiation Simulation and Kinetic Effects
9	Energetic Materials
22	Nuclear Materials
23	Warhead Electrical Components and Technologies
28	Non-Nuclear Materials
29	Nuclear Counter-Terrorism Technology
30	Facilities
31	Nuclear Weapons Engineering
32	Nuclear Warhead Physics
34	Computational Technology
36	Aircraft, Missile and Space System Hardening
37	Laboratory Plasma Physics
39	Manufacturing Practices
41	Nuclear Warhead Accident Response
42	Nuclear Weapon Code Development
43	Nuclear Weapon Environment and Damage Effects

Since May 1997 the number of meetings connected with Joint Working Groups which have taken place in the UK and the US is:

	Meetings in the UK	*Meetings in the US*
1997 (May onwards)	64	79
1998	78	148
1999	78	123
2000	66	116
2001	61	120

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which United States departments and establishments were represented at the October 2000 meeting of JOWOG 32. [29958]

Dr. Moonie: The JOWOG 32 meeting at AWE in October 2000 was attended by representatives from the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the Sandia National Laboratory, Albuquerque.

Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what level of medical examination and assessment is required from those former and existing service personnel who are on the Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme. [30433]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme (GVMAP) was established in 1993. As at 17 January 2002, 3,276 patients had been seen by GVMAP physicians. The GVMAP is located at St. Thomas's Hospital, London, and is open to all present and former service men and women or MOD civilians who believe that their health has suffered as a direct result of the 1990–91 Gulf conflict. Its two main purposes are:

to investigate patients' medical complaints, make a diagnosis as far as is possible, and recommend appropriate management, or provide reassurance if no illness is found;

to collate statistical information in an anonymised form as a resource for researchers.

Patients are referred to the GVMAP by their doctors. There is no pre-determined medical criterion they need to satisfy before being seen. Patients are given a full medical examination by GVMAP physicians and a range of physical tests; investigations routinely conducted for all patients include urinalysis, haematological, biochemical, biological and serological tests, ultrasound scan of the abdomen and electrocardiography. These tests are carried out on the day of the appointment and take approximately four hours. Additional investigations and/or referrals to other consultants/specialists may be required. This is decided either during the initial appointment or in follow-up consultations if deemed necessary. Since May 2001, a small number of patients have been seen at a clinic held every two months and run by the head of the GVMAP in Northallerton, North Yorkshire. Patients are given the same assessment as they would have received had they come to London.

The clinical findings from the first 1,000 service and ex-service patients seen by GVMAP physicians were published in the British Medical Journal on 30 January 1999. A paper on the clinical findings from the second 1,000 service and ex-service patients seen was published in the Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps on 29 June 2001. Copies of both papers—as too is a great deal more information of interest to Gulf veterans—are readily available from the Ministry of Defence's Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit (Freephone 0800 169 4495) and on my Department's website at: www.mod.uk/issues/gulfwar/index.html. A clinical analysis of the first 3,000 service and ex-service veterans who have attended the GVMAP is being prepared for peer-review and publication in a scientific journal.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to put the Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme into independent administration. [30434]

Dr. Moonie: None. Medical Assessment Programme physicians already have complete clinical independence from the Ministry of Defence.

Accommodation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been allocated *(a)* to improve armed forces single living accommodation and *(b)* to upgrade married quarters in the last three years. [25704]

Dr. Moonie: Over the last three financial years we have spent £283 million on upgrading single living accommodation, and £167 million on service family accommodation (SFA). A new modernisation programme for single living accommodation was announced in March 2001 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. Worth some £1 billion, its aim is the upgrading of over 30,000 bed spaces within five years of the appointment of a prime contractor. The Defence Housing Executive has a continuing programme to upgrade the core of stock of service families accommodation by the end of 2005.

Medically Downgraded Personnel

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Army and *(b)* RAF personnel were medically downgraded on 1 April 2001; how many of these have postings which would require them to be operational or on rapid reaction duties if fit; and how many of these in each category are (i) awaiting an initial medical consultation, (ii) awaiting treatment following an initial medical consultation and (iii) receiving treatment. [28729]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 April 2001, there were 9,635 medically downgraded personnel in the Army, many of whom would be deployable on military operations although not at the front line. At the same date, there were 3,888 medically downgraded personnel in the RAF, who were considered unfit for any type of deployment. Information is not held centrally on the numbers of medically downgraded personnel who have postings which would require them to deploy overseas on operations or rapid reaction duties, or on the numbers receiving treatment, awaiting an initial medical consultation or awaiting treatment following an initial medical consultation. Such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Washington Treaty

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the practical consequences resulting from bringing terrorism countermeasures within the remit of Article 5 of the Washington treaty and how this may affect NATO's commitment to guarantee the security of WEU member countries; and if he will make a statement. [29630]

Mr. Hoon: The decision to invoke Article 5 following the terrorist attacks of 11 September was consistent with NATO's process of adaptation since the end of the cold war, and the alliance will continue adapting its capabilities to reflect changes in the security environment.

All WEU member states and associate members are also members of NATO; the security of these states is guaranteed by NATO under Article 5 of the Washington treaty.

Nancekuke

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 317W, on Nancekuke, whether there are records of equipment and materials being brought from overseas for use, storage and disposal at CDE Nancekuke. [29965]

Dr. Moonie: There are no surviving records which detail the origin of equipment and materials used at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Nancekuke.

However, records summarising the technical programme undertaken at Nancekuke indicate that in 1959, CN (chloroacetophenone) of both Belgian and Italian origin was transferred to Nancekuke. Some of the CN of Belgian origin was returned to Belgium during 1962 to 1967.

Additional anecdotal evidence also implies that some of the nerve agent production plant built at Nancekuke contained equipment originating from Germany.

MOD Vehicles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 555W, what criteria are laid down whereby operational requirements for the purchase of vehicles by the MOD police mean that the choice is not subject to competition. [30558]

Dr. Moonie: Purchases of vehicles for the Ministry of Defence Police are made on the basis of obtaining best value for money. The MOD police can make a request for a particular make and model of vehicle for specific operational requirements. Each request is scrutinised and considered on its individual merits. Where no competition takes place, we would still expect to secure discounted prices based on wider purchasing arrangements secured in a competitive environment. Typically requests for specific vehicles do not exceed 6 per year.

HEALTH

Hospital Developments

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects each of the 12 hospital developments, announced on 15 February, to be completed. [10790]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the current indicative timetables for the 12 new hospital developments which will be taken forward this year as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 February 2001.

Trust	*Capital value (£ million)*	*Anticipated date of contract signing*	*Anticipated operational date*
University Hospital Birmingham	291	Autumn 2003	Spring 2008
Bradford Hospital	116	Summer 2004	Winter 2007
North Bristol Mental Health	68	Spring 2002	Winter 2005
Central Middlesex	56	Summer 2003	Summer 2005
East Kent	102	Winter 2004	Summer 2006
University Hospital Leicester	286	Winter 2005	Winter 2010
Lewisham	44	Spring 2004	Winter 2005
Peterborough	135	Autumn 2003	Spring 2007
Salford Trust—Hope Hospital	114	Winter 2003	Spring 2007
Tunbridge Wells	175	Autumn 2004	Autumn 2007
Wakefield and Pontefract	164	Summer 2004	Summer 2007
Whipps Cross—Forest Healthcare	184	Spring 2004	Summer 2008

Private Beds

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private beds have been used by the NHS in the last five years. [13603]

Mr. Hutton: According to data collected from independent healthcare providers by the Independent Healthcare Association, since November 2000 at least 75,000 patients have been treated in the independent sector, paid for by the national health service. This figure includes out-patient appointments, day cases and in-patient treatment. A breakdown by type of operation will shortly be placed in the Library.

Operation Cancellations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been cancelled in each quarter since 1997. [15062]

Mr. Hutton: Data are collected on the number of operations cancelled at the last minute. The latest published figures are for Quarter 1 2001–02. Copies of quarterly statistics on cancelled operations by health authority for the years requested are available in the Library.

MMR Vaccinations (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of eligible children were vaccinated with the MMR vaccine in South Buckinghamshire in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01. [27118]

Ms Blears: The information available about children immunised against measles, mumps and rubella is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0121.htm.

Hospital Waiting Lists (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage was of patients waiting for in-patient treatment in the South Buckinghamshire health authority on 1 January in each of the years 1997 to 2002. [27117]

Ms Blears: Information is not available relating to the 1 January each year, nor for South Buckinghamshire health authority. Information is available on the total number of patients waiting at the end of each quarter in Buckinghamshire health authority as shown in the table. Information for the third quarter of this year is not yet available.

Number of patients waiting in Buckinghamshire health authority

Quarter 3	*Number*
1997–98	16,154
1998–99	14,679
1999–2000	13,854
2000–01	13,535

Hospital Treatment Costs

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost is to the national health service of treating an in-patient in a national health service hospital for one week. [26744]

Mr. Hutton: No information is kept centrally on the average costs of an in-patient week in hospital; the data are collected by condition. The cost of any stay will vary due to the nature of the condition being treated, the age of the patient and any pre-existing conditions that the patient may have.

Cost information on in-patient, day case and out-patient treatments can be found on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk. Copies of the publication reference costs 2000 are available in the Library.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies for new NHS dental patients are available in the Gosport constituency. [27152]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Waiting Lists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts have more than 10 per cent. of patients waiting on in-patient lists placed on suspended lists and more than 2 per cent. of patients waiting more than 12 months on in-patient lists; and which of these trusts have been investigated by the Department of Health for waiting list irregularities in the light of recommendations from the National Audit Office. [27366]

Mr. Hutton: The 13 trusts referred to in the National Audit Office report "Inappropriate adjustments to NHS waiting lists", which had more than 10 per cent. of patients waiting on in-patient waiting lists placed on suspended lists and more than 2 per cent. of patients waiting more than 12 months on in-patient waiting lists, are as listed.

The Royal United Hospital Bath NHS trust
Epsom and St. Helier NHS trust
Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS trust
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS trust
Countess of Chester Hospital NHS trust
Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust
The Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS trust
Wrightington Wigan and Leigh NHS trust
Good Hope Hospital NHS trust
Wirral Hospital NHS trust
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS trust
The Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS trust
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS trust.

Regional offices regularly monitor suspension rates of all trusts as part of the performance management function. Since the NAO report on 19 December, regional offices have been reviewing the position of the 13 noted trusts.

Emergency Contraception

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which areas the morning-after pill is available to *(a)* girls aged 14 and 15, *(b)* girls aged 12 and 13 and *(c)* girls under-12 without a doctor's prescription; and what measures are in place in each such area to address issues of child abuse. [28208]

Yvette Cooper: All emergency contraception supplied to under-16s is a prescription only medicine (POM). This is provided under medical supervision which includes other health professionals supplying the POM product under patient group directions. Information collected centrally of the number or prescriptions for emergency hormonal contraception dispensed in family planning clinics and prescriptions dispensed in the community by community pharmacists and dispensing doctors in England is included in my reply to the hon. Member on 23 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 965W.

Health professionals providing contraception to under-16s do so within a legal framework established in 1986. This involves assessing the young person's competence to understand the choices they are making and whether the treatment is in their best interests. Health professionals, like any other professional whose work brings them into contact with children and families, should follow the Government's "Working Together to Safeguard Children" child protection guidance. This guidance sets out how all agencies and professionals should work together to promote children's welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect. It is intended to provide a national framework within which agencies and professionals at a local level—individually and jointly—draw up and agree upon their own more detailed ways of working together.

Bristol Royal Infirmary

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been set aside to compensate the children who survived the Bristol heart case affair. [27881]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* All claims for compensation are assessed individually, on their merits. Any compensation payments made in relation to cardiac surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary will be handled in accordance with the arrangements in place for all other clinical negligence claims against national health service trusts and health authorities.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases where children were left mentally disabled resulting from the Bristol heart cases *(a)* have been settled and *(b)* are outstanding. [27880]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* There have been a total of 61 claims made in relation to children who are alleged to have suffered injury following cardiac surgery at Bristol Royal Infirmary. In two of these cases legal proceedings have been issued. Admissions of liability have been made in two other cases, but neither of these were subject to court proceedings. 24 cases have either been withdrawn or are unlikely to proceed. In the remaining 33 cases solicitors have been asked to provide further details.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been paid out to date by way of compensation to families resulting from the Bristol heart cases. [27882]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* A total of £1,900,000 has so far been paid out to date as compensation for claims relating to cardiac surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

Fou[illegible]n Hospitals

Ms Walley: To ask [illegible] Secretary of State for Health what process will be used to select managers for the proposed foundation hospitals. [29399]

Mr. Hutton: Where appointments are necessary the normal national health service practices, based on fair and open competition, will be used.

Health Spending

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate health spending per head of population by health authority in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [29318]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The expenditure by weighted head of population for each English health authority area for 2000–01 is shown in the table. Expenditure estimates for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Expenditure by health authorities and primary care trusts

Health authority	*Expenditure by weighted head (£)*
Avon HA	856.75
Barking and Havering HA	773.42
Barnet HA	959.87
Barnsley HA	766.50
Bedfordshire HA	779.74
Berkshire HA	804.46
Bexley and Greenwich HA	886.09
Birmingham HA	823.71
Bradford HA	769.58
Brent and Harrow HA	823.29
Bromley HA	971.74
Buckinghamshire HA	755.09
Bury and Rochdale HA	771.15
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	763.88
Cambridgeshire HA	786.94
Camden and Islington HA	1,067.88
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	796.09
County Durham and Darlington HA	738.32
Coventry HA	802.56
Croydon HA	925.44
Doncaster HA	861.88
Dorset HA	1,023.69
Dudley HA	828.09
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	826.21
East and North Hertfordshire HA	803.66
East Kent HA	810.16
East Lancashire HA	740.66
East London and The City HA	869.91
East Riding and Hull HA	787.13
East Surrey HA	958.66
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	827.74
Enfield and Haringey HA	817.53
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	784.29
Gloucestershire HA	799.79
Herefordshire HA	761.71
Hillingdon HA	753.76
Isle of Wight HA	867.61
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	1,011.24
Kingston and Richmond HA	829.50
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	886.88
Leeds HA	869.94
Leicestershire HA	779.71
Lincolnshire HA	808.95
Liverpool HA	887.35
Manchester HA	869.02
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	882.91
Morecambe Bay HA	1,346.04
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	811.10
Norfolk HA	815.11
North and East Devon HA	800.95
North and Mid Hampshire HA	835.93
North Cheshire HA	811.75
North Cumbria HA	793.52
North Derbyshire HA	744.33
North Essex HA	839.97
North Nottinghamshire HA	761.33
North Staffordshire HA	760.11
North West Lancashire HA	770.48
North Yorkshire HA	814.07
Northamptonshire HA	830.95
Northumberland HA	871.50
Nottingham HA	842.50
Oxfordshire HA	823.14
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	762.50
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	901.60
Rotherham HA	773.29
Salford and Trafford HA	839.62
Sandwell HA	777.76
Sefton HA	1,040.25
Sheffield HA	956.59
Shropshire HA	763.29
Solihull HA	756.17
Somerset HA	825.30
South and West Devon HA	800.84
South Cheshire HA	801.87
South Essex HA	806.50
South Humber HA	802.29
South Lancashire HA	779.41
South Staffordshire HA	792.06
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	781.00
Southern Derbyshire HA	759.33
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	749.06
Stockport HA	759.28
Suffolk HA	778.56
Sunderland HA	781.94
Tees HA	824.19
Wakefield HA	854.72
Walsall HA	776.48
Warwickshire HA	798.29
West Hertfordshire HA	800.40
West Kent HA	786.21
West Pennine HA	746.22
West Surrey HA	840.34
West Sussex HA	784.64
Wigan and Bolton HA	732.65
Wiltshire HA	828.57
Wirral HA	798.81
Wolverhampton HA	763.81
Worcestershire HA	827.41

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include:

(i) the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission health care or fund training on behalf of other health bodies;

(ii) asset revaluations in NHS trusts being funded through health authorities; and

(iii) some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trusts within the health authority area.

2. Expenditure per head cannot therefore be reliably compared between health authorities.

3. Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

4. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General

Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

5. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

Sources:

Health authority audited summarisation forms 2000–01

Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01

Weighted population estimates for 2000–2001

Napp Pharmaceuticals

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health following the Competition Commission Appeal Tribunal's upholding of the Office of Fair Trading's findings against Napp Pharmaceuticals, what assessment he has made of the extent of similar abuses and their cost to the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [28705]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* I will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Staffing

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the change in the number of civil servants working within the Scotland Office in the last 12 months. [30311]

Mr. Foulkes: At 31 March 2001 the Department had 107 staff in post. It currently has 114. Both of these figures are within the staffing levels planned for the Scotland Office in July 1999.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Devolution

David Cairns: To ask the Advocate-General what criteria she takes into account in deciding to intervene in devolution issues; and what consideration she gives to the cost to public funds. [30556]

The Advocate-General: The vast majority of cases to date have involved human rights issues. The reasons for intervention will vary according to the circumstances and the criteria are not rigid. In considering intervention I always have very much in mind the need to avoid unnecessary delay in criminal proceedings and the cost of intervention to the public purse. I have taken the view that intervention should not be a routine matter. I might for instance intervene where the case raises human rights issues of serious concern to the Government and I am satisfied that these are more likely to be resolved satisfactorily with my intervention. Experience has shown that the vast majority of devolution issues are disposed of satisfactorily by the courts, without any need for my intervention and consequent public expense. Where cases reach the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, intervention is particularly apt because that is the final authority. But even in these cases my intervention may not be necessary. My role as Advocate-General is not to intervene in cases at any level, at significant public expense, merely because there is an interesting legal point being debated.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General on how many occasions she has raised proceedings in the Scottish courts on a devolution issue since the creation of her office. [29335]

The Advocate-General: I have not been responsible for the raising of any devolution issue proceedings in the Scottish courts. All issues concerning the competence of the actings of the Scottish Parliament, or the Scottish Ministers, have been resolved without any need for me to instigate court actions.

Ministerial Duties

David Cairns: To ask the Advocate-General what proposals she has to review the role and function of the Advocate-General. [30554]

The Advocate-General: My role and functions include a legal advisory role as Law Officer and statutory functions under the Scotland Act 1998. I cannot alter these responsibilities but regularly review how I carry them out, and have no current proposals for change. My office was created by Parliament less than three years ago and I have had to establish and develop it, determining what is required to be done and how to do it. In my advisory role, I have worked closely with the other UK Law Officers to ensure the Government get high quality legal advice, essential to their work. I have developed my role under the Scotland Act, in close co-operation with UK Departments, to seek to ensure that the Government have early warning of issues of competence of Bills of the Scottish Parliament or actings of the Scottish Executive, and can engage in constructive dialogue with the Scottish Executive to address them. Establishing and developing a new office of State is an exciting challenge. The creation of my office has also resulted in a Law Officer with Scottish responsibilities being available in the House of Commons for the first time since 1987.

Scots Law

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General if she will list occasions she has been requested by the Government to give advice on Scots Law since the general election. [29336]

The Advocate-General: I give Law officers' advice frequently and it is a major part of my work. I am precluded from providing further information because it is a long standing convention, adhered to by successive Governments and enshrined in the Ministerial Code, that neither the fact that the Law Officers have advised on a matter, nor the content of any advice which they may have given, is disclosed outside Government other than in exceptional circumstances. This is to protect the confidentiality of the legal advice given to the Government. I have explained this convention to Parliament on a number of occasions. In addition, my officials in the Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General frequently advise Government Departments on Scots Law.

Legislation

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General how many Bills of the Scottish Parliament she has referred to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council since the creation of her Office. [29337]

The Advocate-General: Since devolution in July 1999 my officials and I have examined 30 Bills in conjunction with relevant Government Departments at various stages during their progress through the Scottish Parliament in order to ensure that any problem of legislative competence is identified and resolved if possible, in order to try to avoid the need to refer a Bill to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The Bill may be outwith legal competence in a variety of ways, for example, if it relates to reserved matters, or relates to enactments protected from modification by the Scottish Parliament, or is incompatible with any of the rights of the European Convention on Human Rights or with European Community law. Thus far I am pleased to advise that any problems have been resolved, following legal advice when necessary, and after co-operation and dialogue. As a result I have not referred any Bill so far to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The existence of the power of referral and the work which is done in connection with that power is an essential part of the devolution settlement.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General what the total cost of her Office has been in each year since its creation. [29338]

The Advocate-General: The office of the Advocate-General for Scotland was established on 20 May 1999 and since 1 July 1999 forms part of the Scotland Office with the office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. Not all the costs of the Scotland Office can be separately allocated to each of these two Offices.

Between 20 May and 1 July 1999, the costs of the office of the Advocate-General were paid by the former Scottish Office. From 1 July 1999 to 31 March 2000 the identifiable costs of staff and related administration was £883,326; and in 2000–01 it was £1,265,215. Approximately half of the costs of the office relates to work on litigation and advisory work including the preparation of Bills carried out by lawyers from the Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General on behalf of Government Departments other than the Advocate-General.

Court Proceedings

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General on how many occasions she has *(a)* defended and *(b)* intervened in court proceedings raised by other parties. [29339]

The Advocate-General: I have not defended any actions under the Scotland Act 1998 as none have been raised against me under that Act. I have intervened in 21 court proceedings raised by other parties under the Scotland Act. Over 1,300 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me since May 1999 and my officials and I consider these in conjunction with interested Government Departments. As I have explained to Parliament on a number of occasions I intervene, as a UK Law Officer, only in special circumstances. Most cases are disposed of in the lower courts with no need for my intervention.

Scotland Office Website

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General how many hits there were on the Advocate-General's page of the Scotland Office website between the general election and 1 January 2002. [29347]

The Advocate-General: From June 2001 to 31 December 2001, there were 2,493 hits on the Advocate-General's pages of the Scotland Office website.

Law Officers' Advice

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General on how many occasions she has been requested by the *(a)* Attorney-General and *(b)* Solicitor-General to give advice on a matter of law since the creation of her Office; and if she will list them. [29340]

The Advocate-General: Requests for the Law Officers' advice come from Government Departments and not from the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General for England and Wales. The usual practice is that for requests for advice concerning matters of common interest to the whole United Kingdom, such as the application of European law or human rights issues, I advise jointly with the other United Kingdom Law Officers. Such advice is given frequently. The convention concerning the confidentiality of the Law Officers' advice applies and precludes me from providing details.

Legal Secretariat

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General if she will list the Government Departments for whom the Legal Secretariat has provided legal services. [29341]

The Advocate-General: The Legal Secretariat does not provide legal services to Government Departments but assists me in my ministerial duties, such as preparing Law Officers' advice and Cabinet Committee work. The Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General provides legal services to most Government Departments. Clients include the Cabinet Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office, the Department for International Development, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, HM Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Office of Fair Trading, and the Scotland Office itself.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General how many *(a)* advocates and *(b)* solicitors have been employed in the Legal Secretariat in each year since the creation of her office. [29344]

The Advocate-General: The complement of the Legal Secretariat in each of the years 1999, 2000 and 2001 has been three lawyers, all of whom have been solicitors.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General if she will list the matters in which the Legal Secretariat participated in discussions between the UK Government and the Scottish Executive since the general election. [29346]

The Advocate-General: Members of the Legal Secretariat frequently participate in co-ordination meetings of officials involving representatives of the devolved Administrations as well as Government Departments. Such meetings most commonly concern the application of European Law, human rights and the devolution settlement to various subjects.

Court Appearances

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General on how many occasions she has appeared in court as Advocate-General since the general election. [29342]

The Advocate-General: Since June 2001 I have personally appeared in court in two cases. The first was Karl Anderson, Alexander Reid and Brian Doherty *v.* The Scottish Ministers and the Advocate-General for Scotland, which was a human rights challenge to the first Act passed by the Scottish Parliament, the Mental Health (Public Safety and Appeals) (Scotland) Act 1999. This case was heard over four days in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in July 2001 and followed my appearance personally in the case in the Inner House, heard over several days in May 2000.

The second case was Kenneth Anthony Paton Mills and John Cochrane *v.* Her Majesty's Advocate and the Advocate-General for Scotland which was heard in the Appeal Court, High Court of Justiciary in August 2001. My interest in this case was to determine questions concerning the interrelationship of the Scotland Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Correspondence

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General how many pieces of correspondence her office has answered from non-government sources since the general election. [29343]

The Advocate-General: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Advocate-General how many *(a)* advocates and *(b)* solicitors have been employed in the Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General in each year since the creation of her office. [29345]

The Advocate-General: In the years 1999–2000 the complement of the Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General was 14 lawyers. In 2001 this increased to 16 lawyers. In each year one lawyer was an advocate and the rest solicitors.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

External Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27388]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Expenditure by the Department on campaign extension activities through external public relations consultancies in the past four years is as follows. Information on expenditure by the Department's agencies is not held centrally.

Year	*Campaign*	*Consultancy*	*Spend (£000)*
1999	Reading and Literacy	Hill and Knowlton	[1]620
2000	Maths Year	COI	16
2000	Childcare helpline	COI	1
2000	Connexions	Kinross and Render	4
2000	Don't quit now	Beer Davies	196
2000	UK Online centres	Geronimo	63
2001	UK Online centres	Geronimo	52
2001	New Deal	Hill and Knowlton	46
2001	Connexions	Kinross and Render	42
2001	Foundation Degrees	QBO	114
2001	Childcare Recruitment	Barclay Stratton	90
2001	Work Life Balance	Fishburn Hedges	89
2001	Individual Learning Accounts	Shandwick International	110
2001	Widening Participation in Higher Education	Harrison Cowley	62
2002	Adult Basics Skills	Fishburn Hedges	[2]103
2002	Work Life Balance	Fishburn Hedges	217
2002	UK Online	Geronimo	[2]90
2002	Aim Higher	Geronimo	[2]100

[1] Figure includes general publicity activity, on organising roadshows and events, in addition to campaign extension work. A breakdown between categories is not available.

[2] On-going campaign—figure shown is anticipated spend for year.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what expenditure has been incurred by her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if she will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27953]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department commissions tightly focused market research to help develop and evaluate publicity campaigns. The spend in recent years was:

	£
1998–99	1,408,908
1999–2000	1,687,050
2000–01	2,340,222
2001–02[1]	1,256,121

[1] To January 2002

It would be possible to list every one of these research projects only at disproportionate cost. However, some recent campaigns where strategic communications research or creative development research have been commissioned include the drive to widen participation in higher education, by encouraging under-represented groups to take up this option, the promotion of the relevance of science to teenagers, as part of Science Year, the child care recruitment campaign, the campaign to help those adults with basic skills gaps, and the promotion of foundation degrees and modern apprenticeships. This research is subject to the usual strict rules that spending must represent good value for the tax payer and must not be used for party political purposes.

The Department also conducts research to help us understand the education, skills and communication needs of our customers. It has sampled and consulted on the

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views of teachers, parents and other groups affected by the Department's policies on specific issues. For example, the project "Causes of truancy by pupils of compulsory school age" gathers the views of pupils, parents, school and LEA staff on the causes of truancy and what measures could be taken to address the issue. One of the aims is to examine the issue of absence that is condoned by parents. "A longitudinal study of factors contributing to variations in teacher effectiveness" will investigate the factors which contribute to the effectiveness of teachers at different stages of their career, working in a range of schools in different contexts, and how this changes over time. Part of this study is to track 300 teachers over three years measuring their effectiveness by pupil outcome measures and other qualitative techniques. Again it would not be possible to give details of every project without disproportionate cost.

Information about opinion polls, focus groups and other forms of research commissioned by the Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by her Department in each of the last four years. [27957]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The estimated cost of buildings refurbishment carried out in my Department in each of the last four years is as follows:

£

	Estimated cost
2000–01	4,604,749
1999–2000	3,928,406
1998–99	2,970,093
1997–98	[1]—

[1] Unfortunately this information can be provided only at disproportionate cost

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by her Department since August 2001; and if she will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28400]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

Specialist Designation

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether there is a barrier to a school's PFI partner sponsoring a bid for technology status by that school. [28353]

John Healey: As stated in the criteria set out in the published guidance documents for each specialism, a PFI partner may provide all or part of the £50,000 sponsorship required to support a school's application for designation as a specialist school.

Pupil Mobility

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research she has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effect of pupil mobility on educational attainment. [29234]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department and the Nuffield Foundation supported a research project into pupil mobility, its effect on schools and educational attainment, conducted by the Migration Research Unit at University College London. The project was concluded in June 2000 and the final report published in September 2000. The first part of the research 'Pupil Mobility in Schools' is available from DfES Publications. The second part is available in full on the internet at www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/mru.

Teachers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 426W, if she will break down the figures by vacancies in *(a)* nursery, *(b)* primary, *(c)* secondary and *(d)* special schools; and what the equivalent figures are for England. [30127]

Mr. Timms: Full-time teacher vacancies in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools reported by the Buckinghamshire local authority were as follows:

	January 1998	*January 2001*
Nursery	0	0
Primary	10	21
Secondary	14	33
Special	11	5
Total	35	59

Full-time teacher vacancies in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in England were as follows:

	January 1998	*January 2001*
Nursery	69	103
Primary	1,322	2,007
Secondary	968	2,586
Special	233	280
Total	2,592	4,976

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish her latest estimates of the percentage of secondary school pupils who are in specialist schools in each local education authority area in England; and if she will make a statement. [29218]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The available information is shown in the table.

Percentage of secondary school pupils who attend specialist maintained secondary schools by local education authority[1]

LEA	*Pupils aged 11+ in specialist maintained secondary schools*	*Pupils aged 11+ in all maintained secondary schools*	*Percentage of pupils aged 11+ in specialist maintained secondary schools*
Wandsworth	6,395	9,944	64.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	10,138	16,318	62.1
West Berkshire	7,033	11,740	59.9
Gateshead	7,025	12,043	58.3
Hackney	4,411	7,921	55.7
York	4,929	9,972	49.4
Darlington	2,953	6,009	49.1
North Somerset	5,891	12,268	48.0
Cornwall	13,685	32,000	42.8
Bath and North East Somerset	5,218	12,270	42.5
Camden	4,544	10,868	41.8
Greenwich	5,767	13,834	41.7
Ealing	6,163	15,088	40.8
Durham	13,116	32,158	40.8
Stockton-on-Tees	5,070	12,792	39.6
Bournemouth	3,800	9,768	38.9
Newham	6,667	17,469	38.2
Milton Keynes	4,465	12,058	37.0
Wigan	7,716	20,854	37.0
Birmingham	25,401	69,037	36.8
Bradford	12,539	34,214	36.6
Hartlepool	2,409	6,679	36.1
Plymouth	6,786	18,823	36.1
Gloucestershire	13,718	38,146	36.0
Northumberland	8,075	22,855	35.3
Manchester	8,227	23,472	35.1
Rutland	789	2,254	35.0
Wiltshire	9,570	27,383	34.9
Cambridgeshire	10,625	30,916	34.4
St. Helens	4,167	12,159	34.3
Northamptonshire	14,932	44,161	33.8
Barking and Dagenham	3,709	11,079	33.5
Redbridge	6,301	18,868	33.4
Lambeth	2,398	7,208	33.3
East Riding of Yorkshire	7,333	22,627	32.4
Rochdale	4,583	14,153	32.4
Lincolnshire	14,210	44,166	32.2
Sheffield	9,596	29,861	32.1
Wakefield	6,758	21,279	31.8
Trafford	5,000	15,844	31.6
East Sussex	8,686	27,805	31.2
Knowsley	3,160	10,240	30.9
Norfolk	13,712	44,896	30.5
Warrington	4,192	13,833	30.3
Leicester	5,436	18,031	30.1
Leicestershire	13,014	43,184	30.1
Oxfordshire	10,694	36,002	29.7
Dorset	7,474	25,163	29.7
Bromley	6,269	21,227	29.5
Poole	2,321	7,864	29.5
Liverpool	9,819	33,470	29.3
Tower Hamlets	4,049	14,086	28.7
Suffolk	12,537	44,056	28.5
Wolverhampton	4,694	16,540	28.4
Blackpool	2,203	7,823	28.2
North Tyneside	3,521	12,511	28.1
Surrey	15,892	56,626	28.1
Bolton	5,363	19,145	28.0
Essex	23,989	86,260	27.8
North East Lincolnshire	3,263	11,734	27.8
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	4,446	16,012	27.8
Buckinghamshire	9,215	33,255	27.7
North Lincolnshire	2,933	10,649	27.5
South Gloucestershire	4,473	16,440	27.2
West Sussex	11,545	42,454	27.2
Isle of Wight	2,356	8,858	26.6
Brent	3,846	14,473	26.6
South Tyneside	2,680	10,508	25.5
Cumbria	8,581	33,743	25.4
Derby	3,739	14,748	25.4
Southend-on-Sea	2,836	11,363	25.0

Percentage of secondary school pupils who attend specialist maintained secondary schools by local education authority[1]

LEA	*Pupils aged 11+ in specialist maintained secondary schools*	*Pupils aged 11+ in all maintained secondary schools*	*Percentage of pupils aged 11+ in specialist maintained secondary schools*
Rotherham	4,910	19,845	24.7
Middlesbrough	2,119	8,572	24.7
Sunderland	4,823	19,837	24.3
Coventry	5,091	20,963	24.3
Kirklees	6,070	25,084	24.2
Somerset	6,966	28,849	24.1
Islington	1,814	7,581	23.9
Brighton and Hove	2,872	12,026	23.9
Wirral	5,759	24,181	23.8
Hillingdon	3,869	16,470	23.5
Derbyshire	11,201	47,868	23.4
Halton	2,017	8,688	23.2
Waltham Forest	2,997	12,979	23.1
Shropshire	4,074	17,657	23.1
Devon	9,034	39,814	22.7
Worcestershire	7,638	33,843	22.6
Blackburn with Darwen	2,143	9,501	22.6
Lancashire	16,800	74,964	22.4
Westminster	1,777	8,019	22.2
Medway	4,363	19,837	22.0
North Yorkshire	8,699	40,087	21.7
Reading	1,346	6,349	21.2
Leeds	9,799	47,168	20.8
Herefordshire	2,031	9,823	20.7
Swindon	2,358	11,561	20.4
Wokingham	2,186	10,760	20.3
Luton	2,446	12,073	20.3
Peterborough	2,582	12,960	19.9
Stoke-on-Trent	2,870	14,831	19.4
Sefton	3,893	20,671	18.8
Slough	1,483	7,924	18.7
Southwark	1,844	10,220	18.0
Bristol, City of	3,082	17,902	17.2
Stockport	2,791	16,575	16.8
Barnet	3,501	21,064	16.6
Sandwell	3,240	19,532	16.6
Walsall	3,476	21,382	16.3
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,150	7,101	16.2
Warwickshire	5,108	32,658	15.6
Telford and Wrekin	1,601	10,258	15.6
Hounslow	2,526	16,286	15.5
Solihull	2,398	15,586	15.4
Tameside	2,357	15,368	15.3
Nottingham	2,115	13,910	15.2
Hertfordshire	11,173	74,566	15.0
Salford	1,874	12,524	15.0
Kent	13,541	92,264	14.7
Oldham	2,398	16,825	14.3
Haringey	1,557	11,391	13.7
Havering	2,068	15,903	13.0
Portsmouth	1,271	10,108	12.6
Thurrock	1,004	8,124	12.4
Hampshire	8,632	70,604	12.2
Cheshire	5,651	46,234	12.2
Redcar and Cleveland	1,221	10,351	11.8
Torbay	1,013	8,704	11.6
Nottinghamshire	5,926	53,560	11.1
Staffordshire	5,347	57,451	9.3
Calderdale	1,358	14,882	9.1
Sutton	1,134	14,572	7.8
Barnsley	847	13,134	6.4
Croydon	1,081	17,394	6.2
Bedfordshire	1,516	27,263	5.6
Bexley	823	17,461	4.7
Dudley	585	20,290	2.9

[1] As at January 2001

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

The provisional 2002 data will be available in late spring.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist schools have received assistance from public funds in order to raise the money needed to submit a development plan; how many have received assistance of *(a)* £1 to £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 to £15,000, *(c)* £15,001 to £25,000, and *(d)* over £25,000; and if she will make a statement. [29219]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* No public sector funds may be counted towards the sponsorship supporting a specialist school application. No data are held centrally on the extent of public support—such as from LEAs—for the preparation of applications for specialist school status.

Independent Schools

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the independent schools removed from the register of independent schools in each year from 1996. [30409]

Mr. Timms: Since 1996 the following schools have been deleted from the register of independent schools as a result of failure to comply with a Notice of Complaint:

1998

Jameah Islameyah, East Sussex

1999

Grange House, Herefordshire

Kensington International, London

2000

Bright Sparks Theatre School, London

Al Jamea Al Islamia, Manchester

2001

Thomas Francis, London.

Correspondence

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will reply to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough's question of 18 December 2001 concerning asset management plans. [30301]

John Healey: A reply was issued to the hon. Member on 17 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 446W.

Revenue Funding

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total amount of revenue funding available for children in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools has been in the last five years in (i) Durham, (ii) South Tyneside and (iii) Hampshire. [30442]

Mr. Timms: The following tables contain the information requested:

Durham

£

		Cash		*Real terms—prices 2000–01*		
	SSA	*Grants*	*Total*	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total*
Primary						
1997–98	2,040	40	2,080	2,190	40	2,230
1998–99	2,160	60	2,220	2,250	60	2,310
1999–2000	2,280	140	2,420	2,320	140	2,460
2000–01	2,390	320	2,710	2,390	320	2,710
2001–02	2,490	590	3,080	2,430	570	3,000
Change[1]	450	550	1,000	240	530	770
Secondary						
1997–98	2,680	30	2,720	2,880	40	2,910
1998–99	2,820	50	2,870	2,940	50	2,990
1999–2000	2,940	100	3,040	2,990	100	3,090
2000–01	3,090	240	3,340	3,090	240	3,340
2001–02	3,220	410	3,630	3,140	400	3,540
Change[1]	530	380	910	260	370	630

South Tyneside

£

		Cash		*Real terms—prices 2000–01*		
	SSA	*Grants*	*Total*	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total*
Primary						
1997–98	1,210	40	2,160	2,270	50	2,320
1998–99	2,230	70	2,300	2,330	70	2,400
1999–2000	2,360	150	2,510	2,400	150	2,550
2000–01	2,470	360	2,830	2,470	360	2,830
2001–02	2,580	670	3,250	2,510	650	3,170
Change[1]	450	630	1,080	240	610	850
Secondary						
1997–98	2,780	40	2,820	2,980	40	3,020
1998–99	2,900	60	2,960	3,020	60	3,080
1999–2000	3,020	110	3,130	3,080	110	3,180
2000–01	3,180	270	3,450	3,180	270	3,450
2001–02	3,310	460	3,770	3,230	450	3,680
Change[1]	540	420	950	260	410	660

Hampshire

£

		Cash		*Real terms—prices 2000–01*		
	SSA	*Grants*	*Total*	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Total*
Primary						
1997–98	2,010	30	2,030	2,150	30	2,180
1998–99	2,120	30	2,150	2,210	30	2,240
1999–2000	2,230	80	2,310	2,270	80	2,350
2000–01	2,330	220	2,550	2,330	220	2,550
2001–02	2,450	390	2,840	2,390	390	2,770
Change[1]	440	360	810	240	360	590
Secondary						
1997–98	2,630	20	2,650	2,820	30	2,840
1998–99	2,780	30	2,800	2,890	30	2,920
1999–2000	2,870	60	2,930	2,920	60	2,980
2000–01	3,010	170	3,190	3,010	170	3,190
2001–02	3,170	280	3,450	3,090	280	3,370
Change[1]	540	260	800	270	250	520

[1] Change since 1997–98

Notes:

1. The figures reflect Education SSA (primary and secondary sub-blocks respectively) plus all school related revenue grants in the DfES's DEL relevant aged 5–10 (primary) and 11–15 (secondary).

2. The primary and secondary grant figures include notional allocations for those grants in support of more than one sector.

3. Pupil numbers underlying the £ per pupil figures are those underlying the SSA settlement calculations (primary and secondary sub-blocks respectively.

4. Real terms figures are calculated using GDP deflators published by the Treasury 20 December 2001.

5. 2001–02 figures are provisional as decisions on some funding allocations have yet to be finalised. The figures are thus liable to be revised later in the year.

6. Figures rounded to nearest £10. Difference figures may not sum due to rounding.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Translation Services

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what translation services he ensures are available to *(a)* Benefits Agency and *(b)* Employment Service staff in (i) England and (ii) Staffordshire. [13498]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service, throughout Great Britain, we will provide an interpreter for customers who do not speak English and who either cannot or do not wish to provide their own interpreter. This service is provided through either a multilingual member of staff; local services, for example, community interpreters, local authority services or colleges; or the telephone interpreting service provided by Language Line.

We also have an internal translation service for translating documents both into English and into foreign languages. This is supplemented by a rapid translation service on a text-to-speech basis when a quick translation of a document in a foreign language is needed. Local offices also have the freedom to use community based translation services if they are available and convenient.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will quantify the public service agreement target for employment over the economic cycle. [19049]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 777–79W.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the national staffing requirements for Jobcentre Plus, and the average wage per employee will be; what the combined national staffing requirements were for the Benefits Agency and Employment Service, and the average wage per employee; and what will happen to employees that are surplus to the Jobcentre Plus staffing requirements. [24222]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Currently some 112,000 employees work in the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. The average salary per employee is approximately £15,080.

We will begin rolling out Jobcentre Plus nationally from 2002. Local staffing requirements for Jobcentre Plus will be determined as part of this process. The chief executives of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service wrote to all staff on 23 April 2001. They reassured staff that a key aim in developing plans for Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service would be to enable all current staff to have a job in the new organisations or one of the other agencies in the Department.

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the value of the extra investment in help to the unemployed represented by the new Jobcentre Plus pilot offices in Inverclyde. [25418]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: £122 million has been invested in the current financial year to establish the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices. Because much of this investment, for example on IT and communications, has been spent on the Pathfinder offices collectively it is not possible to identify the total investment separately in respect of the offices in Inverclyde. However, a total of around £3.6 million has been spent on improving the physical environment of the Greenock and Port Glasgow Pathfinder offices.

Industrial Action

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of letters that *(a)* his Department and its agencies, *(b)* Employment Service offices, *(c)* Benefits Agency offices and *(d)* Jobcentre Plus offices have written to individuals citing delays in (i) interviews, (ii) processing claims and (iii) claim reviews, which have resulted from the current industrial action. [25222]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The contingency plans put in place during the dispute, allied to the fact that the great majority of staff are working normally, have enabled us to maintain a near normal service with minimal delays.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of complaints that *(a)* his Department and its agencies, *(b)* Employment Service offices, *(c)* Benefits Agency offices and *(d)* Jobcentre Plus offices have received which relate to the current industrial action. [25225]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: It is not possible to estimate the number of complaints received at area or regional level as a result of the industrial action, as these data have not been collected separately during the course of the dispute.

Centrally, where data are available, we have no record of any such complaints being received from customers.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the number of incapacity benefit claimants who have been required to attend repeat Benefits Agency medical assessment in each of the last 12 months; [25223]

(2) if he will estimate the number of incapacity benefit claimants who have lost their entitlement as a result of a repeat Benefits Agency medical assessment in each of the last 12 months; [25224]

(3) if he will *(a)* estimate the number of incapacity benefit claimants transferred to a different benefit as a result of a repeat Benefits Agency medical assessment in each of the last 12 months and *(b)* provide a breakdown by each individual benefit to which they have been transferred. [25221]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information is not available in the format requested.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the arrangements for transfer to incapacity benefit of unemployed persons of working age who are involved in one or more sickness incidents during a year. [29069]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* A person who has been awarded jobseeker's allowance and is unable to work because of sickness may choose to remain on jobseeker's allowance for up to two weeks. This easement means that people who are incapable of work for short periods of time do not have to change the benefit they are claiming. It can normally be used on two occasions in each year of a job-seeking period. Where the easement does not apply an unemployed person who becomes incapable of work can claim incapacity benefit supported by medical evidence.

We are now delivering a new business, Jobcentre Plus, to help all people of working age make the most of their opportunities. In the past, many people were moved on to incapacity benefit with little or no help to make sure they got the right level of support to enable them to get back into work, where they are ready and able to do so.

All people making new and repeat claims to incapacity benefit in Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices are offered a work-focused meeting as a condition of receiving benefit. These meetings provide the opportunity for people to discuss their work options, as well as their benefit claim, and to investigate with their personal adviser the practical and financial support that is available to help them return to work.

Lone Mothers

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action the Government will take to facilitate the provision of *(a)* housing and *(b)* council tax benefit to lone mothers raising children on their own and not forming part of a married couple. [25258]

Malcolm Wicks: On 12 December we responded positively and in detail to the Better Regulation Task Force report "Housing Benefit: A Case Study of Lone Parents". Our response set out the measures already under way and those planned to ease lone parents' path back into work and provide security for those for whom work is not an immediate option.

A copy of our response has been placed in the Library and is also available on the Department's website at www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/20001/index/htm.

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to PQ 01/20232 and PQ 01/20233, 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 687W, if he will publish the syllabi of the training programmes mentioned and the advice to medical service doctors. [26452]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A copy of the contents of the relevant training modules has been placed in the Library.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26974]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department and its agencies use advertising for various reasons ranging from public information and recruitment to advertising opening hours of local offices. For each occasion national and/or regional media may be used as well as hundreds of local papers.

A breakdown of expenditure on newspaper advertising by title could therefore be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Pension Funds

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received concerning the value of pension funds since 1 January 2001. [28198]

Mr. McCartney: The Department has frequent discussions with representatives of the pensions industry which cover a range of issues. We also receive a large number of pieces of correspondence concerning a range of pensions issues.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average delay was in making payment to state earnings related pension schemes for contributions due in the year to April 2001; what the figure was in each year since the scheme was introduced; and if he will make a statement. [30310]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ME

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he has issued to the Benefits Agency concerning the acceptance of a clinical diagnosis of ME as grounds for an entitlement to benefit. [28220]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We recognise the chronic fatigue syndromes (including ME) as potentially debilitating illnesses. Where a clinical diagnosis of CFS has been made, full account is taken of the resultant care and mobility needs in disability living allowance or its effect on the prescribed activities in the personal capability assessment for incapacity benefits.

New Deal

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received on the funding arrangements due to come into voluntary operation on 1 April about the sector option of New Deal. [28060]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 17 January 2002]*: New arrangements for funding providers on a formula basis will be introduced throughout the new deal for young people, including the voluntary sector option on 1 April 2002. This approach fulfils the commitments made following the 1999 "Learning to Succeed" White Paper to ensure a common approach to the funding of all post-16 learning.

I have received representations from two organisations on these new arrangements. The Employment Service is continuing discussions on the new funding arrangements with its existing contractors.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 589, how people can apply for backdated winter fuel payments; and whether the procedure differs according to the year to which the claim relates. [28380]

Mr. McCartney: Backdated winter fuel payments are only available for the first three winters of the scheme, 1997–1998, 1998–1999 and 1999–2000. Claim forms are available by either ringing the winter fuel payment helpline on 08459 151515 and requesting one, or from the Department for Work and Pensions' website at www.dwp.gov.uk/winterfuel. The procedure for claiming for each of the three years is the same.

Benefit Systems

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 896–97W, when the Statutory Instrument referred to was revoked; and for what reason his answer does not refer to the Statutory Instrument currently in force. [28672]

Malcolm Wicks: The Local Government (Best Value) Performance Indicators Order 2000, SI 2000 No. 896 referred to in my answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 896–97W contains Best Value Performance Indicators for 2000–01. The order was not revoked but was superseded by the Local Government (Best Value) Performance Indicators and Performance Standards Order 2001, SI 2001 No. 724 which contains Best Value Performance Indicators for 2001–02 and is currently in force. My answer did not refer to this statutory instrument because the hon. Member did not ask for details of the Best Value Performance Indicators for the current year.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how often, on average, people with stakeholder pensions make contributions towards their pension. [28969]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available.

Medical Assessment Services

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on recent changes in the standards for delivery of medical assessment services contracted by his Department. [29072]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Over the last quarter, October to December 2001, service delivery in all key areas of the Medical Services Contract has improved. The volume of examinations which have been completed is significantly higher than in the same period last year and examinations are being arranged more promptly. The proportion of customers seen within 10 minutes of their appointment time has risen, and the number being sent home unseen has reduced. Special needs indicated by customers, such as interpreter services, are being met. The training, medical quality, and customer service targets set by the Government in their response to the Social Security Select Committee inquiry into Medical Services all are being met.

TREASURY

Insider Trading

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been prosecuted for insider dealing in each of the last 10 years. [27445]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Trade and Industry has prosecuted 30 people for insider dealing offences since 1 January 1992. The breakdown is as follows:

Year	*Number of people*
1992	6
1993	3
1994	2
1995	1
1996	4
1997	—
1998	—
1999	—
2000	7
2001	4
2002	[1]3

[1] Cases not yet completed.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in how many cases in the last year direct debits of national insurance contributions by self-employed persons suspended during payment of incapacity benefit have not been resumed following the termination of payment of incapacity benefit by reason of technical problems with the National Insurance Contributions Office replacement computer system; and if he will make a statement. [22365]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* There is no evidence to show that resumption of collection of national insurance contributions by direct debit in these circumstances failed because of technical problems with the National Insurance Contributions Office's replacement computer system.

Duty-Free Shopping

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on job numbers of the ending of duty-free shopping within the EU. [24280]

Mr. Boateng: No estimate has been made.

Temporary Contracts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of (i) 51 weeks or (ii) less than 51 weeks' duration in this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total workforce these employees constitute. [25167]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is given in the table:

Staff in post numbers

Year	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001*
HMT						
Casual	18	10	36	27	35	20
Percentage of staff	1.9	1.1	3.9	2.9	4	1.9
National Savings						
Casual	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	13	3
Percentage of staff	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	15	3
Debt Management Office						
Casual	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	3	[2]—
Percentage of staff	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5.5	[2]—
Royal Mint						
Casual staff	63	16	131	165	115	18
Percentage of Staff	6.5	1.6	12.7	15.5	11.5	1.7
Office for National Statistics						
Casual staff	[1]—	6	3	8	13	12
Percentage of staff	[1]—	4.3	2.8	4.8	6.1	5.5
Office of Government Commerce						
Casuals	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	33	36
Percentage of Staff	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	6.9	8.4

[1] No data available

[2] No casuals

[3] Agency not formed

Note:

Data relate to figures of casual staff on contracts of less than 51 weeks

Warehoused Goods Regulations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 an owner of warehoused goods failed to comply with the Warehouses and Owners of Warehouse Goods Regulations 1999. [26429]

Mr. Boateng: The central record holds details of rejections at application and revocation action only. The numbers are as follows:

1999–2000

Revocations—1

Rejections at registration—0

2000–01

Revocations—14

Rejections at registration—38.

None were revoked solely due to breaches of conditions. Minor compliance breaches that do not result in revocation are not recorded centrally, as it would be time consuming and costly to gather that information.

Digitised Products (Taxation)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals the Government are making within the European Community for alternatives to the Commission's paper COM (2000) 349. [26448]

Mr. Boateng: As part of on-going EU discussions on the taxation of digitised products supplied to consumers, the Government have consistently argued that, in the medium term, an electronic solution should be introduced for charging, collecting and distributing the tax due on these supplies in the place where they are consumed, and that any short-term solution should be both temporary and simple to administer. We are confident that final agreement will soon be reached on this basis.

Alcohol and Tobacco Fraud Review

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Ministers received the draft Alcohol and Tobacco Fraud Review report containing the paragraph on resources cited in paragraph 9.3 of the Rogues report. [26415]

Mr. Boateng: The draft report was submitted to the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and discussed by Treasury Ministers. Consideration of the resourcing implications was subsequently taken forward as part of the 1998 spending round in the normal way.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the recommendations of HM Customs and Excise on the level of additional resources needed to combat fraud and evasion that were contained in the draft Alcohol and Tobacco Fraud Review and quoted in paragraph 9.3 of the Rogues report. [26414]

Mr. Boateng: Consideration of the resourcing implications of the Review was taken forward as part of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The CSR settlement included an additional £35 million to fund more than 100 extra officers at the ports to tackle the problem of alcohol and tobacco fraud and smuggling.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to consult service users on options and priorities for the Comprehensive Spending Review. [26137]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government consult a wide range of interests in setting their priorities, including, importantly, service users.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27950]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 42W.

Detailed information in the form requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Young People (Income Tax and National Insurance)

Matthew Green: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of persons aged *(a)* 16 and *(b)* 17 years paid (i) income tax and (ii) national insurance in each of the last five years; [29463]

(2) how much *(a)* income tax and *(b)* national insurance was received from persons aged (i) 16 and (ii) 17 years in each of the last five years. [29467]

Dawn Primarolo: Amounts of income tax liabilities from persons aged 16 and 17 are in the table.

Income tax liabilities

£ million

	Aged 16	*Aged 17*
1998–99	20	50
1999–2000	10	40
2000–01	10	40

Estimates (rounded to the nearest £10 million) are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2001 pre-Budget report. I regret that it is not possible to provide reliable estimates for earlier years.

Estimates for amounts of class 1 primary national insurance contribution (NIC) liabilities from persons aged 16 and 17 are in the table.

UK class 1 primary NiC

£ million

	Aged 16	*Aged 17*
1996–97	10	30
1997–98	10	30
1998–99	10	30
1999–2000	10	30
2000–01	10	20

Estimates provided by the Government Actuary's Department and rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Available estimates for the number of income taxpayers aged 16 and 17 as a percentage of the total population of 16 and 17-year-olds are in the table.

Percentage

	Number of 16-year-old taxpayers as a percentage of all 16-year-olds	*Number of 17-year-old taxpayers as a percentage of all 17-year-olds*
1998–99	4	11
1999–2000	3	10
2000–01	3	10

Taxpayer estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes. Population estimates are from the Office for National Statistics.

Estimates for the number of NIC payers aged 16 and 17 as a percentage of the total population of 16 and 17-year-olds are in the table.

Percentage

	Number of 16-year-old NIC payers as a percentage of all 16-year-olds	*Number of 17-year-old NIC payers as a percentage of all 17-year-olds*
1996–97	5	13
1997–98	5	13
1998–99	5	13
1999–2000	5	14
2000–01	4	11

Estimates were provided by the Government Actuary's Department. Population estimates are from the Office for National Statistics.

All of the estimates are based on survey data and therefore subject to a margin of error particularly because of the relatively small sample sizes involved.

Green Technology Challenge

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what basis *(a)* air pollution from industry, *(b)* cleaning up polluted land, *(c)* oil spills, *(d)* waste treatment and *(e)* recycling are excluded from the Green Technology Challenge funding; [29702]

(2) for what reasons the decision was taken to limit the Green Technology Challenge to *(a)* clean fuels, *(b)* clean vehicle reduction in water use, *(c)* the improvement of water quality and *(d)* energy efficient technologies. [29701]

Mr. Boateng: The Government provide support for environmental objectives through a wide range of policies. Proposals put forward in response to the consultation on setting up a Green Technology Challenge were assessed against the following criteria:

the extent to which there is a market failure or a specific environmental problem that needs to be addressed through Government policy;

the extent to which this problem is best dealt with through a fiscal instrument such as capital allowances and the objective cannot be better achieved through other Government policies;

the effectiveness of offering enhanced capital allowances for investment in technologies in the environmental area in question.

The Government's initial view is that other proposals put forward in response to the consultation do not meet the above criteria as well as the objectives announced. However, the Government will consider extending the scope of the scheme over time.

World Bank Loans

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with US Treasury spokesmen on replacing World bank loans to the world's poorest countries with grants. [29629]

Mr. Boateng: The potential role of World bank grant finance is one of the issues being discussed in the context of the replenishment of the funds of the International Development Association (IDA, the concessional lending arm of the World bank), on which the Secretary of State for International Development leads. The Chancellor and Treasury officials have held discussions with the US Treasury and other countries to seek support for the UK position in these negotiations, which is that we should maintain and enhance the role of IDA as the largest source of concessional finance for low-income countries, and to encourage a substantial contribution by donors to the IDA replenishment.

VAT (Care Services)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost in the current financial year of altering the VAT treatment of fees paid by individuals to nursing homes and registered residential homes for the elderly to that of a zero rated VAT product; and if he will make a statement. [29625]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 559W.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects Customs and Excise to issue details of the proposed extra statutory concession in respect of VAT on supply of services agency workers for domiciliary care. [30161]

Mr. Boateng: Details of the proposed extra statutory concession on the VAT liability of home care will be available when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry lays before Parliament revised regulations governing the conduct of the private recruitment industry.

Sport

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received concerning the Promoting Sport in the Community consultation; to whom the consultation document was circulated and in what quantities; and what measures he is taking to ensure that the views of unpaid voluntary workers who work for Community Amateur Sports Clubs are taken into account. [30159]

Mr. Boateng: A number of representations have been received concerning the "Promoting Sport in the Community" consultation document and consultation continues. Over 5,000 copies of the consultation document have been circulated to CASCs and their governing bodies, Sport England and the Central Council of Physical Recreation. The consultation document is also available on the Treasury public internet site. Given the diversity of the sector, the Government are keen that as many interested parties as possible will take the opportunity to respond, so that all views can be taken into account.

Census Data

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate has been made of the impact that the raising of the minimum threshold for publication of census data from 50 persons/20 households to 100 persons/40 parishes will have on the planning of services in rural areas; [30193]

(2) what measures the Office for National Statistics will take to assist authorities responsible for local planning where separate census data for individual parishes has been lost by the amalgamation of figures as a result of the increased minimum threshold; [30194]

(3) what representation he has received concerning the availability of 2001 census data at parish level; [30156]

(4) what representations he has received on the impact of the raised thresholds in the 2001 census on the planning of services in rural areas; [30155]

(5) if he will revert to the 1991 census threshold figure of 50 persons per household. [30157]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Miss Anne McIntosh, dated 25 January 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking:

(i) what estimate has been made of the impact that raising of the minimum threshold for the publication of census data from 50 persons/20 households to 100 persons/40 parishes (sic) will have on the planning of services in rural areas (30193);

(ii) what representation he has received concerning the availability of 2001 Census data at parish level (30156);

(iii) what representations he has received on the impact of the raised threshold in the 2001 Census on planning services in rural areas (30155);

(iv) if he will consider reverting to the 1991 Census threshold of '50 persons per household' (sic) (30157); and

(v) what measures the Office for National Statistics will take to assist authorities responsible for local planning where separate census data for individual parishes has been lost by the amalgamation of figures as a result of the increased minimum threshold (30194).

I will respond generally while covering the issues raised in each of the questions.

Following a recent ONS Review of the measures to protect the confidentiality of personal information provided in the 2001 Census, I have announced some additional measures. These include a decision that standard statistical output (amounting to some 10,000 counts) will not be released for small areas below a certain population threshold, this being 100 resident persons and 40 resident households.

The design of output areas from the 2001 Census will, however, recognise the need to identify parishes separately in the 2001 Census, but the number of parishes that fall below this threshold will not be known until the processing of data is completed later this year. From information from the 1991 Census, however, it is estimated that some 1,230 parishes in England would have fallen below the 2001 Census threshold.

Nevertheless, the average size of output areas in the 2001 Census will be significantly smaller than in the 1991 Census, facilitating greater geographical flexibility overall in using Census output. The resulting increased amount of detail to be made available from the 2001 Census will assist in the better planning of local services.

I have listened carefully to the views expressed throughout extensive consultation on output requirements from the Census. The Review was fully aware of, and considered carefully, all the requirements for output, including those for parishes, that users had articulated during the course of wide and extensive consultation with all local authorities and other users.

Following the initial announcement last November of my decision to introduce these additional disclosure control measures, I received a number of representations including six from local government bodies expressing particular concerns about the impact of the raised threshold on the availability of 2001 Census data for parishes. In addition, I have recently answered two Parliamentary Questions from the right hon. David Curry MP (nos. 28863 and 28862) on the subject.

I am, of course, keen to ensure that users will obtain the maximum benefit from the use of 2001 Census data. To this end, I invited representatives from the census-user community to a meeting on 13 December 2001 at which we were able to discuss further the specific issues that users had raised including the particular issue about sub-threshold parishes. At that meeting I explained that as Registrar General and National Statistician, I have an obligation not to reveal information collected in confidence in the Census about individual people and households. Indeed, I have given public assurances that I will not do so. In presenting increasingly detailed results from the Census, protecting personal information is of paramount importance.

Maintaining the confidentiality of individual data underpins the trust that exists between data suppliers and any agency that acts as custodian of information about them. At ONS we are fortunate that businesses and the public have confidence that their information is securely held and that we do not release any data that could identify an individual. It is essential that this trust be maintained. The 2001 Census Discussion Paper on Standard Area Statistics (September 2001) noted that the confidentiality threshold being proposed at that time was 50 persons and 20 resident households, but that disclosure control measures were under review as part of an ONS-wide programme of methods and quality. The recent Review was conducted to explore whether or not the measures that were in place would maintain this trust.

The Review considered whether or not the measures initially proposed protected against both real and perceived disclosure. In particular it considered:

(a) the level of statistical detail in the proposed tables;

(b) the level of geography for which the tables would be produced;

(c) the increased availability of the data; and

(d) the proliferation of other datasets against which Census data could be matched.

On the basis of this Review I decided that an additional measure of rounding all cells to either zero or a multiple of 3, should be introduced for all tables to be produced for England and Wales, and that the population threshold for Output Areas be raised to 100 resident persons and 40 resident households for the release of Census Area Statistics.

These measures, together with a data modification measure ('record swapping') already announced, will protect against not only the real risk of disclosure but also, and equally as important, the risk perceived, by the very public about whom the information refers, of disclosure that may arise in output table cells containing counts of '1'. Without these additional measures the risk of perceived disclosure would have been substantially higher. Once formed, any such public perceptions would be difficult to dislodge and would, I believe, damage the integrity of all census output.

In the circumstances I do not propose reverting to the threshold adopted for the release of small area statistics in the 1991 Census of 50 persons and 16 resident households.

We agreed at the meeting on 13 December, however, that the ONS and those present representing the user community would work closely together to minimise the impact that the rounding and increased threshold will have on the data and its uses. In particular, the ONS will consider further what summary output for 'sub-threshold parishes'—in the form of simple statistical profiles, for example—may be safely produced from the 2001 Census, in addition to some basic headcounts that have already been agreed.

A note on that meeting has been posted on the ONS website, and a paper giving further background into the decision and the method, and addressing the consequences and issues raised at the meeting and elsewhere, will be produced shortly.

Taper Relief

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the increase in business investment due to taper relief in each year since its introduction; and if he will make a statement. [30272]

Dawn Primarolo: No such estimate is available. We intend to evaluate taper relief once the system has had more time for its effects to become measurable.

Working Families Tax Credit

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in Barnsley, East and Mexborough are benefiting from the implementation of the working families tax credit. [30524]

Mr. Roy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in Motherwell and Wishaw are benefiting from the implementation of the working families tax credit. [30858]

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families within the Harwich constituency have taken advantage of the working families tax credit to date. [30984]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friends to my answer to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 293W.

Public-private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the technical guidance given to civil servants in his Department on how to define PPPs as finance or operating leases; and if he will make a statement. [30204]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Copies of the Treasury document "Technical Note No.1 (revised)—How to Account for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) transactions" have been placed in the Library. The document sets out additional practical guidance on how to apply the Accounting Standards Board's Application Note "Amendment to Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 5—Private Finance Initiative and Similar Contracts" and the requirement in the Treasury's "Resource Accounting Manual" that all complex transactions should be accounted for under the overriding principles of FRS5.

Construction Industry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what criteria the Inland Revenue determines which firms in the construction industry are subject to an investigation of the employment status of their work force. [30643]

Dawn Primarolo: The criteria are the same as they are for firms who do not operate in the construction industry. The Inland Revenue select firms in three different ways: a proportion is selected randomly, a proportion is selected using pre-selected criteria, and a proportion is selected using risk analysis. The Inland Revenue do not publish the pre-selected and risk criteria they use, as publication may undermine their compliance strategy.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many visits have been made by the Inland Revenue compliance staff to firms in the construction industry to investigate the employment status of their workforce; and how many investigations have been deemed successful, in each year since 1997, broken down by region. [30642]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available. Employment status examinations will often form part of a general review of employer compliance issues. Details of the employment status examinations may not be recorded separately.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ask the Parliamentary Secretary for her Department in the House of Lords, to answer the letters of 13 August and 13 September, Reference H/DEFRA/FM/Snell/130901 from the hon. Member for Hereford; and if she will make a statement. [13524]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* A response to the hon. Member's letters of 13 August and 13 September was sent on 16 January 2002.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed to the Minister for the Environment dated 19 July and 14 September relating to representations from Mr. A. Hodgson of Berwick-upon-Tweed. [19982]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* A response to Mr. Hodgson's letter of 11 July was sent on 21 January. A copy of this response was sent to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed on 23 January. I apologise for the long delay in replying.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will clear outstanding correspondence with hon. Members. [28361]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all Members of Parliament on 14 November 2001 setting out her assessment of the current problems on correspondence. The Department suffered severe disruption last year due to allocating top priority to defeating the food and mouth epidemic. On top of this the sheer volume of correspondence received since the creation of DEFRA has had a major impact on the Department's performance. I accept this is not an adequate excuse for not giving hon. Members timely responses, and now that normality is returning to the Department one of our key priorities is to rectify weaknesses in our service delivery. The size of our correspondence section has increased threefold and the line management strengthened; our IT systems have been updated and are in the process of being further improved and new guidance has been circulated throughout the Department. These actions are already beginning to bear fruit and it is hoped that the last of the backlog cases will be dispatched over the next few weeks.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many letters from hon. Members to her Department did not receive substantive replies within *(a)* one month, *(b)* three months and *(c)* six months in 2001; and if she will make a statement on her Department's performance against targets in relation to response times to letters from hon. Members. [28816]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Unfortunately our system is currently not sophisticated enough to produce these figures, although we are in the process of having it upgraded. However staff have conducted an extensive manual trawl which put the total for *(a)* at approximately 4,000 letters and the total for *(b)* at approximately 1,800 letters. For *(c)* 110 letters had not received a response after six months.

The Secretary of State wrote to all Members of Parliament on 14 November setting out her assessment of the Department's current problems on correspondence. The Department suffered severe disruption last year due to allocating top priority to defeating the foot and mouth epidemic. On top of this the sheer volume of correspondence received since the creation of DEFRA had a major impact on the Department's performance, resulting in a large backlog of letters. I accept this is not an adequate excuse for not giving hon. Members timely responses, and now that normality is returning to the Department one of our key priorities is to rectify weaknesses in our service delivery and to meet our response time targets. The size of our correspondence section has increased threefold and the line management strengthened; our IT systems have been upgraded and are in the process of being further improved; and new guidance has been circulated throughout the Department.

These actions are already beginning to bear fruit and it is hoped that over the next few weeks the system will be back at an even keel.

Fly Tipping

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 315W, if she will adopt a policy on fly tipping similar to that adopted by the National Assembly for Wales. [18022]

Mr. Meacher: Fly tipping is a blight on our countryside and towns and is an antisocial activity wherever it takes place and whoever is responsible for it. The stringent controls in place to ensure that waste is dealt with properly apply both in England and Wales.

The National Assembly for Wales (NAW) initiated a special drive against fly tipping. As part of this, the NAW voted £400,000 for a two year project, (running in the financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02) to support targeted waste enforcement. Three targeted enforcement teams were established. These teams work closely with other agency staff and other enforcement agencies such as the police, local authorities and the benefits agency. This has involved an intelligence led approach to enforcement, selectively targeting those activities that are of greatest impact to the environment.

This campaign was in part a response to concerns that fly tipping was becoming a particular problem in Wales and as a result, the number of successful prosecutions has increased from 24 in 1999 at the start of the project to 48 in 2000. Similar improvements are expected for the year 2001 to 2002.

The Environment Agency continues also to give the need to combat fly tipping a high priority in England. The agency is currently working to establish a central unit to co-ordinate the agency's approach to environmental crime.

This unit will work with other key enforcement bodies such as the local authorities, police and HM Customs and Excise and will particularly bear down on fly tipping.

Furthermore, the Fly Tipping Stakeholders' Forum, which comprises local authorities, business and landowners representatives, and is chaired by the Environment Agency, has produced a fly tipping guidance document, which provides information and guidance for all those who are affected and/or concerned by fly tipping. The document is available on the web at: http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/wasteman/flytip/

A conference is planned for spring 2002 to help emphasise the role and activity of the forum.

Waste Disposal

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the likely charge per unit waste disposal authorities will make to householders for the disposal of *(a)* refrigerators, *(b)* deep-freezers, *(c)* fridge-freezers and *(d)* air conditioning units after 1 January 2002. [24168]

Mr. Meacher: Waste disposal authorities have a statutory duty, under section 51(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, to provide reasonably accessible sites where householders can dispose of their waste free of charge.

Waste collection authorities have a statutory duty to arrange for the collection of household waste. However, they are entitled to impose a charge for collection for certain items, set out in Schedule 2 to the Controlled Waste Regulations 1992. Charges vary considerably (with many local authorities not imposing a charge) and may include the collection of more than one bulky item. Charges are in the range of £0 to £35, with higher charges for those living in rural areas.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the chairmen of the independent inquiries into the consequences and lessons of the foot and mouth disease for their proposals for communications with hon. Members; and if she will make a statement. [25402]

Mr. Morley: I have met with the inquiries on a number of occasions to discuss a range of issues. I am aware that both the Royal Society inquiry and the Iain Anderson Lessons Learned inquiry provide regular updates on their dedicated websites. The Lessons Learned inquiry will shortly be writing to hon. Members to update them on progress.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what communications she has had with hon. Members drawing their attention to the commencement of the independent inquiry into the lessons to be learned from the foot and mouth epidemic; and if she will make a statement. [25403]

Mr. Morley: In my statement to the House on 17 December I announced the start of the Lessons Learned inquiry to hon. Members. I welcome the start of this inquiry and confirm that the Department will co-operate fully with the independent inquiry process.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the uncompensated losses suffered by farmers through foot and mouth are; and how those losses are calculated. [29997]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* There are no statistics gathered on uncompensated losses and reliable estimates of these losses are not available at this stage. However DEFRA is working with a number of other Government Departments to prepare such an estimate and the results of this work will be made publicly available. We have carried out a survey of over 1,000 farms in FMD affected areas to collect information on the direct impact and their future intentions. The results of this survey will be published early in February.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the current situation regarding *(a)* foot and mouth disease and *(b)* other livestock-related diseases in Settle. [29991]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Livestock related disease surveillance is carried out in the Settle area for DEFRA by the Veterinary Laboratories

Agency regional laboratories at Thirsk and Preston. I understand that currently the reported incidence of livestock related disease in that area is normal for this time of year. North Yorkshire, like the whole of Great Britain, is now classified as free from FMD. However, it is important that farms and veterinarians remain vigilant.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made *(a)* to the European Commission and *(b)* to the OIE regarding the reinstatement of foot and mouth disease free status to the United Kingdom. [28683]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 January 2002]*: The European Commission have been kept fully informed of the position in the United Kingdom through monthly meetings of its Standing Veterinary Committee. Having received a report from the State Veterinary Service earlier this month that all counties in Great Britain are foot and mouth disease (FMD) free, the European Commission lifted all export controls except those on live sheep.

My Department also submitted a report to the OIE which set out the work carried out to control the outbreak and invited the OIE to consider whether it was now in a position to restore the UK's FMD free status. This report was considered by the OIE's FMD commission on 22 January. The OIE commission agreed to restore the UK's "FMD free status without vaccination" for the purposes of international trade.

The EU Standing Veterinary Committee is expected to return to the issue of live sheep exports at its 5–6 February meeting, in the light of the OIE decision.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of her Department's staff remain employed directly in dealing with the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease and consequential activity; how many of these staff members will be re-designated to activities associated with combating incidences of bovine tuberculosis; and if she will make a statement. [29089]

Mr. Morley: About 12 per cent. of the permanent staff in my Department, in offices across the country, are still employed in dealing with the foot and mouth epidemic and consequential activity. It is not possible to say how many of these staff would become available for work on bovine tuberculosis, but veterinary officer effort on bovine tuberculosis has already doubled between June and December last year.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the firms of contractors employed by her Department and its agencies to assist with clean-up work during the foot and mouth outbreak; and what payments were made from public funds in each case. [28183]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 17 January 2002]*: Over 1,200 contractors have been employed by the Department to undertake work, including that on secondary cleansing and disinfection. A complete list of all contractors was placed in the Library of the House on 15 October 2001.

The final cost of all cleansing and disinfection is now estimated to be about £280 million, but the total amount being paid to all of the individual contractors has not yet been finalised.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of hill farmers who have recently left the industry as a result of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [28042]

Mr. Morley: At present it is too early to assess the impact of foot and mouth disease on hill farmers.

Farm Subsidies

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the contribution farm subsidies make in reducing the cost of food in the UK. [26021]

Mr. Morley: The only farm subsidies directly aimed at reducing the cost of food are consumer subsidies. However these constitute a very small element of the support mechanism and they do not significantly offset the higher prices consumers face from the CAP. The recent reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy, which have reduced the level of support to the market and increased direct payments to producers, have had the effect of substantially reducing the cost of agricultural support to consumers. However I estimate that in 2000 the overall cost of the CAP to food consumers and taxpayers was equivalent to £8 to £9 per week for a family of four.

Beam Trawlers

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government are taking to monitor the damage caused to sea beds by beam trawlers; and if she will make a statement. [27162]

Mr. Morley: The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) has studied the impacts of beam trawling on different sea bed habitats in the North and Irish seas since 1993 and compared these impacts with other sources of disturbance in the marine environment.

Beam trawling effort is patchily distributed. Most beam trawling takes place in relatively shallow areas with relatively high levels of natural disturbance, and where the sea bed is, to a certain extent, resilient to the effects of the gear. For example, the sandy sea beds of the southern North sea are continually disturbed by tides and wave action, and most of the animals living there are already adapted to cope with disturbance. In these areas the effects of beam trawling on the sea bed are hard to detect, and recovery of areas that are trawled will usually occur in less than one year.

In deeper water, where there is usually less wave and tidal action, beam trawling could have a proportionally greater effect, and recovery of the sea bed will take much longer. However, beam trawls are not widely used in these areas.

Hill Farmers

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the average income of hill farmers was provided by *(a)* Government and *(b)* European funding in each year since 1997. [27256]

Mr. Morley: Information on public expenditure under the CAP and on national grants and subsidies is given in the table.

£ billion

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01(f)*
Total public expenditure under the CAP and on national grants and subsidies	3.58	3.48	3.16	3.18
Of which:				
Under the CAP	3.32	3.19	2.82	2.87
Other schemes	0.26	0.29	0.34	0.31
Percentage EU funded	93	92	89	90

Source:

Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2000

These figures exclude the additional support farmers receive from the consumer, through the maintenance of EU agricultural prices above world levels by the CAP.

It is not possible to give this breakdown specifically for hill farms, but typically, a high percentage of subsidy paid to hill farmers will be from EU funding.

In the years since 1997, average total direct subsidies to LFA cattle and sheep farms have exceeded net farm income. Data for England for the year 1999–2000, given in the table, illustrate the point.

Average output, input and income for full-time hill farms

England 1999–2000 *(£/farm)*

	LFA cattle and sheep farms
Average farm output	61,700
Of which:	
Direct livestock subsidies	25,400
Other direct subsidies	4,000
Average input costs	56,400
Average net farm income	5,300

Source:

Farm Business Survey

Water Framework Directive

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimates she has made of the potential cost *(a)* to businesses and *(b)* to public funds of implementing the EU water framework directive 2000/60/EC. [27139]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 January 2002]*: The implications of the directive are set out in the regulatory impact assessment (RIA) "First Consultation Paper on the Implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)" which was published jointly by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the National Assembly for Wales in March 2001. A copy of the consultation paper is in the House of Commons Library.

Costs to businesses and public funds

The estimated overall costs[1] in the regulatory impact assessment were dominated by the cost of making improvements to water status (£1.9 billion to £9.0 billion), which were broken down into: improvements to point source discharges by sewerage undertakers (£0.9 billion to £4.2 billion); improvements to point source discharges by industry (£0.3 billion to £1.2 billion); reductions in pollution from diffuse sources, particularly agriculture (£0.6 billion to £2.9 billion); improvements to river habitats (£90 million to £440 million); and, alleviation of low flows (up to £240 million).

It is not yet possible to make an estimate of the effect on water charges to domestic and commercial customers of water and sewerage companies. This will be dealt with as part of the periodic reviews of water prices carried out by Ofwat. These reviews will also provide the opportunity to ensure that the most cost-effective combination of capital investment and other measures is built into water companies' programmes alongside regulatory measures delivered by the Environment Agency.

The costs of habitat restoration and low flow alleviation projects, and urban run-off, may fall on the regulatory bodies, water companies, local authorities and landowners. However, it is not currently possible to estimate the extent and distribution of such work.

The administrative, planning and monitoring costs were assumed to fall principally on central Government and Government agencies, with small administration costs falling on local authorities and the water companies. The estimated cost of administrative arrangements was £3 million, for the planning process £13 million to £20 million, and for additional monitoring and assessment approximately £94 million.

A revised regulatory impact assessment will be needed, once an overall package of implementing regulations has been prepared for consultation, later this year or early 2003.

[1] The figures quoted were the net present value of costs incurred between 1998 and 2040. The choice of the year 2040 did not relate to the actual expenditure period but because it was 30 years after the deadline in the Commission's original proposal for achieving the directive's objectives. Thirty years is a widely used asset life for pollution control equipment.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate her Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if she will make a statement. [27293]

Mr. Morley: The Department has only been in existence since June 2001. Information covering earlier periods is therefore not available, and could be constructed retrospectively only at disproportionate cost. Annual reports which the Treasury prepares on fraud, covering returns from both the former MAFF and DETR, are deposited in the Library of the House.

Food Imports

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what additional impact control measures have been introduced since the resolution of the blockade of foreign food imports at *(a)* Cairnryan and *(b)* elsewhere in 1998. [27026]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The blockade of food imports at Cairnryan and elsewhere in 1998 related to farmers' concerns over rural incomes in the UK due to the effects of BSE on the market price of British beef, along with concerns over the strength of the British pound reducing the price of foreign meat imports from the Republic of Ireland. EU legislation does not allow the blockade of meat imported without justifiable reason and no additional import measures were taken following these events.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by her Department in each of the last four years. [27956]

Mr. Morley: The figures, which exclude any refurbishment carried out as part of landlord lease obligations, are as follows:

Refurbishments are included in the planned programme of building maintenance.

Flood Protection (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve flood protection in the London borough of Hillingdon. [28486]

Mr. Morley: This Department provides grants for flood and coastal defence capital works, and associated studies, which meet essential technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score. Further to increases in spending plans in the last two spending reviews, additional funding of £51 million over the four years from 2000–01 was announced in November 2000 following the severe flooding that year. An increased priority was given to urban flood defences and the grant rates for all river flood defences were increased by 20 per cent.

Operational responsibility for flood management measures rests with the local operation authorities, normally the Environment Agency (EA) and local councils, who decide which projects to promote and their timing. The operational authorities are invited to submit applications for DEFRA funding.

The EA has implemented a number of flood alleviation schemes in the London borough of Hillingdon as part of the £20 million Lower Colne Improvement Scheme with the benefit of grant aid. The schemes provide flood alleviation properties within West Drayton, Uxbridge and Cowley.

The EA is now reviewing the feasibility of sustainable flood alleviation measures for the River Pinn catchment.

Nitrate Pollution

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to provide financial assistance to farmers having to expend on increased slurry storage facilities as a result of being included in extensions to nitrate vulnerable zones; and if she will make a statement on her Department's consultation on the implementation of the European Nitrates Directive. [29090]

Mr. Meacher: The Farm Waste Grant Scheme is available now to assist farmers in existing nitrate vulnerable zones with the cost of improving or constructing farm waste storage facilities. Grant is available at a rate of 40 per cent. on eligible expenditure up to an investment ceiling of £85,000. The Government intend to extend this scheme to the new NVZ areas, from the date of their designation. We are currently considering whether additional funds will be needed from 2003 onwards, and we are considering also the option to raise the grant rate to 50 per cent. in less favoured areas, as is permitted under the EU rules on state aids.

DEFRA's current consultation seeks views on how England should complete full implementation of the Nitrates Directive. Following this, a decision on which of the two options for designation will be taken in England will be announced later this year.

Sea Fisheries Committees

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the *(a)* operation and *(b)* cost of funding of sea fisheries committees; and what proposals she has to alter the source of funding of sea fisheries committees from local authorities to central Government. [29081]

Mr. Morley: Sea Fisheries Committees as managers of inshore fisheries are subject to local government rules and are rightly funded by their constituent local authorities. There are no proposals for this arrangement to change.

Hunting

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has received from the Chief Veterinary Officer concerning changes in the threat to livestock from predatory foxes during the ban on fox hunting. [29178]

Mr. Morley: The Chief Veterinary Officer has made no such assessment. Foxes are not regarded as a major national threat to livestock by the Department.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the use of combined heat and power systems in the horticultural sector; and what assessment she has made of the obstacles that exist to the use of such systems in the sector. [28897]

Mr. Meacher: There is around 150 megawatts of good quality CHP capacity installed in the horticulture sector. I understand the main obstacles to the use of CHP are the availability of capital, a lack of understanding of the opportunities for CHP and concerns over energy prices. Support and advice, including site specific, will be channelled to the sector via the Carbon Trust under a voluntary energy saving agreement my Department has with the NFU.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will support the European proposal to maintain a Community register of genetically modified food and feed; and if this will result in a change in the information that is available to the public via the Food Standards Agency and her Department. [29501]

Mr. Meacher: The Government support the establishment of the proposed Community register. However, the proposal implies that the information included on the register will be limited to a summary of applications for authorisation and authorisations granted. The current register maintained by my Department in relation to the release and marketing of genetically modified organisms contains more information, including all details of non-confidential information included in applications for authorisation. The Food Standards Agency operate procedures that give a similar level of information in relation to GM foods. The Government will press in negotiations on the proposal for more information to be placed on the Community register.

Animal Slaughter (Jedburgh)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 8 January 2002 to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), *Official Report*, column 756W, on animal slaughter (Jedburgh), how many premises outwith the 3km zone were slaughtered out; how many sheep were slaughtered at each of these individual farm premises outwith the 3km zone; how many of these premises were tested for evidence of foot and mouth disease; and what was the result of the tests. [29505]

Mr. Morley: In the Scottish Borders local authority area there were 11 premises outwith the 3km area on which animals were slaughtered as part of the foot and mouth disease eradication strategy. Animals on six farms were slaughtered as the disease was suspected but not clinically proven and animals on a further five farms were slaughtered due to their contacts with Longtown market. This involved a total of 11,917 sheep as detailed in the following table.

Name of farm	*Number of sheep*	*Tested for FMD*	*Test result*
Sunnyside Farm, Haddington	230	Yes	Negative
West Broomhouse, Dunbar	74	Yes	Negative
Broadmeadows, Paxton	800	Yes	Negative
Broadlea, Hawick	1,200	Yes	Negative
Rawburn, Longformacus	3,000	Yes	Negative
Castlwood Farm, Jedburgh	43	Yes	Negative
Threepwood Cottage, Blainslie	1,155	Yes	Negative
Howford Farm, Ettrickbridge	2,115	Yes	Negative
Muirfield, Hawick	1,150	Yes	Negative
Foulshiels, Yarrow	1,000	Yes	Negative
Hopestead, Coldingham	1,150	Yes	Negative

Suckler Cow Premiums

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when farmers will receive their suckler cow premiums; for what reason farmers have not received payment of the premiums; and if farmers will receive interest on late payments. [29455]

Mr. Morley: Payments for suckler cow premium scheme are made between 16 October 2001 to 30 June annually. Claims are received up to 6 December. Payments are made in two parts, an advance payment to be paid by the 6 March 2002, and a balance payment due by 30 June 2002.

This year, scheme payments have not been made as early in the window as we would have liked because computer systems have had to be upgraded to reflect regulation changes to the bovine schemes. Processing has also been affected by the diversion of staff to FMD and by industrial action. Advance payments started in January and are expected to be completed by 31 March. As the end of the advance payment window has still not been reached, the matter of the payment of interest to farmers does not arise.

IACS Payments

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason farmers did not receive IACS payments due in October 2001 until December 2001. [29464]

Mr. Morley: The payment window for IACS arable area payments scheme (AAPS) 2001 runs from 16 November 2001 until 31 January 2002.

The diversion of staff to FMD and industrial action within the Rural Payments Agency has delayed the processing of AAPS claims and meant that fewer claims than normal were paid during the early part of the payment window. The industrial action was suspended on 11 January and good progress is now being made in dealing with unpaid claims. RPA expects to pay over 90 per cent. of AAPS claims by 31 January and to complete the payment process by around mid-Febru[illegible]

Scrapie Research Project

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress of the Scrapie Research Project; and what steps are being taken to speed up the project. [29471]

Mr. Morley: The hon. Member has confirmed that he is specifically interested in the National Scrapie Plan for Great Britain. The plan was launched on 19 July 2001 with the opening of a genotyping scheme for breeding rams in pedigree pure-bred flocks registered with a breed society. From an estimated 15,000 flocks in this sector we have thus far received expressions of interest from over one third. Of those expressing an interest over 2,800 have so far joined the plan. On 16 January I announced an extension of the plan to all pure-bred breeding flocks, irrespective of whether they are registered with a breed society. It is estimated that this will open eligibility to an extra 25,000 flocks. Eligibility has also been extended to all scrapie-affected flocks, irrespective of whether such flocks are pure-bred. We will be considering possible future extensions to the plan in consultation with stakeholders. Measures to eradicate scrapie are also included in the Animal Health Bill.

Air Pollution

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list by each local authority area in England and Wales the concentration of the pollutants *(a)* benzene, *(b)* 1,3 butadiene, *(c)* carbon monoxide, *(d)* lead, *(e)* nitrogen dioxide, *(f)* particles (PMI), and *(g)* sulphur dioxide for 1997 to 2001. [29322]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* This information is not held centrally. Local authorities are not required to monitor levels of each of these pollutants unless it appears from their modelling results that they are unlikely to achieve the nationally prescribed air quality objectives by the relevant deadlines. Our national monitoring network indicates that between 1997 and 2001 levels of most of these pollutants have fallen across England and Wales, and most local authorities are on course to meet the prescribed objectives for each of the pollutants. However, a number of authorities have identified possible difficulties with the objectives for nitrogen dioxide, particles and, to a lesser extent, sulphur dioxide. The table lists each of the authorities which has to date designated an air quality management area (AQMA), and highlights the pollutants in respect of which the AQMA has been designated.

Authority	*Date of effect*	*Pollutant(s)*
London local authorities		
Barnet[1]	18 April 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Brent	2 April 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Bexley	22 August 2001	PM_{10}
Camden	30 October 2000	NO_2, PM_{10}
Corporation of London[1]	26 January 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Croydon	2 October 2000	NO_2
Ealing[1]	14 December 2000	NO_2, PM_{10}
Enfield[1]	31 March 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Greenwich	1 July 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Hackney	23 March 2001	NO_2
Haringey	1 July 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Hammersmith and Fulham[1]	3 November 2000	NO_2, PM_{10}
Hillingdon	1 May 2001	NO_2
Hounslow	15 March 2001	NO_2
Islington	19 January 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Kensington and Chelsea[1]	6 December 2000	NO_2, PM_{10}
Lambeth	1 May 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Lewisham	1 July 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Merton	28 March 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Richmond upon Thames[1]	31 December 2000	NO_2, PM_{10}
Southwark	1 October 2000	NO_2, PM_{10}
Sutton	29 March 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Tower Hamlets[1]	6 December 2000	NO_2, PM_{10}
Waltham Forest[1]	31 October 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Wandsworth[1]	1 January 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Westminster[1]	9 March 1999	NO_2, PM_{10}
Other English authorities		
Babergh District Council	28 August 2001	NO_2
Barnsley MBC	3 October 2001	NO_2
Bath and North East Somerset	2 February 2002	NO_2
Blaby Borough Council	19 January 2001	NO_2
Bolsover DC	1 December 2001	NO_2
Boston BC	10 September 2001	NO_2
Bromsgrove DC	26 July 2001	NO_2
Broxbourne BC	1 November 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Bristol City Council	1 May 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Colchester BC	1 May 2001	NO_2
Charnwood BC	20 June 2001	NO_2 (3)
Dartford BC	1 October 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Derby CC	1 August 2001	NO_2
Doncaster	1 August 2001	NO_2 (3)
East Herts	6 August 2001	PM_{10}
Fenland District Council	1 May 2001	SO_2, PM_{10}
Harborough DC	18 July 2001	NO_2
Herefordshire Council	23 November 2001	NO_2
Hertsmere BC	30 August 2001	NO_2
Hinckley and Bosworth BC	9 May 2001	NO_2
Leeds	1 July 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Leicester City Council	29 December 2000	NO_2, PM_{10}
Maidstone BC	1 August 2001	NO_2
Manchester	31 July 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Melton	21 April 2001	NO_2
North Warwickshire BC	1 March 2001	NO_2
North West Leicestershire	23 April 2001	NO_2 (6)
Oldham	1 June 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Oxford CC	1 September 2001	NO_2
Rotherham MBC	1 January 2002	NO_2
Runnymede BC	4 December 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Rushmoor BC	31 October 2000	NO_2
Salford	1 June 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Salisbury	24 July 2001	NO_2 (4)
Sheffield CC	5 December 2001	NO_2
South Gloucestershire	1 November 2001	NO_2
South Kesteven DC	1 August 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
South Lakeland	5 May 2001	NO_2
Spelthorne	1 December 2000	NO_2
St. Edmundsbury	1 September 2001	NO_2
Stoke-on-Trent DC	23 November 2001	NO_2
Stroud and Tewkesbury (joint AQMA)	30 June 2001	NO_2
Tameside MBC	1 July 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Tewkesbury and Stroud (joint AQMA)	30 June 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Three Rivers	1 April 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Thurrock	1 April 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Tonbridge and Malling	1 May 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Trafford MBC	29 June 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Warrington BC	1 November 2001	NO_2
West Wiltshire DC	26 November 2001	NO_2, PM_{10}
Wigan Council	13 August 2001	NO_2
Wokingham DC	28 September 2001	NO_2
Wycombe DC	1 August 2001	NO_2
Wales		
Neath Port Talbot[2]	1 July 2000	PM_{10}
Cardiff	November 2000	NO_2
Swansea	31 August 2001	NO_2

[1] Indicates designation of whole borough

[2] Where industry is one of the main sources

Note:

The figure in brackets in the third column denotes the number of AQMAs declared in those authority areas where more than one has been declared

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent investigations have been undertaken by her Department on the impact of air pollution on health. [29320]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Department of Health's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) advises the Government, through the Chief Medical Officer, on the effects of air pollution on health.

COMEAP publish the statements and reports that they prepare on their website at www.doh.gov.uk/comeap. Recent studies include a "Statement and Report on Long-Term Effects of Particles on Mortality" and "The Health effects of Air Pollution: Advice from COMEAP".

Also published on the website are details of a recent call for research proposals on air pollution and health. This new research is aiming to cover projects to be carried out over a three-year period as well as some smaller projects lasting for about one year.

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last reviewed the air quality strategy; and what the main findings of the review were. [29319]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was published in January 2000. The strategy is not expected to need a comprehensive review for a few years. Instead, the Government and devolved Administrations have decided to review the strategy on a pollutant by pollutant basis to allow reviews of individual pollutants to be carried out relatively quickly, and to allow the outcomes of these reviews to be published was addenda to the strategy. The first of these reviews as published for consultation on 17 September 2001. It considered the possibility of tightening the existing policy objectives for three pollutants (carbon monoxide, benzene and particles) and of introducing for the first time a policy objective for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. A large number of responses to the consultation document were received, and we will take account of these in finalising our proposals.

Reed Beds

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evaluation she has made of the potential use of reed beds as a way of alleviating foul sewerage problems exacerbated by flooding. [29327]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Reed beds form part of the portfolio for sustainable drainage systems. DEFRA, the Environment Agency and other stakeholders are looking at how future drainage systems ensure that water quality can be better protected, although no specific evaluation has yet been made of this potential role for reed beds.

Farming Subsidies

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will *(a)* devote a minimum percentage of farming subsidies to sustainable rural development and *(b)* negotiate on this principle as a start during the mid-term review negotiations on the CAP. [29989]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has stated that our policy for the mid-term review is to see a switch from production support under the first pillar of the CAP to support for agri-environment and sustainable rural development schemes under the second pillar, and we will be pressing for this in the negotiations.

Biosecurity

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what grounds under the clauses in the Animal Health Bill the Government will withhold part of the compulsory purchase payment for animals slaughtered for posing a risk of spreading disease, where the Government considers that the farmer's biosecurity measures are substandard. [27740]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Department launched a public consultation on the implementation of key provisions of the Animal Health Bill on 11 January 2002.

Included in this package are proposals for the matters to be covered by the disease risk assessment that will help to determine the amount of adjusted compensation paid for animals slaughtered on infected premises. We are seeking key stakeholders' views by 15 March.

The consultation document and list of stakeholders can be found on the DEFRA website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/ahbill/index.htm.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to apply for agrimonetary compensation for the livestock sector in April; and if she will make a statement. [29994]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The European Commission have yet to confirm whether there is any agrimonetary compensation available for the livestock sector. Although this aid relates to the second and third stages of compensation paid last year, the EU rules provide for these later payments to be reduced or cancelled if the market prices and exchange rates have since moved in a direction which ameliorates the situation which leads to the compensation. We will not know for some months what the Commission assessment will be. When we do the Government will have carefully to consider the case for payment.

Agricultural Co-operatives

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to improve the competitiveness of agricultural co-operatives in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [29996]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* We are supporting a number of initiatives to improve the competitiveness of both agricultural co-operatives and collaborative marketing groups.

With the NFU, we have been running a collaborative marketing initiative since 1998. This is aimed at helping farmers to recognise the many advantages of working together, particularly in relation to economies of scale and access to professional expertise. We have used joint representation at agricultural shows across a range of sectors to generate interest in this initiative.

Under the Agriculture Development Scheme, aimed at helping farmers and growers improve their competitiveness through better marketing, collaborative activities were given priority under bidding rounds held in 1999, 2000 and 2001. Successful bids in 1999 and 2000 included a project to benchmark best practice in farmer controlled businesses (Plunkett Foundation) and several projects from collaborative producer groups or co-operatives.

Opportunities for improving the competitiveness of co-operatives and collaborative marketing groups are also provided under the England Rural Development Programme through awards under the Processing and Marketing Grant and the measure on the marketing of quality agricultural products under the Rural Enterprise Scheme.

Bovine TB

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list research projects associated with bovine TB, indicating for each *(a)* the cost in 2001–02 and *(b)* the total cost of the project. [29833]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Krebs badger field trial, TB99 epidemiological survey of risk factors which may dispose some farms to TB breakdowns and road traffic accident survey of badger carcases are projects associated with bovine TB. These were suspended for most of 2001–02, because of the foot and mouth disease emergency and little expenditure in respect of them has, therefore, been incurred in the present financial year. With the present resumption of work on these projects, revised costings are being drawn up but the total cost of the trial is expected to remain at £35 million over five years.

A list of individual research projects and their 2001–02 and total costs are given in the table. The list is subject to change as new projects come on stream and others end and costs are revised. The table represents the position at 23 January 2002.

£

Research project	*Cost in 2001–02*	*Total costs*
Generation of vaccine candidates against *Mycobacterium bovis*	313,201	1,566,005
Testing of vaccine candidates for bovine tuberculosis using a low dose aerosol challenge guinea pig model	208,247	1,068,045
Testing TB vaccines in cattle	263,642	1,316,635
Development of badger vaccines	167,889	370,274
Antigen presenting cells and T cell responses to *Mycobacterium bovis*	400,000	1,200,000
Development of badger immunological reagents	152,908	432,642
Improved diagnostics for cattle	170,449	511,347
Cost-effectiveness of using the gamma interferon test in herds with multiple tuberculin reactors	38,850	124,682
Assessment of the economic impacts of TB and alternative control policies	48,049	156,959
Development and evaluation of strain typing methods for *Mycobacterium bovis*	387,810	1,275,223
An integrated approach to the application of *Mycobacterium bovis* genotyping for the control of bovine tuberculosis in GB	334,439	927,801
Survival of *Mycobacterium bovis* in laboratory made silage	4,408	4,408
Mycobacterium bovis pathogenesis	681,933	2,440,159
Pathogenesis and diagnosis of tuberculosis in cattle—complementary field studies	105,000	1,975,135
A spatial analysis using GIS of risk factors associated with TB incidents in cattle herds in England and Wales	11,683	188,373
Genome sequence analysis of *Mycobacterium bovis*	50,932	1,156,293
Ecological correlates of tuberculosis incidence in cattle	118,729	374,181
Quantification of the risk of transmission of bovine TB from badgers to cattle within localised areas	41,816	167,504
Integrated modelling of *M. bovis* transmission in badgers and cattle	276,540	902,769
The risk to cattle from Mycobacterium bovis infection in wildlife species other than badgers	460,945	1,214,788
The risk to cattle from wildlife species other than badgers in areas of high herd breakdown risk	195,822	608,095
Understanding the route of TB transmission from badgers to cattle	34,980	266,942
Develop innovative methods to estimate badger population density	268,572	882,090
Novel methods of estimating badger numbers in the wider countryside	70,201	230,426
An integrated study of perturbation, population estimation, modelling and risk	299,877	1,252,592
A molecular genetic analysis of badger social structure and bovine tuberculosis	162,451	766,069
Ecological consequences of removing badgers from an eco-system	323,625	1,000,810
Using herd depopulation for effectively controlling TB	26,758	26,758
Exploratory study to model the distribution and spread of bovine TB using multi-temporal satellite imagery	42,450	42,450
Application of postgenomics to reveal the basis of virulence, pathogenesis and transmissibility of *M. bovis*	350,000	3,318,624

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the merits of reintroducing the bovine TB programme; and if she will make a statement. [29999]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The need to control bovine TB in herds remains a top priority for the Department. Before the restart of routine testing, and restart of the badger culling trial, veterinary risk assessments were made. The restart of the programme has been dependent on when counties were declared free of foot and mouth disease.

Tenant Farmers

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will seek a revision of the definition of agriculture within tenancy legislation to include rural development and agri-environment activities. [29986]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Many tenant farmers are already successfully taking part in rural development and agri-environment scheme. Further, over the last few years roughly the same proportion of tenant farmers and owner occupier farmers have joined the agri-environment schemes. However we are aware that some tenant farmers are concerned about their ability to take part in these schemes. This is something we will consider in the light of the ongoing review of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 and the recommendations made by the Policy Commission on Food and Farming.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will move funds from agricultural price support towards environmentally sustainable agricultural and non-agricultural activities; and if she will make a statement. [29988]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has stated that our policy for the CAP mid-term review is to see a switch from production support under the first pillar to support for agri-environment and sustainable rural development schemes under the second pillar, and we will be pressing for this in the negotiations.

Zoos

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment her Department has made of *(a)* public awareness relating to potential disease risks between humans and animals in locations defined under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 and *(b)* the effective enforcement of relevant health and safety standards; and if she will make a statement; [30004]

(2) what steps her Department has undertaken to ensure that establishments defined as a zoo under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 are *(a)* licensed and *(b)* meeting required standards in animal welfare and public safety; and if she will make a statement. [30005]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The enforcement of zoo licensing, and of health and safety standards in zoos, are matters for the relevant local authorities, taking account of advice issued by the Department and the Health and Safety Executive.

In terms of zoo licensing, local authorities must ensure that the zoos in their area have a licence to operate or are exempt from the provisions of the Zoo Licensing Act 1981. All licensed zoos are also subject to regular inspection to ensure that the Secretary of State's Standards on Modern Zoo Practice, which include provisions relating to animal welfare and public safety are being met. The Department has issued guidance to local authorities on the implementation of the 1981 Act and a new circular will be issued shortly to take account of the changes introduced by Council Directive 1999/22/EC on the keeping of wild animals in zoos, which is due to come into force in April.

Guidance on the management of public interaction with zoo animals is also set out in the Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice. This requires that risk assessments be carried out on a case-by-case basis, taking advice from the Health and Safety Executive, where necessary. For example, hand-washing facilities must be provided, together with signage reminding the public of hygiene requirements.

The prevention of transmission of zoonotic disease between zoo animals and employees is addressed by inspections carried out under health and safety legislation. In addition, inspections carried out under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 will check whether zoos have measures in place to alert employees to the potential risk of zoonotic disease transmission.

Hens

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve the welfare of egg laying hens before battery cages are prohibited in 2012; and if she will make a statement. [30002]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* We have a number of initiatives to improve laying hen welfare. These include: a draft new Welfare Code; an extensive DEFRA on farm poultry welfare R&D programme; and ADAS run advisory programmes for farmers to encourage good welfare. In addition, the State Veterinary Service visit poultry units to assess all aspects of welfare.

Broiler Chickens

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of broiler chickens' welfare; and if she will make a statement. [30003]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* As part of its inspection programme the State Veterinary Service visits broiler units to assess all aspects of welfare. The normal programme of visits is now resuming following the FMD outbreak.

BSE

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of BSE have been confirmed in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK in each of the last three years. [30406]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the number of cases of BSE confirmed in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK in each of the last three years (as at 18 January 2002).

	Presented as clinical suspects	*Confirmed by active surveillance*
Scotland		
1999	37	0
2000	36	2
2001	23	24
UK		
1999	2,254	20
2000	1,311	44
2001	738	310

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent progress has been made in reforming the CAP. [28358]

Mr. Morley: The reform of the sheepmeat regime agreed by the Agriculture Council in December will simplify the regime and make it more flexible. The ewe premium will in future be paid on a flat rate basis, and the introduction of national envelopes provides a valuable mechanism for targeting extra support for the sheep sector and for encouraging environmentally beneficial farming practices.

More generally we expect the Commission to come forward with the mid-term review for the Common Agricultural Policy in the early summer and for negotiations to take place thereafter. We are working hard through informal discussions with the Commission and other member states to prepare the ground for these important negotiations.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to means-test CAP subsidy payments to farmers. [28359]

Mr. Morley: None. The Government have asked the Policy Commission for Food and Farming to look at its overall objectives in this area and we will review future policy in the light of the report which is expected on 29 January.

Producer Support Estimate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the most recent estimate of the value of agricultural producer support for *(a)* the EU and *(b)* each country thereof. [26647]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 January 2001]*: The OECD produces annual estimates of agricultural producer support in OECD countries, called producer support estimate (PSE). This includes estimates of the value of support to producers through market support mechanisms as well as through national and EU budgets. Their most recent provisional estimate of PSE for the EU is 98 billion euro for 2000. The OECD does not provide estimates of agricultural producer support for individual countries within the EU, however the following table shows the payments from the EU budget under the Common Agricultural Policy to each member state. These payments include costs that are not directly received by farmers (eg costs of intervention storage), but they do not include payments by national Governments or the value of market price support.

Payments from the EU budget under the common agricultural policy in 2000

	Million euro
Belgium	957
Denmark	1,309
Germany	5,675
Greece	2,598
Spain	5,485
France	9,006
Ireland	1,681
Italy	5,043
Luxembourg	21
Netherlands	1,442
Austria	1,019
Portugal	653
Finland	728
Sweden	798
UK	4,062

Source:

Court of Auditors annual report concerning the financial year 2000.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27963]

Mr. MacShane: Separately identifiable building refurbishment costs over the last four years on Foreign and Commonwealth Office properties have amounted to:

1997–98: £3.2 million

1998–99: £4.7 million

1999–2000: £22.5 million

2000–01: £31.2 million.

In addition to the figures listed, refurbishment is often a component in the adaptation of buildings, but it is not possible to identify that element without disproportionate cost. We also have a programme of routine building maintenance across the estate.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28091]

Mr. Straw: I generally travel to my Blackburn constituency by rail, most recently on 18 January 2002. I made extensive use of the railways on official business as Home Secretary: as Foreign Secretary the opportunities to do so are more limited.

South Africa

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit South Africa; and if he will raise the issue of arms sales with his South African counterpart. [28291]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no immediate plans to visit South Africa. The Under-Secretary, my noble Friend Baroness Amos, will be visiting South Africa in February. There are no plans to discuss arms sales during that visit.

Gibraltar

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will visit Gibraltar before he next meets his Spanish counterpart under the auspices of the Brussels Process. [28791]

Mr. Straw: I refer the right hon. Member to my statement in the House on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 21–29. I will be discussing this further when I see the Chief Minister of Gibraltar in London today.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he plans to give to the Royal visit to Gibraltar in 2002. [30681]

Mr. Straw: There are no Royal visits to Gibraltar planned for 2002.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place with Spain on roaming rights of Gibraltar mobile telephones; and under what statutory powers he can take action against Spain over restriction of telephone numbers for Gibraltar. [30644]

Peter Hain: We raise the problems facing the Gibraltar telephones sector with the Spanish Government, at ministerial and official level, at every appropriate opportunity. Most recently, I raised the issue with Spanish Europe Minister Ramon de Miguel on 24 January. Her Majesty's Ambassador to Madrid has also discussed the problem with Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Pique in recent days.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no statutory powers to take action against Spain on the restriction of telephone numbers for Gibraltar.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking against Spain in respect of freedom of movement of UK citizens on the Gibraltar border. [30552]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 826W.

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if independence for Gibraltar has been discussed during talks under the Brussels Process. [30646]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 399W.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the integration of Gibraltar with the UK has been discussed during talks under the Brussels Process. [30640]

Peter Hain: No.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next meet representatives of the Government of Spain to discuss the future status of Gibraltar. [30696]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis) today, *Official Report*, column 1177W.

Trafficking

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Government of Bangladesh concerning measures to combat people trafficking, with particular reference to *(a)* the number of prosecutions for trafficking offences, *(b)* the sentences imposed on those found guilty of trafficking and *(c)* compensation granted to victims of trafficking; [29453]

(2) what assessment he has made of the scale of trafficking of women and children from Bangladesh. [29454]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on people trafficking on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 304W.

The most recent figures we have available are from the Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association (BNWLA) who conducted a survey in 10 districts of Bangladesh in 1999. It found that approximately 7,000 people were trafficked during that time (70 per cent. under 18) with the majority going to India (80 per cent.). I understand that there were 63 repatriations last year (50 children), mainly from India.

Latest figures from the BNWLA show that there are 60 cases under trial at present. Last year there were three cases, each of which resulted in the accused being found guilty and given a life sentence. There is no specific compensation scheme for victims, although we understand that the BNWLA provides some support services. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs is also receiving development funding for a related project.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whom the Government will appoint as the National Government representative to the Convention on the Future of Europe. [31137]

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe has been appointed the Government representative to the Convention on the Future of Europe.

Camp X-Ray

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Foreign Office officials first arrived at Camp X-Ray. [30412]

Mr. Straw: 17 January 2002.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he was first informed of the conditions of the prisoners held in Camp X-Ray; [30410]

(2) when he first had communications with UK officials concerning the conditions of prisoners in Camp X-Ray. [30361]

Mr. Straw: The report of the officials' visit was sent and received on 21 January; I received it on my arrival in Kinshasa that afternoon. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), made a statement the same day, *Official Report*, columns 623–31.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he first had communications with US officials concerning the conditions of prisoners in Camp X-Ray. [30411]

Mr. Straw: I discussed the conditions in which British nationals were being held with the US Secretary of State Colin Powell on 12 January and asked for access by British officials in order to verify their identity, nationality and welfare.

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what charges Mr. Abbasi is being held at Camp X-Ray in Cuba and under what jurisdiction; if he has received legal representation during interrogation; who has made direct contact with him and in whose presence; if he has provided testimony of his treatment and condition in private without the presence of American officials; if written confirmation of his medical condition and treatment has been provided; if he is subject to a possible death penalty; and what prospects there are for his extradition to the UK. [30414]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are not yet aware of any charges but are in regular contact with the US regarding next steps. We have made it clear that the detainees must be treated humanely and, if tried, are entitled to a fair trial and to legal representation. At this stage we do not know whether detainees would be subject to the death penalty if convicted but HMG regularly makes their views plain to the US on this issue. The question of whether the detainees will be prosecuted by the US or returned to the UK is as yet undecided.

The UK team which met Mr. Abbasi during their visit from 17–20 January were accompanied by representatives of the US as the detaining power. The report of the visit indicates that the British detainees spoke without inhibitions and appeared to be in good physical health.

Ministerial Meetings

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what items will be discussed at his next meeting with his Spanish counterpart. [30633]

Peter Hain: The Foreign Ministers will meet at the EU General Affairs Council on 28 January, where they will discuss a range of bilateral and foreign policy issues.

Christians (China)

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Chinese Government regarding the persecution of Christians in south east China, with specific reference to the imprisonment of several Christians in Huadu Detention Centre in Guangdong Province. [30418]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised concerns about religious freedom in China with the Chinese Foreign Minister during his visit to the UK on 16–19 January. During my visit to China in September 2001, I raised concerns about human rights, including the treatment of Christians, with the Chinese authorities. These concerns were discussed in detail at successive rounds of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue, most recently on 19–21 November 2001.

We raised the case of Pastor Li Dexian at the February 2001 round of the UK/China Human Rights Dialogue. The Chinese told us that he was not under arrest at that stage. Media reports indicate that he was arrested on 26 July 2001, and held at the Hua Du Centre, but released the following day.

Brussels Process

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what date has been set for the next round of talks under the Brussels Process; and what the time scale is for the end of talks. [30641]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 311W. We propose to hold a further ministerial meeting of the Brussels Process shortly. It remains our intention to conclude a comprehensive agreement by the summer.

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement to Parliament following the next round of talks under the Brussels Process. [30645]

Peter Hain: We will continue to ensure that the House is kept fully informed of progress under the Brussels Process.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support from his Department is being given to overseas territories to compete in the Commonwealth games; and which overseas territories are benefiting from this support. [30435]

Mr. Bradshaw: The overseas territories are themselves responsible for determining and funding their teams' participation in the games. We are in contact with the organisers of the games to ensure the overseas territories are fully involved. We are also liaising with the organisers to facilitate the attendance of VIP visitors from the participating territories.

Spanish Residents

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Spanish people live and work in the UK. [30702]

Peter Hain: According to the Office for National Statistics, as of mid-2000 there were approximately 47,000 Spanish nationals resident in the UK. The Spring 2000 Labour Force Survey, also produced by the Office for National Statistics, records approximately 30,000 Spanish nationals working in the UK.

PRIME MINISTER

Honours

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister how many non-citizens of the United Kingdom have been knighted in each year since 1990. [30024]

Mr. Straw: I have been asked to reply.

The numbers of non-UK citizens who have received honorary knighthoods (or who were invested as honorary Dames) are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1990	8
1991	9
1992	23
1993	7
1994	12
1995	18
1996	22
1997	21
1998	18
1999	6
2000	29
2001	13

These figures do not include Knight (or Dame) Commanders of the Victorian Order which is the Queen's personal prerogative.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by the Lord Chancellor's Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29425]

Mr. Wills: It has not been possible to identify the answers to the parliamentary questions that the hon. Member refers to without incurring disproportionate cost. The Department does not keep records of parliamentary questions and answers in such a form as to enable the information sought to be readily produced. The only way to identify the relevant parliamentary questions and answers, with any degree of reliability, would be to search manually through *Hansards*. This would be an extremely time-consuming task which would produce the information sought by the hon. Member only at disproportionate cost.

Crown Court Proceedings

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of defendants who appealed against conviction in a magistrates court and whose case was reheard in the Crown court in 2000 were found *(a)* not guilty and *(b)* guilty. [29694]

Mr. Wills: Information held centrally relating to the results of appeals to the Crown court is limited and is not collected in a form to provide an answer to the hon. Member's question without incurring disproportionate cost. For information purposes, however, the table provides figures for receipts, by type of appeal, and outcome, by type of result, of appeals to the Crown court during 2000.

Appeals to the Crown court, 2000

	Number
Net receipts	
Conviction/sentence	5,341
Sentence only	7,691
Other[1]	870
Total	13,902
Results	
Allowed	3,090
Dismissed	4,485
Varied	3,268
Other[2]	3,512
Total	14,355

[1] Eg liquor licence refusals and non-renewal of shotgun certificates

[2] Abandoned appeals, remitted to magistrates, other results

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what procedures are in place to inform local authorities about the withdrawal of PFI credits from projects under his Department's remit; and what evaluation has been undertaken on the effectiveness of those procedures. [30637]

Mr. Wills: There have been no instances of the Department withdrawing PFI credits from projects that have received Project Review Group (PRG) endorsement. In the unlikely event that it could become necessary to withdraw PFI credits, the Department would consult with the appropriate local authorities and magistrates courts committee prior to any decision being made.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, on how many occasions since 1997 PFI credits have been withdrawn from projects under his Department's remit; and what were the *(a)* costs and *(b)* reasons for withdrawal. [30636]

Mr. Wills: There have been no instances where PFI credits have been withdrawn from projects following the Project Review Group's endorsement.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what procedures his Department has for local authorities to make representations to the Project Review Group on a decision to withdraw PFI credits from projects under his Department's remit; and what is the length of time for response. [30638]

Mr. Wills: No formal procedures are in place for local authorities to make representations to the Project Review Group on a decision to withdraw PFI credits. That is not the Project Review Group's role. In the unlikely event it was necessary to review the credit allocation it would be a matter for the Department, in consultation with the appropriate local authorities and magistrates courts committee or committees.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Transfer of Functions (Costs)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission if the additional costs relating to the transfer of the functions of the Local

Government Commission for England to the Electoral Commission will be met in advance of the transfer date of 1 April 2002 provided for in the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3962). [31316]

Mr. Beith: In order to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the transfer and to enable the transferring local government boundary review functions, together with the related functions transferring from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, to be carried out without interruption, urgent expenditure estimated at £127,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last used the railway service in connection with her official duties; what station she left from and what was the destination; and whether it is her intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28099]

Ms Hewitt: I last used the railway service on official business on Monday 10 December 2001, departing from Euston travelling to Luton Parkway.

All the arrangements for my official travel are made in line with the guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code, and accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers", using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations.

Information and Consultation Directive

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received regarding the information and consultation directive. [30165]

Alan Johnson: There is considerable interest in the information and consultation directive and the Department frequently receives inquiries and representations about it. The directive is expected to be adopted shortly and we will be consulting fully and widely on how best to implement it in this country.

Electronic Signatures

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress on implementing the European electronic signatures directive. [31314]

Ms Hewitt: Further to the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 610W, I can now announce that the discussion document referred to in that answer is now being issued and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

This clearly has not happened as quickly as I had hoped when my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness replied to my hon. Friend. This delay has been occasioned by developments in the Government's approach to updating the law to facilitate electronic communications referred to in my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness' reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 971W.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 89–92W, concerning the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 6 and 7 December 2001, which were the member states with parliamentary scrutiny reserves on *(a)* the Framework Decision on combating terrorism and *(b)* the council decision establishing Eurojust. [28792]

Angela Eagle: Ireland, Denmark and Sweden had, and continue to have, parliamentary scrutiny reservations on the Framework Decision on combating terrorism which was provisionally agreed at the council, and on which the European Parliament is being reconsulted. My previous reply, based on information supplied by the Council Secretariat and included the council's own press statement reporting the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 6–7 December 2001, stated that four member states had parliamentary scrutiny reservations on the Council Decision establishing Eurojust, on which the council reached political agreement. The Council Secretariat have subsequently stated that only Denmark and Sweden maintained parliamentary reservations on this measure at the council.

In both cases, the United Kingdom lifted its parliamentary scrutiny reservation at the Council following clearance by both Houses.

Departmental Spending Review

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury. [29011]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Department is currently collating its bid for the 2002 Spending Review. The environmental implications of the bid will be outlined in a report on sustainable development, which will be submitted to the Treasury with the final version of the bid.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what way sustainable development objectives are reflected in his Department's bids for the 2002 Spending Review. [27508]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The Department is currently collating its bid for the 2002 Spending Review. The impact of each bid upon sustainable development indicators is being assessed, and alternatives are being considered to eliminate or reduce any negative impact. A report on the sustainable development aspect of the bid will be produced, in accordance with Treasury requirements, which will detail the social, economic and environmental implications of the final version of the Department's SR2002 bid.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four. [29008]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* No environmental appraisals have been published by my Department since 1 January 2001.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [29010]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* In taking important administrative and policy decisions environmental considerations are taken into account. For example:

> Where relevant goods and services are procured, prospective suppliers are asked to include an assessment of the major environmental impacts of the contract, as part of the tendering and evaluation process; and
>
> Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methods (BREEAM) assessments are undertaken for new buildings and for the major refurbishment of existing buildings within the Department's estate;
>
> A section on environmental appraisals is included within the Department's Policy Checklist;
>
> The Ministerial website states that policy submissions should include a section on environmental considerations.

The Prison Service Management Board has agreed that all new policies and programmes should be subject to environmental screening and appraisal. This will apply to submissions to Ministers, papers to the Prison Service Management Board and Operational Policy Group and to business cases in respect of prison maintenance and construction work.

Fear of Crime

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to reduce the fear of crime in *(a)* London and *(b)* the London borough of Havering; and if he will make a statement. [29472]

Mr. Denham: It is a key priority of the Government to reduce crime and the fear of crime through effective law enforcement and partnership working. The British Crime Survey shows that fear of crime generally has been declining since 1998. There are a large number of different programmes operating throughout London and in specific boroughs of London aimed at reducing crime, and it is the Government's policy wherever possible to ensure that they also effectively reduce the fear of crime to include programmes aimed at reducing street robbery, violence at licensed premises and on public transport, and racist attacks and harassment; it would not be practicable to list all relevant programmes currently operating in London.

There are a number of relevant initiatives being carried out in Havering under the Home Office's Crime Reduction Programme. Among them is the targeted Policing Initiative Project aimed at understanding and responding to hate crime; this initiative is still at an early stage of development and has an allocated funding of £287,000 for a 22-month period. Funds have also been allocated for Neighbourhood Wardens; one of the objectives of this scheme is to reduce fear of crime by five per cent. by March 2003. £466,583 has been provided to facilitate new and replacement Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras in the borough, as a result of which over 1,000 crimes are expected to be prevented in the first three years of operation. Funds have also been allocated to tackle drugs problems in the borough, including allowing for higher visibility policing. In addition to these schemes and initiatives 3,000 local people are to be surveyed for their views on fear of crime and their personal priorities for crime reduction. This information will be used to inform decisions on priorities for the Crime Reduction Strategy for Havering.

Either-way Cases

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what percentage of either-way cases defendants elected for jury trial in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [29647]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to respond to this question, and would refer the hon. Member to the figures and the statement given in reply to his related question.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of either-way cases (i) magistrates declined jurisdiction, (ii) defendants consented to magistrates jurisdiction and (iii) defendants elected for jury trial in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [29648]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to respond to this question.

The following table, drawn from Crown Prosecution Service records, shows the number and proportion of defendants in either-way cases who were committed to the Crown court at their own election or on magistrates direction. No separate record is maintained of cases in which defendants consented to magistrates jurisdiction.

These figures show a steady decline in the proportion of either-way cases reaching the Crown court by way of defendant election up to 1997–98, followed by a period of relative stability over the last four years, when these proceedings remained in the region of 29–32 per cent. of all either-way cases.

The Government are committed to achieving improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System and is considering Sir Robin Auld's recommendations contained in his "Review of the Criminal Courts" which include removal of the right to elect jury trial and the introduction of an intermediate tribunal. The Government have been actively seeking the views of stakeholders on these and other recommendations contained in the "Review" and will take decisions following the conclusion of the consultation process at the end of January.

Either-way proceedings in the Crown court

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Defendant elections	35,584	32,865	25,249	26,612	24,768	21,472	21,653	18,391	18,572	16,351	7,605
as percentage of either cases	36.5	37.5	35.0	34.2	33.1	30.5	27.9	29.4	31.7	29.6	30.5
Magistrates directions	61,867	54,738	46,954	51,181	50,158	49,026	56,069	44,269	40,097	38,914	17,350
as percentage of either cases	63.5	62.5	65.0	65.8	66.9	69.5	72.1	70.6	68.3	70.4	69.5
Total either-way cases	97,451	87,603	72,203	77,793	74,926	70,498	77,722	62,660	58,669	55,265	24,955

[1] April to September

Police Budget (Nottinghamshire)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the anticipated police budget is for Nottinghamshire for *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004. [29406]

Mr. Denham: Police authorities set their annual budgets before 1 March each year. I understand that the Nottinghamshire police authority budget for 2002–03 is still under consideration. Information for 2003–04 and 2004–05 is not available.

Community Group Funding

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether the Government keep a record of the overall number of state funded competitive grant schemes available to voluntary and community organisations in the United Kingdom in *(a)* the current and *(b)* previous years, and by what categories this is broken down; [29928]

(2) whether the Government keep a central list of the statutory bodies that make competitive grant schemes available to voluntary and community organisations in the United Kingdom in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* previous years; [29927]

(3) whether the Government keep a record of the total sum distributed through all state funded competitive grant schemes available to voluntary and community organisations in the United Kingdom in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* previous years; and by what categories this is broken down. [29929]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Information about grants for earlier years is available in two recent publications:

Central Government Funding of Voluntary and Community Organisations 1982–83 to 1999–2000: ISBN 1 84082 636–3; and

A Guide to Funding from Government Departments and Agencies—Second Edition: ISBN 1 900360 79.

Information on grants allocated by Government Departments during 2000–01, the last completed financial year, is currently being compiled and will be placed in the Library before the summer recess.

Missing Children

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to ensure that police forces place details of missing children on the uk.missingkids.com website as soon as possible after being informed of a child's disappearance, and if he will make a statement. [29529]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The uk.missingkids.com website aims at reuniting missing children with their families. This site is maintained by Computer Associates plc and is supported by the charity, International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children.

The website facility is open to be used by all police forces in England and Wales and Scottish forces will have the system made available to them in the very near future. Not all missing children cases are however suitable for the site: children are only featured if it is believed that the child has left their home area, if there is a photograph of reasonably good quality available, and with the agreement of the senior investigating officer and the family. Ultimately any decision as to whether to use the site is the responsibility of the Chief Officer of the relevant force.

However, the Police National Missing Persons Bureau regularly audits the children currently notified as missing and if the child is not on the site, the investigating force is offered the use of the facility.

Sustainable Development

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what weight he gives to sustainable development objectives in his Department's *(a)* public services agreements and *(b)* service delivery agreements. [27507]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Revisions to Public Service Agreements (PSA) and Service Delivery Agreements (SDA) are being considered as part of 2002 spending review process. In accordance with Treasury guidance, sustainable development issues will be considered when PSAs are redrafted. My Department will also consider if it will be appropriate to set out the impact of sustainable development on the delivery mechanisms in the SDA.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the recorded crimes per head of population for each police authority in England and Wales and the average figure for these authorities. [28665]

Mr. Denham: The latest available information on the number of recorded crimes per 100,000 population for police force areas and nationally, for the year ended March 2001, has been published in table 2.6 of the Stationery Office publication "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2000".

Police Numbers

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics he collates on the average number of police officers *(a)* at headquarters establishments and *(b)* per 1,000 population. [28669]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary collects data once a year about the allocation of officers. The Inspectorate's data record officers attached to Basic Command Units and to central functions. Central functions include specialist police squads as well as headquarters support functions and the officers performing central functions may be located at a number of sites.

At the end of March 2001 (latest date for which data are available), 30,928 police officers (25 per cent. of total force strength) were deployed to central functions.

Information on the number of police officers to population is published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletins "Police Service Strength: England and Wales". The latest bulletin (No. 23–01), was published on 18 December 2001 and shows that in England and Wales the number of officers per 100,000 population at 30 September 2001 was 240.3. A copy of the bulletin is in the Library.

Police Corruption (Cleveland)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been charged with corruption in the last five years in the Cleveland police force. [26735]

Mr. Denham: There is no offence of 'corruption' as such.

However, I am told that in the Cleveland police force over the last five years there have been the following criminal cases:

one officer was convicted of attempting to pervert the course of justice

one officer was found not guilty of attempting to pervert the course of justice;

one officer was found not guilty of misconduct in a public office; and

two officers are awaiting trial for misconduct in a public office.

There have also been the following disciplinary cases:

one officer was reprimanded for fraudulent use of an excise license;

three officers were reprimanded or fined for failing to comply with the terms of an arrest warrant and false entry in a pocket notebook; and

one other officer was found not guilty regarding taking appropriate action when the above case was first reported.

The ongoing Operation Lancet investigation has also to date led to 12 police officers being charged with disciplinary offences.

Naturalisation Applications

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for naturalisation are *(a)* outstanding and *(b)* awaiting input to the INS database. [25998]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* I regret that statistics on individual types of citizenship applications undecided cannot be determined from current Immigration and Nationality Directorate data sources.

Visa Renewal Applications

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for visa renewal are *(a)* outstanding and *(b)* awaiting input onto the INS database. [25996]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* We do not routinely publish statistics on the number of general and settlement applications for further leave to remain undecided.

Policing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the planned expenditure on policing as a percentage of gross domestic product in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [27917]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Year	*Police provision (£ billion)*	*Money GDP (£ billion)*	*Police provision as a proportion of money GDP (percentage)*
2001–02	8.5	998	0.85
2002–03	9.0	1,046	0.86
2003–04	9.3	1,099	0.85

Notes:

1. Police provision is total Government provision (police grant, special grant, capital grant, credit approvals and central Home Office spend and police Standard Spending Assessment).

2. Money GDP figures are estimates.

Information on the number of police officers to population is published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletins "Police Service Strength: England and Wales". The latest bulletin (No. 23/01), was published on 18 December 2001 and shows that in England and Wales the number of officers per 100,000 population at 30 September 2001 was 240.3. A copy of the bulletin is in the Library.

Police White Paper

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the White Paper on the Police. [30212]

Mr. Denham: We have received approximately 1,100 representations on the White Paper. We are still considering these and will place a summary in the Library in due course.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 378**

SESSION 2001–2002

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The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
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- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

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- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
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HEADINGS

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REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
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  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
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  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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